

YOUTH, MUSIC, AND AGENCY: UNDOING RACE, POVERTY AND VIOLENCE

IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

By

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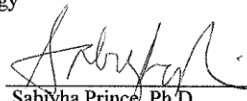
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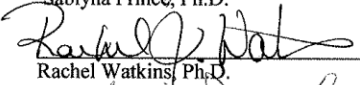
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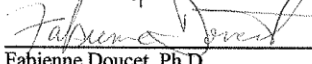
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## DEDICATION

To the youth of the world,

“Small acts joined together become a movement. When people talk governments have to listen” (unknown)

“The struggle of the Black people of Brazil is an aspect of a much larger struggle: the struggle of the Black people of the world” Lélia Gonzalez (1985)

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on the intersection of youth, their music and their agency, all of which interact to shape identities and create social change in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Music as media activism serves as backdrop, narrative, response, and counterpoint rhythm to the interlocking systemic violence(s) affecting favela youth. Identity issues around race, poverty and violence are the central focus as Brazil's homicide rates are some of the highest in the world with much of it concentrated in Rio and perpetrated by the state against youth of color. In 1993 rampant violence reached a climax as poor black and brown youth were being murdered daily in Rio's streets. The city's image of paradise on earth, and Brazil's self-narrative of racial democracy were suffering. Musical genres of funk and hip-hop proliferated in Rio's favelas facilitating life stories told by youth of color. Lyrics of racism, chronic poverty and violence surfaced in resistance to imposed constructions of blackness, space, and worth. In dialogue and resistance, youth design alternative worldviews and identities while performing grassroots participatory citizenship. In these ways young people disrupt structural violence and re-work local and global identities.

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## GLOSSARY OF PORTUGUESE TERMS

Asfalto - asphalt, on the ground, not on the hill

Bola Preta – black dance balls or dance parties

BOPE- Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais – Special Police Operations Battalion

Capoeira - martial art

Cara - slang term for “guy” or “man”

Cariocas - the name for natives of Rio de Janeiro

Carnval - Carnival

Cidade de Deus - City of God (a north zone favela), also called CDD

Cidade maravilhosa - the marvelous city (referring to Rio de Janeiro)

Central Única das Favelas - Central Association of Slums or CUFA

Comunidade - community

Cozinheira - the cook, chef

Escola de samba - samba school

Fantasia - costume

Favela – slum, shantytown, ghetto

Favelados - shantytown dwellers / residents

Futebol - football (American soccer)

Gringo/Gringa - non-Brazilian, outsider, foreigner

Mininos de rua - street kids



Morena/Moreno - mixed race, light brown skin color

Moradores - Neighbors or Residents

Morros - hills, favelas are often referred to as morros

Mulata or Mulatta - mixed race, coffee to bronze brown skin color

Pagode - a folk form of samba dance and music

Palmares - name for Brazil's most popular quilombo (17<sup>th</sup> century)

Passarela do samba - carnival parade route in Rio

Pensão - mom n pop community diner, kitchen with cheaply priced meals

Periferia - Periphery (suburb, slum)

Preto/Preta - black

Preto Velho - old black, disembodied African slave spirit from the colonial period who speaks through willing human hosts. They are compassionate, kind, and wise spirits

Quilombo - run-away slave community/village

Reveillon - New Year's Eve

Sambistas - Samba musicians

Sambódromo - carnival stadium and parade route in Rio

Terra - land

Tia – aunt “auntie”

Traficantes - Drug Traffic

Umbanda - Afro-Brazilian religion born in and unique to Rio de Janeiro

Via Duto - the viaduct, the overpass, under the bridge

Zumbi - 17<sup>th</sup> century Afro-Brazilian warrior chieftain, leader of the Palmares quilombo

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Sitting inside Celso Athayde's modest office in the Madureira section of the city of Rio de Janeiro not far from the record store he used to own, Celso recounted to me his relationship with hip-hop calling it "a voz da periferia" (the voice of the periphery). The periphery in Rio refers to the slums, the spaces where hip-hop has particular appeal to poor marginalized youth not just in Rio but around the globe. Celso remarked that hip-hop could be found in virtually every space, corner, and crevice of the planet, both on and off the grid, but it proliferates in the shantytowns, slums and ghettos of the world because of its visceral ability to incorporate and relay conditions of reality. Rap was a storytelling medium expressing earthy, coarse and crude truths. That description of rap and hip-hop would shape and ground my research in youth, music and agency in Rio. How did indigent young people of color manipulate music in the undoing of constructions of race, poverty and violence in Rio? Multiple injustices and inadequate social services were the standard for Rio's poor and I wondered how young people became active agents in their own salvation and what role music played in their activism.

Celso Athayde was a music producer and rapper MV Bill was his business partner. Both were Afro Brazilian men from the margins in Rio who saw a need and created an NGO in 1999 in response to that need. A persistent surge of drugs, violence,

and daily murders of black youth on *favela* (slum) streets called for local action. Their NGO was named Central Única das Favelas (Central Association of Slums) or CUFA, and used hip-hop arts to create programs and safe spaces where indigent youth of color could express themselves, be heard, and learn skills for life and work. Celso and MV Bill would become a wealth of knowledge for my research in Rio. CUFA served as a network sampling snowball through which I met and interviewed a wide array of young people, grassroots activists, rappers, musicians, and educators. While my research did not focus solely on the work of CUFA, being connected to CUFA and its leaders offered me grounding and legitimacy which was necessary since as an outsider many favela residents were suspicious and uncertain as to whether or not they should answer my questions if I appeared to be probing too much. My relationship to CUFA helped to slowly open doors inside and outside of the favela. Everybody in Rio knew about the work of CUFA and most people respected the organization. CUFA was housed inside the neighborhood association building of *Cidade de Deus* (City of God) favela along with other programs that serve the community. Neighborhood associations are hubs in the center of the community that mediate favela concerns between political leaders and *favelados* (residents), deal with governmental bureaucracy, organize programs and do overall advocacy on behalf of favela residents. Therefore being involved with CUFA also put me in contact with other people who showed up at the neighborhood association for programs, meetings, and gatherings.

Based on direct sustained daily contact with people and programs at the neighborhood association in City of God, made up of youth, staff, leaders and neighbors within the favela community over a period of three years, I was able to gather primary

source data for this research. Besides “snowballing” and respondent-driven sampling (RDS) I also used methods of participant-observation getting involved in the various activities at the neighborhood association by attending classes, listening and questioning. I used a structured interviewing tool where I scheduled meeting times with select respondents and asked specific questions, and unstructured interviews which occurred anytime and anywhere. Textual analysis of rap lyrics and audio/visual analysis of videos also permitted me to discover and observe content patterns of favela youth, their music and agency. From RDS I came up with a few key informants who acted as seeds and roots who I later returned to with idea patterns gathered from larger pools of respondents. My key informants listened and responded to my findings, confirming or refuting my analysis. These key informants were Celso Athayde, male age 44 self-identified as Afro Brazilian, MV Bill, male age 34 self-identified as Afro Brazilian; “Preta” female age 24 self-identified as Afro Brazilian; “Jalene” female age 33 self-identified as morena; “Tati” female age 19 did not self-identify (appears black); “Gilberto” male age 24 self-identified as Afro Brazilian; “Marianna” female age 28, self-identified as Afro Brazilian. Celso and MV Bill are public hip-hop figures; all other names are pseudonyms to protect identities. Throughout this document I include ages of young persons in parentheses directly after their name, i.e. Gilberto (24).

While I analyze several musical genres of resistance, research on the function and meaning of hip-hop is particularly significant since the culture of hip-hop has circulated and permeated the planet propagating its message everywhere. It is both a global and local phenomenon, or what Roland Robertson calls “glocal” (1995) combining the global with the local, emphasizing their influences on each other. Each is defined by the other as

they intersect, rather than polarize. Robertson adopted this blend to describe the indigenization of global phenomena. “This ‘glocal’ indigenizing dynamic has reproduced itself in hip-hop and rap scenes the world over, to the extent that rap can now surely be regarded as a universal musical language and its diffusion one that has taken root in most parts of the globe.” Further, Italian radio announcer Luca De Gennaro called rap “a universal language, in whatever language it happens to be in, and whatever part of the world it is produced” (Mitchell 2001d). Also, global hip-hop when planted on African *terra* (land) or the African diaspora shapes and nuances local understandings of blackness while also re-shaping itself and aligning itself with the various concepts of blackness and marginalized global black spaces (Perry 2008). Overwhelmingly, hip-hop has become that space where young people of color re-work local identities both at local and global levels, and contest, disrupt, resist and counter imposed narratives of identity, space, and place typically associated with race, poverty and violence.

Chapter two reviews the literature on social constructions of youth and young people as change agents. This chapter also considers literature on projected urban shantytown growth and hip-hop as youth activism in those spaces. In the face of neoliberal policies and state retreat, young people are forced to take their lives into their own hands for their own present and future preservation and many are doing that through networking, music, and artistic creative rituals of uprising and resistance, often termed “media activism.”

Chapter three is a nod and critique of samba music as Brazil’s mark of cultural pride and national identity. Samba is the definitive cultural force of the last century in Brazil and the most visible form of cultural expression especially in Rio de Janeiro,

capable of synthesizing blackness and rhythm. It is a remarkable success in *the marvelous city*<sup>1</sup> and in both spoken and unspoken ways life seems to revolve around samba and the spectacle of carnival. However, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century funk and hip-hop began invading Rio's favelas and samba was forced to take a back seat as other narratives about life in Brazil stepped forward. A counter-narrative was coming down favela hills telling stories of racism, violence, poverty and injustice. These narratives would be broadcast around the world through rap and they would cast aspersion on a country that prides itself on racial democracy, peace, harmony, and samba. I introduce funk and hip-hop as “anti-samba” response music which uncovers ugly truth and daily reality from the margins that samba purposely omits.

Chapter four focuses on the history of black music (soul, funk, hip-hop) in Rio's black communities and narratives of youth in Cidade de Deus (CDD) favela. Social comparisons are explored between hip-hop history in the U.S. related to youth agency and urban dislocation. Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation were frequently referred to as a source of inspiration for many older hip-hop activists in Rio de Janeiro.

Chapter five examines race and color and the shame still experienced around blackness. The favelado and the favela represent black people and black space and the corresponding imposed subjectivities around each. I introduce *neo-negritude* as a concept of everyday black pride and how hip-hop lifts up black pride and spatial pride. Youth resist and reconstruct what it means to be black and poor in Rio.

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1. “The marvelous city” is a popular name for Rio de Janeiro used by locals in reference to the city's natural landscape beauty making it one of the world's most picturesque cities.

Chapter six examines violence in what's been called one of the most violent cities in the world. Through interviews I investigate views and responses to violence in the community. Youth learn at an early age how to make sense of and navigate violence both on the hill and on the asphalt as violence is likely to happen anywhere, although it is commonly imagined to occur in favelas. State violence via corrupt policing is a persistent reality and young people make ways to resist and create music and art around the violence.

Finally in chapter seven I conclude with my finding that youth music and agency in Rio is ultimately about young people's re-realization and affirmation of themselves as citizens. Their music and art say "this is our country too and we deserve rights." Youth musical advocacy is about democratic subject making in Rio's favelas. Through music and activism young people not only take part in restructuring their own lives but they also take part in restructuring the democratic life of the entire country in a model that builds from the bottom-up. Their musical agency is a pulse of participatory democracy at the lowest most vulnerable rungs of society, the slums.

Finally, *Bem Vindo!* Welcome to narratives of youth from the periphery in Rio as they transcend oppressive discourses, re-construct identity, challenge constructions of blackness, re-imagine favela space, and navigate daily violence. Their lives and stories create a powerful tapestry of hope and self-advocacy from the fringes of "a cidade maravilhosa" (the marvelous city). A review of the literature on global youth, agency, music, and activism follows.

## CHAPTER 2

### YOUTH AS GLOBAL CHANGE AGENTS

“You can’t stop the power of the youth, ‘cause the power of the youth won’t stop,” an old familiar youth chant about the strength of young people as activists and change agents. I begin with a review of the current literature on youth as change agents. The literature is still growing and unfolding but youth participation in revolution is as old as history. Youthful idealism and energy, when harnessed and directed, can bring about good in the world, but when nihilism replaces idealism that same energy has also been known to incite riots, violence, and destruction. In those instances, instead of building, youth tear down, destroy and kill communities and each other. Cornel West referring to nihilism in his treatise, *Race Matters* labels it “a profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair.” It is a “loss of hope and absence of meaning but as long as hope remains and meaning is preserved the possibility of overcoming oppression stays alive” (West 1994:23).

Young people possess the energy, physical stamina and optimism to create, re-create, and dismantle. Youth are natural risk-takers due to lack of longevity on the planet and the general foresight that comes with age (Bernstein 1996). Therefore anything is possible in their view and as a result young people have always played key roles in struggles for progress, whether for land, human rights or democracy. Thomas Skidmore



writes that representatives of the state during the height of Brazil's 1970s military dictatorship, realized that most of its leftist guerilla warriors attempting to overthrow the military's authoritarian regime were young people in their teens and early twenties (2010). Like Brazil, other global upheavals have included young people on the front lines, from civil rights movements to anti-war protests and women's rights, young people have been there. In South Africa the anti-apartheid movement has been called South Africa's first formal youth revolution. In Chile, uprising against Pinochet was led by young people. Youth are movement makers, shapers, and organizers on local, national and international levels, including the newest forms of movement organizing by way of online social media and networking. Clearly, those who will be most impacted by change now and in the future must have a voice in shaping that change. Young people are stakeholders because the future and the present belong to them, and many of them are willing to fight to the death for hopeful tomorrows.

A brief scan around the globe at this very moment capture images of mostly young people in upheaval. They are spawning and organizing protests via Internet social networking. New York City's financial district was recently invaded by protestors in "Occupy Wall Street," a "leaderless resistant movement" that vows to "no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%." ([occupywallst.org](http://occupywallst.org)) referring to Wall Street corporate bankers and investors whose paychecks and incentives continue to skyrocket at the expense of everyday citizens who struggle to make ends meet especially in a recession. Other grievances include high interest loans, rampant home foreclosures, global warming, and social inequality. "These mostly young people took to the streets to say: Enough! ... Thus far, the Left has dropped the ball, but obviously it's not too late. It's

pretty clear that these young people are just getting started” (PlutocracyFiles 2011). The protests began peacefully on September 17, 2011 and turned violent as police entered with pepper spray and batons in attempts to force them to disband (youtube and independent news footage). At this point hundreds of people have been arrested as protesters spread out from the financial district to the Brooklyn Bridge. The NYC activists say they were inspired by recent uprisings in other parts of the world, like Tunisia and Egypt, and now young people in New Orleans, Philadelphia, and parts of Canada are organizing their own “Occupy...” protests. Filmmaker Michael Moore and scholar Dr. Cornel West showed up in solidarity on Wall Street and suggest that a global movement is afoot.

August of this year (2011) young people took over the streets of Tripoli in what was code named, “Operation Mermaid Dawn” in demand of the removal of their leader, Muammar Gaddafi. This generation of Libyans decided they were fed up with Gaddafi’s oppressive regime and lavish lifestyle; they wanted opportunity and better lives for themselves (Jay-Kennedy 2011; Shadid 2011). After Gaddafi fled from the scene, Internet photos showed a young Libyan joyfully breakdancing in Tripoli Square. A 19 year old woman forced into Gaddafi’s all-female body guard unit wept of having to execute 11 Libyan rebels. She said she and other women in the brigade were raped constantly by Gaddafi’s men, and now that Gaddafi had been overthrown, the young girl said all she wanted was to go home to be with her mother (Huff Post 2011). The Libyans orchestrating and executing the rebellion were young people, and even young women were not exempt from forced participation in Gaddafi’s opposition forces. By late October 2011 the young opposition found Gaddafi hiding in a hole, pulled him out, beat

and shot him to death and videotaped the killing with cell phones for the world to see. The gruesome images of Gaddafi's bloodied bullet riddled cadaver were spread across news outlets and Internet sources as proof that the dictator was indeed dead.

London also recently experienced what's been called "the worst violence in the north area of Tottenham in more than 25 years" (BBC online). Buildings and cars were burnt, shops looted, and petrol bombs thrown at police. The rioters were reportedly teens and twenty-something's angry about the murder of one of their community members by police. The BBC reports past and ongoing tension between local young people and the police, a common theme on the global front. Police and teenagers have a history of animosity. A British student, Jake Manu said "the police never talk to us, they ignore us, they don't think we're human in this area" (BBC 2011b). The BBC also reports that Tottenham and nearby Hackney are areas troubled by gang violence, high unemployment and poverty.

The Internet and social media assist young people in feeling more connected with the plight of their global peers often inciting boldness and copy-cat effects like the ones witnessed in the recent youth revolutions of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Bahrain. Once one country's youth began protesting other young people in nearby countries also began protesting. As early as January this year, 2011, Gerald Celente an American trends analyst told a Russian news service that "young people from industrial societies around the world would unite on the Internet and overthrow increasingly ineffective elements of globalism that have driven their economies into depression" (Webster 2011). December 2010 young Tunisians, tired of unemployment, food inflation, poor living conditions and government corruption began civil unrest and protest. Within

one month they ousted their long-time president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. On January 25, 2011 pro-democracy Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo in large numbers calling for a “day of rage.” Once again, young people fed up with poverty and lack of hope for a better future called for an uprising protesting persistent unemployment and government corruption under the rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who had reigned three decades. Young people chanted for freedom and democracy. The protests were mostly peaceful and much of the organizing took place through online social networking like twitter and facebook. Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Palestine, and other global youth would follow, and their demands were the same, freedom, democracy, jobs, and quality of life:

Media reports often fail to connect recurring demonstrations in Greece and Spain with those in the Middle East and North Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain). The demonstrations are ostensibly about democracy... at the core, all of these uprising are about the simultaneous failure of modern economics and modern politics – even though systems differ somewhat from country to country. People in all of the nations mentioned have one thing in common: crushed expectations. [Heinberg 2011]

Even though young people have functioned as social actors and change agents, youth as a cultural frame and as community activists remain under theorized. Near the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the midst of globalization, social scientists began examining the distinctive societal contributions of youth as change agents and consumers in a globalized world. Rhoda H. Halperin argued that youth and globalization mutually shape one another. “Youth are architects of culture and practice, active participants in global economies of late capitalism, and resilient and creative citizens often in the face of dire and rapidly deteriorating conditions” (Halperin 2007; Honwana 2005a; Maira 2005).

For clarification as to how I have defined “youth,” I am using the United Nations definition developed during the International Youth Year in 1985. Youth are the

demographic of those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (UN website). They are significant contributors to the making and shaping of popular culture forms like music, dance, art, fashion, hair styles, footwear, and the manipulation of language, i.e. slang. Youth are a primary power group influencing more than just pop culture. As avid consumers they also impact business markets linked with social status, demand and imagined need. Global market flows and the behaviors of young people are tightly intertwined. The youth demographic contributes to multiple modes of cultural production and consumption patterns, even in lesser developed parts of the world where youth numbers are staggering.

Trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century point to a global population explosion of young people, rapid urban growth, and the spread of slums and poverty, all of which have accelerated in recent years at unprecedented rates (Davis 2006; Hagedorn 2008; Perlman 2010; Tienda 2002; Tranberg Hansen 2008a). My research examines these shifts within the spatial context of shantytowns in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where indigent young people are transforming their lives and their blighted under resourced communities through funk and hip-hop mediums.

While the current status of scholarship on cities sufficiently examines urbanization and neoliberal shifts impacting the global urban poor, adolescents as positive change catalysts in cities are under theorized. Disadvantaged teens are frequently pathologized with descriptors like truancy, drug use, violence, and gang membership, all potential by-products of chronic poverty. In reality not all teens are gang-bangers or hoodlums, many are social and cultural collaborators seeking ways to solve maladies in their communities. The literature that informs, and brings substantive context to my

research examines urban youth residing in shantytowns and ghettos, and their contribution as community activists who cannot trust or rely solely on the state to improve their life conditions. Rather they become their own advocates using music among other mediums in addressing and challenging the issues of race, poverty and violence that affect them daily.

Their behavior points to agency. Youth possess power and agency, or the ability to examine the present in light of past actions, particularly the actions of those who came before them, and the ability to shift current actions with the hope of an alternative and just future reality (Emirbayer 1998). Young people can also learn agency. In his discussion of social justice education, Gutstein (2003) suggests that youth can be taught to develop a socio-political consciousness or an awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the social and political factors that affect society and their own sense of agency as the freedom and empowerment to act as change agents. Related to youth agency, the 1990s produced two landmark volumes of ethnographic research which forced anthropologists to reconsider youth as a viable cultural category on its own. Categories of youth practice, agency, power, gender and ethnicity were included. The works were Sharon Stephens' *Children and the Politics of Culture* (1995) and Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff's *Youth Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1995).

In an interconnected world youth are the makers and shapers of multiple global forces and are just as affected as others by the uneven processes of globalization. Since the introduction of those two edited volumes more anthropologists have focused on youth as critical social actors with agency, conceptualizing them in multiple and nuanced ways, from active transformers to oppressed victims (Honwana 2005a). In a similar vein,

Helena Wulff argues that youth cultures move easily across national borders, “shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structures and meanings” (1995:10). In effect, globalization, transnational relationships, global hybridization, and borrowing cannot be seriously examined without also examining youth culture and agency.

By 2002 Mary Bucholtz called for “an anthropology of youth” that would pay attention to agency, practice, and how identities emerge in the new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local expressive culture. This framework advocated for a new time of life called *youth* not as once thought, a liminal stage where young people practice, figure out, or mimic adulthood; rather, as a potent time of life on its own. Young people think, act, create, transform, shape and engage culture, and make life interesting (Wulff 1995). Youth have also redefined ways of thinking about and *performing* race and racial identity in both local and global arenas as Livio Sansone had introduced years earlier.

Sansone (1990) had written about the borrowing and localizing of identities among working-class black male youth from Surinam whose families immigrated to Amsterdam, and how these young males performed an American style of *black male cool* in public; posturing on street corners well aware of their attractiveness and desirability particularly to the white youth of Amsterdam. African American urban black male style is co-opted and appropriated globally as *the* definitive image of hyper-masculinity, thus mimicked by non-black youth globally. Mimicking is frequently not just mimicry, but also local appropriation, or cultural style being adjusted to local contexts creating global hybrids even of expressive cultures. The concept of “doing” or “performing” race and place is further discussed in John Jackson’s *Harlemworld* (2001).

Jackson localizes the *performativity* of race in Harlem. He considers commercial hip-hop artists P-Diddy and MACE as they *perform* youthful black Harlem in their hip-hop videos. According to Jackson, Harlem has its own local style of blackness that is recognizable even non-locally. One of the effects of globalization is that it results in youth borrowing, sharing and appropriating cultural style; as a result one need not be from Harlem, the South Bronx or even the United States to perform Harlem. Marc Perry's work in Cuba examines Afro-Cubans, hip-hop and local black identity making from larger global fashionings of blackness within the *Afrodiaspora*.<sup>2</sup> (Perry 2004b; Perry 2008). As mentioned above, Roland Robertson's (1995) "glocalizing" or global influences and flows which are appropriated and made distinct to local contexts. Global copying is not mindless acceptance of the other; rather the influences are re-shaped to make sense within a new local global space. Ian Condry makes similar observances of youth in Japan who mimic American rappers while also contextualizing rap and hip-hop within their own place and space (Condry 2002).

Maira and Soep's edited volume (2005) examines popular, national, and global practices of youth that are shaped, influenced and connected by global shifts called *youthscapes* which engage one another across real and imagined space and time and in local, national and global forms. Youth become *shifters*, or those who create and sustain cultural practices, but also disrupt them. Deborah Durham explores the discourses of youth in Botswana calling them *social shifters* arguing that they index sets of dynamic

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2. Marc Perry's term for the African Diaspora (see Perry 2004, 2008)



shifting social relationships of power and authority, responsibility and capability, agency and autonomy (2004).

Young people participate in social relations; use and invent technology; earn, spend, need, desire, and despise money; comprise target markets while producing their own original media; and formulate modes of citizenship out of various ideologies they create, sustain, and disrupt. Therefore we use the notion of a *youthscape* in the epistemological spirit of Appadurai's framework, while conceiving of youth as a shifting group of people that is simultaneously a deeply ideological category. [Maira 2005:61]

Finally, Ginwright, Noguera and Cammarota's edited volume documents youth as activists in the U.S. examining ethnicities, regional identities, rationales, and methods of youth protest (Ginwright 2006a) as young people respond to multiple forms of violence in their communities. In her work in an inner-city community Alice McIntyre (2000) exposes the fourfold violence(s) that impact youth; interpersonal, educational, structural and environmental. McIntyre observes the ways young adolescents react and respond to the fourfold violence(s) suggesting that they do not passively experience community violence(s) but contest and construct meaning from and about it. McIntyre's work is particularly important as she uses groundbreaking participatory action research (PAR) in her work with urban youth viewing them as informed collaborators in framing the questions and responses to their own community problems. Youth are shown to have agency, this is PAR at its best. Her work is also poignant because she deconstructs violence in more than just interpersonal ways showing that violence can also be educational, structural and environmental. These same violence(s) are certainly at work in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro.

Jennifer Tilton's (2010) ethnography of an Oakland, CA community considers the ways one urban community mobilizes itself to protect its children and youth while

simultaneously viewing those same youth as dangerous threats to the social order. A cognitive dissonance unfolds as the same people arguing that the young people need protection also name young people as a social threat. This dynamic is at work in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro where young favelados are both demonized and labeled dangerous, but also seen as in need of service and protection. Like Alice McIntyre's analysis above, I suggest that an answer to the dissonance is that young people must participate in finding answers and solving problems. They become their own *salvation* by telling their own stories and changing their own realities through participatory action and expressive culture. I resonate with June Jordan's poem for South African Women which concluded with the words "we are the ones we have been waiting for" (1978). Even CUFA's motto "fazendo do nosso jeito" (doing it our way) point to youth finding answers to social problems that affect them, thereby becoming their own advocates for change.

The concept of self-advocacy is not new but it is especially necessary right now as states retreat from responsibility to protect and serve its citizens. Multiple forms of privatization leave communities to solve their problems without over-relying on government assistance. This is certainly not new for favelas in Brazil that have often had to function as separate states within the state. Youth activism is also not new but it remains under theorized and undervalued. The methods of youth activism also rapidly change as globalization and the Internet bring global youth in closer contact with one another. A significant portion of their organizing occurs online and new terms like "media activist" or "media activism" have spawned. Media activists manipulate technology for social movement. Music, audio/visual mediums, blogs, facebook, twitter,

tumblr, and other alternative media are used to relay messages, organize, connect, create and maintain communities virtually and in real time.

What are young people organizing and protesting about? The answers can range from poverty, education, violence, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and the environment. In the case of impoverished young people in the shanties of Rio de Janeiro, violence, racism and poverty were injustices that surfaced most frequently in my readings and discussions with Brazilian respondents and key informants. The favela as representative of blackness and poverty and the growth of urban shantytowns the world over was a central focus in many conversations. The next section considers the literature on cities and poverty.

### Young People, Cities and Shantytowns

The growth of cities will be the single largest influence on development in the twenty-first century... Over the next 30 years, the population of African and Asian cities will double, adding 1.7 billion people – more than the current populations of the U.S. and China combined. –UN State of the World Population Report. [UN June 27, 2007]

Urban studies literature has examined the multi-faceted effects of rapid urbanization sparking the growth of cities worldwide. In 1950 approximately 29.0 percent of the world's population was urban, by 2000 that number rose to 47 percent, and by 2030 those numbers are projected to rise to 60 percent (United Nations 2006).

Globalization and urbanization are dual processes undergirding postindustrial and neoliberal shifts that continue to leave their marks on cities. Dynamics of gentrification divide people in cities hardening class lines, as slums proliferate worldwide.

Anthropologists have documented neoliberal policies, urbanization decoupled from industrialization and from development, resulting in gentrification, displacement and relegation of the poor to certain pockets of cities. Most recently gentrification has pushed

poor families outside of cities to suburbs creating a new variation on the term *edge city*<sup>3</sup> as the wealthy purchase and occupy centralized prime urban neighborhoods for themselves (Caldeira 1996; Cities 1995; Davis 2006; Gmelch 2009; Goode 2001; Harvey 2001; Holston 1999a; Holston 2005; Low 1996; Lyon-Callo 2002; Maskovsky 2003; Mullings 1987a; Mullings 1987b; Neuwirth 2006; Palen 2008; Ruben 2001; Sennett 2002; Stack 1974; Tienda 2002; United Nations 2006; United 2004; Williams 1992; Williams 2001).

However, as cities continue to proliferate and the face of city-dwellers change due to gentrification, slums, ghettos and shantytowns continue to grow inside and around the edges of cities. The overwhelming numbers of slum inhabitants are projected to be young brown people between the ages of 15 and 24. As a result, the report, *Challenge of the Slums* states:

Nearly one billion people live in what the UN defines as 'slums.' Three-quarters of Latin American's half billion people now live in cities, and nearly one-third of them live in slum neighborhoods. Of the three hundred million urban dwellers in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 70 percent live in shantytowns or other dilapidated urban areas. In Asia, more than a half billion people live in desperate urban conditions. The West is not left out either. In the United States alone, twelve million people live in what the UN defines as 'slums.' People in the third world are flocking to cities as rural opportunities disappear, only to find equally bleak prospects. By the year 2020, the UN estimates, half of the world's urban population will live in poverty. [UN-Habitat 2003]

As it concerns the very young Tienda and Wilson (2002) write:

The consequences of extreme material deprivation are especially harsh for the very young, whose neurological development, physical health, and emotional capacity are prematurely compromised by poor nutrition, limited emotional and intellectual stimulation, and inadequate satisfaction of basic human needs, such as safe shelter, clean drinking water, and predictability of social environment.

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3. *Edge cities*, a term coined by Joel Garreau in 1991 to describe various patterns of out-movement from cities or patterns of evolving new urban cores found in the outer rings of metropolitan areas.

Whether in the inner-city ghettos of the United States, the homelands of South Africa, or the favelas of Brazil, growing numbers of urban youth find themselves at the periphery of city life, facing the familiar problems of poverty: fragile families, inadequate nutrition, limited or no access to education, premature entry into the world of work, and involvement in illegal activities. [2002:3]

If they live past infancy and early childhood the outcomes could remain bleak.

In her chapter *The World Goes to the City* Janice Perlman writes: “Virtually all of the projected population growth on the planet in the coming decades will be urban growth, will be in the cities of the “global South” (Asia, Africa and Latin America), and will be concentrated in informal settlements – the shantytowns and squatter settlements that Brazilians call favelas” (2010:41). The growth of cities, shantytowns, and the growing youth bulge could equate pending disaster. Slain rapper Notorious BIG, “Big Poppa” said in a 1997 rap, “mo’ money mo’ problems.” Here I suggest, mo’ cities, mo’ slums, mo’ youth, mo’ problems, as the numbers of 15-24 year olds also increase globally. If international policies don’t address these realities in proactive ways, the results could prove devastating. Young people without opportunity or hope of opportunity will react as seen in the recent uprisings in the U.K., Libya, Egypt, and the U.S. Will nations assure positive healthy outcomes to the growth of youth in global urban poverty? This growing demographic has been theorized as problematic by some western demographers and military analysts who suggest:

Societies with rapidly growing young populations often end up with rampant unemployment and large pools of disaffected youths who are more susceptible to recruitment into rebel or terrorist groups. The term [youth bulge] was coined by German social scientist Gunnar Heinsohn in the mid-1990s but has gained greater currency in recent years, thanks to the work of American political scientists Gary Fuller and Jack A. Goldstone. While this kind of frustration and competition for jobs do not directly fuel violence, they do increase the likelihood these unemployed youths will seek social and economic advancement by alternative,

extralegal means. If you have no other options and not much else going on, the opportunity cost of joining an armed movement may be low. [Beehner 2007]

Oppressive regimes, dictatorships, and struggling countries with meager budgets, underfunded state apparatus, inadequate civic activity, employment instability and without non-governmental organizations involved in communities are most vulnerable to youth-bulge-related violence and social unrest. The recent youth led protests of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and Palestine are examples. Countries that do a satisfactory job of providing stability, quality education, employment and opportunities for advancement for their young people find the youth bulge to be a "demographic bonus" that equals bright hope and possibility for tomorrow. Youth are groomed and trained as future leaders in science, technology, politics and culture. In the global south, on the other hand, where some countries remain systemically challenged and democracy is frequently stalled, high birth rates among poor people of color are frequently considered a "political hazard" and a threat to social and economic stability and security (Hendrixson 2004).

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks in NYC, there is increasing global concern about new groups of "anti-state actors" among populations of disenfranchised and dispossessed youth who are desperate, non-white, and theorized as potential terrorists. In this case the youth bulge theory is ultimately related to crime, suggesting that excluded populations of *slum children* are a threat and the easiest secret weapon of anti-state forces (Davis 2006; Demarest 1995; Hagedorn 2008; Hendrixson 2004; Tranberg Hansen 2008b). Fortunately, some theorists have critiqued this description of the youth bulge theory as it strongly implies that impoverished youth, particularly youth of color are

always a threat to social order which enables fear mongering, devaluation of youth of color, and criminalization of the poor.

Karen Tranberg Hansen's (2008b) response to the youth bulge in cities of the southern hemisphere critiques the "violence as only option for the dispossessed" view. She situates young people in their everyday struggle in "normalized" ways as they discern how to succeed at transitioning into adulthood within a failed democratic system. Her work examines these realities in light of the youth population explosion because these changing demographics have meaning other than fear of terrorism. There are issues of resource development, service provision like education and healthcare, opportunity, social organization, and everyday life quality. The youth bulge gives rise to salient questions regarding policy and the role of youth in the social reproduction of cities of tomorrow. It is misleading and stereotypical to only view youth through a lens of violence and terrorism. Young people are the primary culture makers and shapers, economic contributors, social and political actors in the two-thirds world. Tomorrow's politicians, scientists, religious leaders, artists, business people, and educators are today's young people. The issues youth face today and how current leadership addresses them profoundly impacts their lives both now and in the future. At this point the state has failed its young citizens therefore young people must be active co-contributors in addressing their current and future realities.

In the case of Brazil, the country has one of the largest cities in the world, São Paulo, thousands of shanties nationally, and it is the fifth largest population in the world with a median age of 29. Brazil is one of the most youthful countries on the planet in both demographic and attitude, with over two-thirds of the population being under the age of

30 (Dicks 2003). Figures three and four below from the International data base of the U.S. Census Bureau display the 2010 population of Brazil based on gender and age, and the projected 2020 demographic also based on gender and age. The 2010 pyramid shows young people between the ages of 15 and 29 bulging, and ten years later (2020) at ages 25-39 they are projected to remain bulging being the largest population in the country.

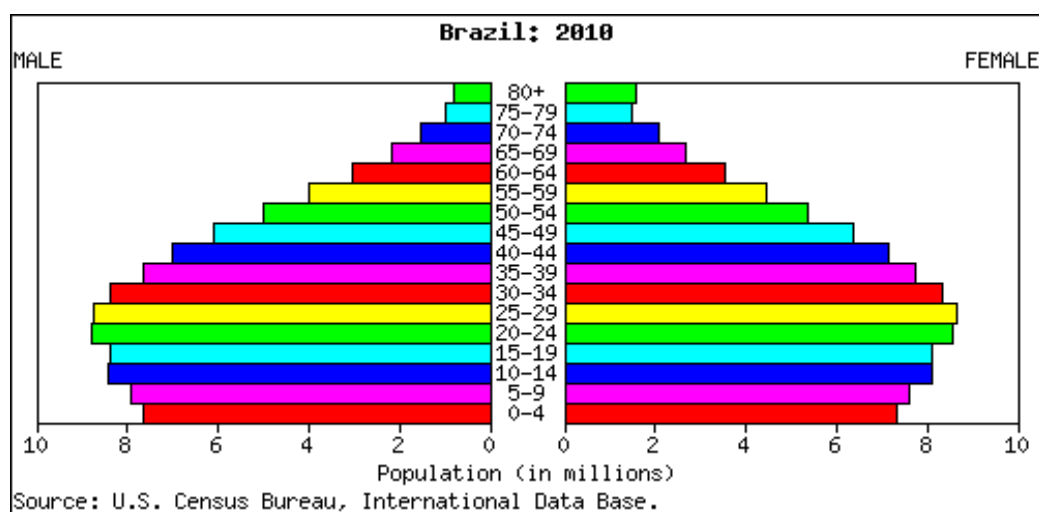


Figure 1. Brazil population pyramid 2010

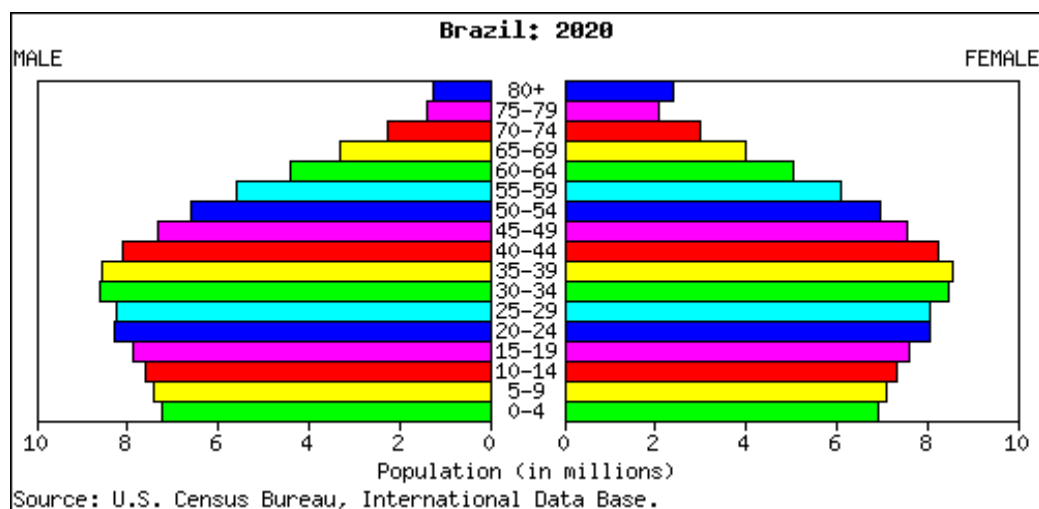


Figure 2. Brazil population pyramid 2020



In attitude, both Brazilians and non-Brazilians have stereotypically reduced the country to descriptors like “carefree,” “obsessed with youth and beauty,” and “Brazil is not a serious country.” Preta (24) was one of my key informants in Rio and she made this comment at different times in varying ways. French actress Catherine Deneuve once remarked “Brazil doesn’t attract me, it’s too consistently carefree” (Page 1995:16). “Brazilians have a penchant for joyfulness”... according to Joãozinho Trinta, the creative genius who revolutionized Rio’s annual carnival extravaganza, “if you consider the planet as a living entity, Brazil is its heart; thus Brazil’s function is to bring happiness to this earth” (Page 16). Finally, “Brazil is the country of the future and always will be” was a common joke about the country as being perpetually immature, until recently. It must be noted that today Brazil is a power to be reckoned with and has joined the league of other developed nations around the world. During President Lula da Silva’s term in office (2003-2010) Brazil’s economy grew an average of 5 percent per year, development is up, and as of December 2011 Brazil overtook the U.K. as the world’s 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy (BBC 2011a; Bourne 2008; Rohter 2010). The 2014 FIFA world cup for football will be held in Brazil, as well as the 2016 Olympic games. Brazil is the country of now, but their challenge remains the enormous poverty and injustices experienced most often by people of color residing on the hillsides in and around cities like Rio de Janeiro. Next, I consider the literature on music and youth uprising.

### The Role of Music

Pertinent for my work is a review of literature about the role of music in social activism, particularly the role of rap. Political anthropologist Margaret Dorsey (2004)

discusses the role of music and the arts in materializing politics. Dorsey queries the special connection between political disposition, music, and political outcomes. She argues that using music to create identification is crucial to the formation of political publics. Spirituals, folk music, race music, and hip-hop have all been used to shape political consciousness and the reverse is also true, music and lyrics arise from particular social and political positions (Baraka 1963; Chuck D 1998; Dorsey 2004; Hebdige 1987; Moehn 2007; Perry 2004a; Stapleton 1998).

The civil rights movement had its corresponding identity music, the freedom songs of the day. The South African anti-Apartheid movement incorporated its own protest songs in the struggle. Post U.S. civil rights had its supportive music of soul and hip-hop. These movements arose from communities of disenfranchised youth of color. In the U.S. the civil rights movement was born out of industry, and institutions like church, mosque, and prison; the hip-hop movement was born out of post-industry, fleeing institutions, decaying streets and public housing filled with restless youth. The social context in which persons are absorbed and from where identities derive create the music and the reverse is also true. Tricia Rose theorized that the ruptures, fractures and uncertainties taking place in the postindustrial urban landscape produced hip-hop music and culture:

Worked out on the rusting urban core as a playground, hip hop transforms stray technological parts intended for cultural and industrial trash heaps into sources of pleasure and power. These transformations have become a basis for digital imagination all over the world. Its earliest practitioners came of age at the tail end of the Great Society, in the twilight of America's short-lived federal commitment to black civil rights and during the predawn of the Reagan-Bush era. In hip hop, these abandoned parts, people, and social institutions were welded and then spliced together, not only as sources of survival but as sources of pleasure. [1994:22]

Rose continues:

Hip-hop is an Afro-diasporic cultural form which attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African American and Caribbean history, identity and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of Black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip-hop. [1994:21]

Tricia Rose also wrote, “life on the margins of postindustrial urban America is inscribed in hip-hop style, sound, lyrics and thematic.” Hip-hop is “situated at the crossroads of lack and desire, and emergent deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect (1994:21). She argued that hip-hop was a Western postindustrial art form, and that both postmodern and pre-modern interpretive frames fail to do justice to its complexities because of the specific tensions of the time, economic change, deteriorating cities, closing factories and transition to the communication age. Its postindustrial artistic innovation simultaneously reflect and contest the social roles open to urban inner-city youths at the end of the twentieth century (1994). Rose paints a picture of a technologically evolving and changing urban spatial geography mixed with youthful frustration in the making and shaping of hip-hop. Where there is movement, push, pull, erosion and explosion, space breaks forth for the birth of something new, and in the 1970s that something new was rap and hip-hop.

Even hip-hop’s protest styles were unusual and different as they reflected a new social context. But changing perceptions of space and time that accompanied new virtual technologies had crafted arenas for fashioning a different kind of protest. Tricia Rose refers again to hip-hop’s breaks, flows, fractures, and ruptures as reflective of deindustrialization. Hip hop replicates and re-imagines the experiences of urban life and

symbolically appropriates urban space through sampling, attitude, dance, style, and sound effects” (1994:22). Its modes of resistance would also reflect something new. Living in the space of urban retreat and transition, and the rise of global communications brought greater global connectivity, but less local support, and wider divides between the haves and have-nots. These dynamics along with rupture, flow, and layering informed the methodology of resistance and protest that young people would create and shape. Rose compellingly argues that postindustrial shifts created unique and distinct responses to time, movement, and space.

Related to this idea of postindustrial shift or break, Russell Potter argued that rap music was a radical postmodern form of resistance, a peculiar splitting of time. “This split in time has potent connections to the inner-spatial ‘double consciousness’ articulated almost a century ago by W.E.B. DuBois: that African Americans, even as they have sought to build from within a full sense of self-authenticity, have had to exist in a nation where the fundamental symbolic structures continually place them in the position of ‘Other.’” (Potter 1995). The persistent oppressive state of “Otherness” uncovers modes of resistance that are not readily apparent.

Globally, far too many young people still encounter the “ruptures and fractures” of poverty and alienation that Tricia Rose wrote about. In the 1960s and 70s the reality was compounded by white flight and state retreat. Those remain factors today, along with gentrification and dislocation, leaving impoverished people worse off than ever before. These universal thematic realities of poverty, dislocation, relocation, gangs, drug cartels, and police corruption find youth responding to their specific local contexts, and yet the global dilemma in these impoverished spaces are the same.

Hip-hop attached itself to these under resourced urban spaces catching on most poignantly in the world's ghettos and shantytowns. Hip-hop was a magnet for disenfranchised young people living in shanties or low-income housing, receiving inadequate education, poor health care, experiencing food insecurity and malnourishment. Police violence was a daily reality for many youth of color, compounded by the fact that there was little hope for future employment that reaped livable wages. Hip-hop had a way of resonating with poor youth, of empowering them to resist, disrupt, and counter. By the late-1980s young people in other countries were mimicking the rebellious sounds and moves of rap and breakdance in the U.S.

Rapper MC Yan from Hong-Kong admits, "through hip-hop, we were trying to find out who we were, what we were. That's what black people in America did" (Howe 2000). While MC Yan was influenced by U.S. hip-hop he eventually created his own sound and narrative distinct to his country. By the 1990s, rap's most transformative dimensions were international, not American. A Croatian rapper called DJ Pimp Tha' Ho said "rap is the form of music that has the power and directness to say what needed to be said. It fit our situation... People here are killing and dying for nothing." His narrative and context was war torn Bosnia (Mitchell 2001c). Rap's global ideology had the power to speak into local realities.

Rap in particular, as the voice of hip-hop would become the most visible element of hip-hop. MC's rapped about race, poor living conditions, low quality education, violence, unclean neighborhoods, and overall inequality. They were broadcasting their conditions of lack, but also their moments of joy in this midst of dearth. "Oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and

produce fantasies of subversion” (Rose 1994:99). Robin D.G. Kelley similarly wrote about subversion in his work on everyday resistance as an examination of subversive resistance as that which is often un-examined and under-valued. Kelley argues that unorganized, unacknowledged acts of rebellion point to daily struggle and survival. Gangster rap for example, Kelley argues, is a response by young black males to their experiences of being vilified, under employed, under educated, and oppressed. Gangster rap is at its root, a form of working class resistance (1994).

Cultural critic bell hooks argued that it was conditions of suffering and survival that created rituals of rap and breakdance as a means to gain public recognition and voice. Further, “in its earliest stages, rap was a ‘male thing.’ Young black and brown males could not breakdance and rap in cramped living spaces. Male creativity, expressed in rap and dancing, required wide open spaces, symbolic frontiers where the body could do its thing, expand, grow, and move, surrounded by a watching crowd” (1992:35).

Street violence has also been connected to poverty in depleted urban areas and has led some of those disillusioned youth living in housing projects to creative endeavors like the formation of the Zulu Nation in the Bronx, under the leadership of a housing project DJ called Afrika Bambaataa. Much of that urban creativity was a response to community violence, gang warfare, and police harassment (Chang 2005a). While hip-hop was formed from different people, pieces and parts of a New York City hybrid of young Black and Latino writers, dancers, DJ’s and rappers, the named leaders of the movement surfaced as DJ Kool Herc, Grand Master Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa, all three of African and Caribbean descent. It was Bambaataa who outlined the four pillars of hip-hop, bringing together artists from MC, DJ, breakdance and graffiti communities in New York City to

form his Zulu Nation. And there on the streets of the South Bronx a hip-hop institution was born, and in no time music journalists were writing about it in the weekly *inkies*, *Billboard*, *Rolling Stone*, *the Village Voice*, and *Spin*. At that time it was a new cultural and artistic genre but hip-hop was also becoming the newest form of media activism.

Bambaataa's work with the Zulu Nation (c.1973) is the earliest documented case of parlaying hip-hop into a tool and institution that could affect social change (Chang 2005a; Ogbar 2007; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005). The stated purpose of the Zulu Nation was to battle via dancing, writing, making beats and initiating peace treaties among the various gang members in the Bronx. The release of Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982) dubbed as rap's first commercial "message rap," or social commentary helped shape rap and hip-hop as story telling arts from the ghetto. "The Message" spoke to the harsh conditions of life in an American housing project. Conscious rap in the U.S. and abroad helped raise socio-political awareness and inspire action in urban youth who absorbed it.

Chuck D of the rap group Public Enemy once called rap the CNN of the ghetto, and at another time called it the CNN of black America, "a youth-controlled media network that could pull a race fragmented by integration back together again" (Chang 2005:251). The social and political trajectories of rap resonate with poor youth of color everywhere and meaningful work around hip-hop has been done in communities sparking renewal and social change (Asante 2008; Carter 2005; Chang 2005b; Chuck D 1998; Dyson 2001; Flores-González 2006; Forman 2002a; Kelley 1994; Kitwana 2004b; Lusane 2004; Ogbar 2007; Rose 1996; Stapleton 1998; Watkins 2005). Cornel West said that "hip-hop culture still expresses stronger and more clearly than any other cultural

expression in the past generation a profound indictment of the moral decadence of our dominant society. An unprecedented cultural breakthrough created by poor black youths in the hoods of the empire's chocolate cities, hip-hop has by now transformed the entertainment industry and culture here and abroad"(2004).

Ginwright and Cammarota assert that "progressive hip-hop, with its critique of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy, creates awareness of social problems and politicize youth into taking action" (Ginwright 2002). They continue:

At the self-awareness level, young people use hip-hop culture to express pain, anger, and the frustration of oppression through rap, song, and poetry, or the spoken word. At the level of social awareness, they use hip-hop culture to organize, inform, and politicize at the community level... At the global awareness level, hip-hop culture carries some possibility to unite youth through common experiences and common struggles of resistance. [2002: 91-92]

Hip-hop is an international phenomenon with multiple trajectories, regional and international hybrids. Hip-hop is polyvocal, and intertextual speaking to and between other texts and contexts (Alim 2008; Mitchell 2001c). Its fluid nature permits transmission from one region, country, and continent to another. Hip-hop's consistency is that it flourishes best in urban pockets, whether ghettos, shantytowns or slums, and is most compelling to young people on the margins of societies marked by color, dispossession and poverty. Hip-hop has birthed what Antonio Gramsci called "organic intellectuals" (1971). They are intellectuals who understand and express life through the language, culture and experiences of poor and working class people. They openly identify with an oppressed class, share its interests and works on its behalf. The MC or rapper performs the role of organic intellectual speaking as one who comes from the community, lives in the community, is linked to the community and intimately knows its everyday



struggles. The rapper appropriates popular knowledge from within the community and contests national discourse. The rapper is the accountability link and the advocate between their community and the larger social world.

In 2004 essays by American anthropologist Derek Pardue began appearing in academic journals covering hip-hop in São Paulo (Pardue 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2007). Pardue's ethnography, *Ideologies of Marginality in Brazilian Hip Hop* (Pardue 2008a) was anticipated as the first ethnography on Brazilian hip-hop written in English. Pardue argued that hip-hop in São Paulo was about identity making as marginalized artists re-create themselves as subjects (versus objects) thus making meaning for their lives. He examines the ways rappers re-conceptualize territorial space, the periferia, gender, and blackness in São Paulo's hip-hop communities. Jennifer Roth-Gordon presented a paper suggesting an alternative black movement in Rio de Janeiro at the American Anthropological Meetings in 1999 (2002a). She argued that hip-hop served as a new kind of black movement in Rio because of hip-hop's identification with racial stratification codes in the U.S. over the color caste system of Brazil. Rappers are more Americanized in their racial views than other Brazilians according to Roth-Gordon whose research also examined the ways language is constructed and manipulated as slang and black identity formation in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (2002b; Roth-Gordon 2009).

Maria Moulin asserts that Brazil's hip-hop culture attempts to "sabotage" race as it is known in Brazil (2010), again referring to an Americanized view of race that appears to travel globally with hip-hop. Nascimento adds to the discussion by arguing that hip-hop in Brazil assists young people in their search for citizenship (1995). These works explore cultural practice, race and citizenship identities, and music as resistance ritual.

My contribution to the literature on Brazilian youth, agency and music is to consider the new ways young favelados transcend and undo problematic constructions of race, space, poverty and violence. Youth deconstruct the old and reconstruct fresh meaning for themselves and their communities around identity making and music as resistance ritual. Constructions of blackness, favela space and daily violence surface as critical themes. Beyond Brazil, conscious hip-hop also thrives in other spaces as a tool for reworking identities both at local and global levels. The literature on hip-hop uncovers common threads showing that conscious hip-hop always contests, disrupts, resists and counters through narratives of identity, place and space; “this is who I am, this is where I’m from. I matter and my community matters” (Alim 2008; Campos 2006; Chamberland 2001; Condry 2006; Dennis 2006; Ferreira 2005; Forero 2005; Gilmer 2007; Hesmondhalgh 2001; Hodgkinson 2006; Keyes 1996; Kouddous 2011; Levy 2001; 2000; Marshall 2003; Maxwell 2001; Mitchell 2001b; Mitchell 2001c; Mitchell 2001e; Morelli 2001; Moulin 2010; Nascimento 1995; Neate 2004; 2008a; Pennay 2001; Perry 2004b; Perry 2008; Perullo 2005; Prévos 2001; Ralph 2007; Rocha 2001; Roth-Gordon 2002a; Roth-Gordon 2009; Spady 2006; Swedenburg 2001; Urla 2001; Weiss 2009; Wermuth 2001). Next it is appropriate to consider samba since the music and dance of samba function as totalizing discourse and narrative of Brazilian identity.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ANTI-SAMBA

They say that “in Brazil everything sooner or later ends *up* in samba,” a common expression in the land of football, *capoeira* (martial art), and carnival. But in the end the cultural narrative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will read that everything ended *down* in hip-hop with the poor. An obvious play on the words *up* and *down* as samba is mainstreamed and appropriated by the higher echelons of society while hip-hop in Brazil remains marginal, *down* with the impoverished masses. However in a literal sense the landscape of Brazil finds the poor *up* above cities living on *morros* (hills), with some of the best scenic and ocean views available. Middle and upper class Brazilians reside *down* on the *asfalto* (asphalt) or level ground. Some grassroots hip-hop activists in Rio argue that regardless of where they dwell hip-hop is the defining art of freedom and dignity for impoverished Afro-Brazilians situated at the margins of Brazilian society. Hip-hop is that space where young people of color re-work local identities both at local and global levels, and contest, disrupt, resist and counter imposed narratives of identity and place.

However, Rio de Janeiro is known for samba. It is samba city with its associated narratives of equality and grand discourse of racial and class harmony. That ideal permeates the country. Samba is most celebrated through the annual spectacle of carnival in Rio. Carnival and samba are intimately intertwined locally and on the world stage.

“Millions of people make, sing, dance, or just enjoy samba. Its importance in the maintenance of a relative social peace in Brazil is hard to measure, but it is clear. One doesn’t need to wait for *Carnaval* to see how samba brings people from all social classes and races together and keeps them in harmony” (1991). Samba’s themes and subthemes, its spirit is alive, at least in theory, all year in Rio de Janeiro. Samba is thematically about happiness, joy, ease, harmony, equality and peace. Samba is pervasive in the ways people of Rio prefer to view themselves. *Cariocas* (natives of Rio de Janeiro) view themselves as harmonious, peaceful, non-racist people, and samba embodies that ideal.

Funk is another matter. George Yúdice’s essay, “the Funkification of Rio” (1994) considers young Rio’s fascination with funk as a form of resistance to the elitist contradictions of samba as ruling the public domain. Yúdice argues that funk in Rio possesses its own cultural politics around the contestation of the public sphere. He further states that the “permeation of space by style and ethos carries great political impact” (1994:211). Yúdice examines several events in his essay, one of them being the October 18, 1992 looting rampage by what was called “uma negrada dos subúrbios da Zona Norte” (hordes of dark kids from the slums in the Northern suburbs). Young people reportedly from north zone favelas invade Rio’s South Zone tourist spaces, rioting and stealing from tourists and upper class Brazilians. Because of where they come from, these young people are assumed to be influenced by funk, not samba. Their conscious or unconscious objective was to occupy and resist mainstream space, or samba identified space. Funk is labeled “black” and “low class” and is expected to remain in “black spaces” interpreted as the favela and working class barrios. Funk is a rhythm, a movement, a force, with sensual pulsating beats derivative of Miami bass. It serves an

important politicized spatial function in Rio invading public spaces as if in opposition to samba. Rio is recognized as both the samba and funk capital of Brazil, but each genre carries its own assumptions of space, class, and race. Funk occupies the space of *anti-samba*, as does hip-hop in Rio. Those genres defy everything that samba claims about Brazil, uncovering embarrassing truths about an unjust country.

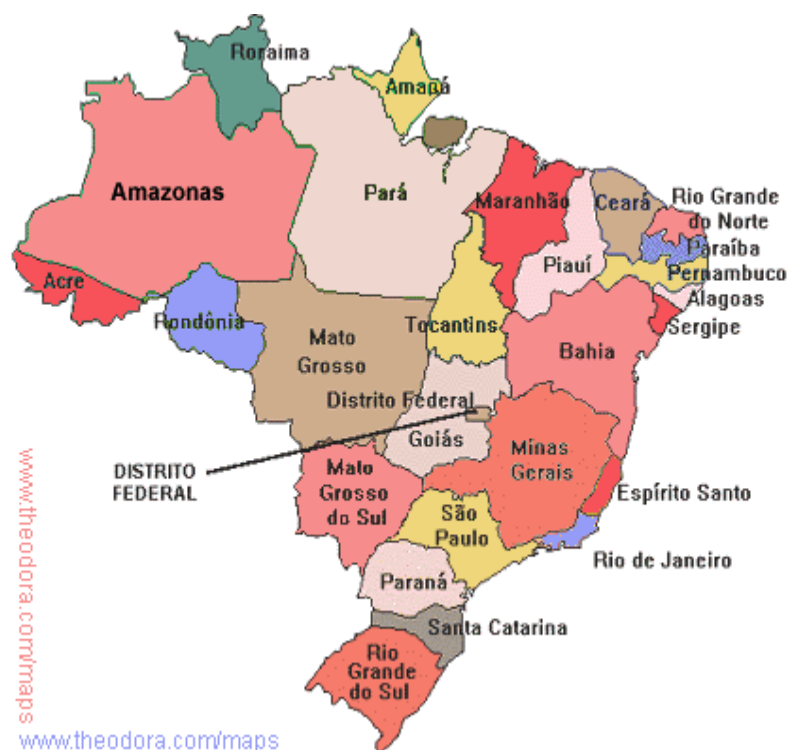


Figure 3. Map of Brazil

Map courtesy of [www.theodora.com/maps](http://www.theodora.com/maps), used with permission.

“In Brazil everything sooner or later ends up in samba” but my friend Gilberto didn’t buy that line. He volunteered and took classes at CUFA, the hip-hop NGO in City of God favela. Gilberto (24), was Afro-Brazilian, a native of Rio, born, raised and still living in City of God favela, and proud of it. He told me he loved living in City of God. Gilberto had a crisp street analysis of life that I enjoyed listening to. While not formally

educated, he was organically brilliant. Gil was giving me one of his walk and talk strolls through the favela streets when I casually asked if he had plans to participate in carnival. He gave me a sobering look and said “I don’t like carnival anymore. I used to, but it’s meaningless and does nothing for us here in the favela.” Besides some of the pious evangelicals, Gil was one of the only people I spoke with who had nothing good to say about carnival. He enjoyed local *pagode* clubs where he could listen to sambistas (samba musicians) from the community play folk samba, but he had no affection for the large commercial event associated with samba and huge profit. While Brazilians are said to view themselves and make sense of life through samba, there are variations on that theme depending on who’s doing the speaking, and from what spatial reality.

For Gil who grew up poor encountering inequality daily, having no opportunity to go to university or acquire marketable job skills, funk and hip-hop offered more meaning to life than samba or carnival. Samba’s text and subtext as totalizing discourse for the country didn’t concur with Gil’s lived reality. Gil’s experience and his own thinking derived from hip-hop analysis made this clear for him. He was able to closely examine Brazil’s racial democracy ideology, peel back the thick layers and found it lacking. Samba’s racial and class democracy was a conceptual imaginary space, a contradictory reality, a dream of equality at best. At worst it was suspended reality and fantastical fiction because when samba and carnival was over the stratified and racial divides persisted. The poor remained poor, and the wealthy remained wealthy. The majority of favelados were still non-white; nothing had changed, there was no progress for the disenfranchised. And that fact is palpable on site as I noticed walking away after the closing night of Rio’s 2007 carnival with Jalene.

It was 5 a.m. and the Champions parade of top samba school winners had just completed their final strut down the *passarela* (carnival parade route) before preparations for next year's spectator carnival would begin. Jalene had been dancing a superb *Carioca samba do pe* (Rio foot samba) all evening, she stood on bleachers waving her arms and spinning around in her sparkly halter top, short shorts, and four inch heels, loudly singing through a huge toothy smile. The sambódromo (samba stadium) was filled to capacity, bright lights, beer, and fireworks exploded through the humid night air. It was beautiful and surreal. At the end Jalene looked at me, her toothy smile gone, head slightly tilted low, glittery attire seemed dull now, and she simply said "*fin*" (the end). The party was over. It was time to awake from samba's dream. It was as if there was a shift in the universe and order was now restored; real life was beckoning us home.

Jalene and I walked through the dusty dawn streets filled with litter and the aftershock of party. Street cleaners were already at work donning their florescent orange uniforms pushing over-sized brooms through the streets. Some of these same street cleaners had just sambaed their way through the entire parade sweeping up and dancing with their brooms in between each *escola de samba* (samba school) performance. Cleaning trucks were already at work as the massive crowd of 90 thousand partiers headed toward public transportation points to get their rides back home or to their hotels. We walked in the sea of people, moving in unison toward the metro. Jalene and I didn't speak during the hour ride home squashed between other carnival goers inside one of the public vans. We were tired but Jalene also appeared sad.

The months leading up to carnival she had been upbeat and alive with learning lyrics to the *samba enredos* (samba songs) for each of the samba schools she was performing with, getting fit for costumes, and scheming how many schools she could parade for without paying a costume fee. We had even attended several of the practice runs of samba schools on site at the sambódromo. Jalene told me stories of the days she was queen of her samba school and all of the attention she received, everyone wanting her because she was tall, light brown (*morena*), and regal, the perfect look for a Rio carnival queen. The mixed-race colors of *morena* and *mulata* were most eroticized in Rio, particularly for women, for reasons I will discuss below. Jalene obviously reveled in a certain feeling of specialness when she talked about her participation in carnival. But when carnival was over it was over. She was still a poor struggling hotel receptionist. Nothing in her real everyday life had changed.

The everyday lives of poor Brazilians remained as they were. There was no Cinderella slipper found by a gringo prince, but there were ample black and brown favela princes and princesses who would find each other during carnival and share their impoverished lives together. While a favela resident may have found contentment portraying royalty during carnival, they knew it was only a *fantasia* (costume) devoid of social truth. In some ways carnival intensified poor people's realization of their poverty. Ironically, even the fantasias were costly which often prohibited the poorest of the poor from parading in carnival, although many found ways around the fees and paraded



anyway pointing to Brazilian improvisation and *jeitino*.<sup>4</sup> Jalene never paid for a costume. She was a tall, thin morena so samba schools often asked her to wear one of their costumes to parade representing their school. Jalene had the look they wanted. Carnival season 2007 Jalene took part in three different samba school parades down the *passarela do samba* and never paid a fee. Others without costume money knew people within the samba school or were members and helpers of the school and attained costumes that way. Still others paid via the lay-away plan, weekly or monthly throughout the year paying until the costume was paid for.

Statistically the overwhelming number of Rio's 30 thousand or so carnival paraders from the *comissão de frente* (front commission), *porta-bandeiras* (flag bearers), *baianas* (older women), *criancas* (children), *passistas* (dancers), *cantores* (singers), *velha guarda* (elder members of the school), *rainhas* (queens), to the *bateria* (drummers), were working poor brown and black people from the favelas. Without the poor there would be no carnival, even though many of the most visible front line positions were held by celebrities or white Brazilians with money. Most samba schools remained located where the poor were located, on hills inside favela communities. The *moradores* (favela residents) were the backbone and carnival was actually the one time of year when the residents were represented in a positive light on the world stage. Poor people dressed in sashes, feathers, gold, silver, glitter, bright colors, and make-up, strutting with pride before international viewers with cameras aiming, clicking and flashing. The eyes of the world were on the poor during carnival, and from a distance they looked fantastic.

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4. *Jeitinho* is an expression in Brazil for getting around the rules or getting around the law in order to get what you want. The term literally means "to find a way."

My seats for the spectator carnival at the sambódromo were on the ground, low and up close. I wanted to see their faces as they paraded by me. I was so close I could lean over the railing and touch the parading masses as they sashayed down the passarela. Up close it was possible to see some signage of poverty on their bodies. I remember thinking “wow, they look happy but worn out, scarred skin, smoker’s lips and lots of missing teeth, but they were smiling. Smiling was the rule. Many wore skin that was severely burnt from the sun, perhaps from prolonged outdoor labor. Their faces were marked with deep lines and creases indicative of stress and hardship, not privileged lives. They were maids, cleaners, haulers and lifters in real life. Hidden under the ruffle, flair and frill of those colorful fantasias were house cleaners, cooks, vendors, taxi drivers, and doormen, many of whom saved their hard earned wages to wear that costume. Brazil’s proletariat was the foundation of the multi-million dollar spectacle but they wouldn’t see any of that money in personal ways. Nothing was altered through samba and the carnivalesque. They were still the working poor cast in samba’s dream march. Scholars have examined and theorized the social meaning, symbolism, intricacies, and hierarchal flips of samba and carnival in Rio (Bakhtin 1968; Da Matta 1984; Da Matta 2005; Da Matta 1982; Parker 1991; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Stam 1997), but at least one young favelado got it right.

“Samba lies, rap tells the truth, the way I see it” words of a young rapper on the neon streets of Lapa one night in Rio. While I wasn’t clear what this young guy meant in that moment, the longer I stayed in Rio and talked to people, the more I understood. His statement was a catch-all contrast between samba’s prevarication and rap’s veracity. Samba told one story, rap told another and for many people one of those stories was an untruth. The discourse of racial democracy was problematic as systemic racism’s post

slavery residue lingered. Social and personal attitudes about color and worth persisted. It remained an enormous stain upon the fabric of Brazil's self-narrative. So while samba strikes a melodious cord inverting social paradigms and ignoring reality most intensely for five days of the year; rap is the discord, that noisy, nagging truth raging from the low places of life the other 360 days of the year. That street rapper in Lapa used few words to crystallize a fundamental truth regarding the function of rap and hip-hop in Rio. Rap courts resistance to the totalizing dominant narrative in Rio. To rap is to resist power, to resist the lie, to keep it real, to tell a truth. Rap is the *anti-samba*. The culture of hip-hop embodies words, symbols, music and movement that narrate reality as experienced in the poorest sectors of society (Flores-González 2006).

Symbolically, samba and hip-hop are also gendered in Rio. Samba's physical trope is the smiling *mulata* woman draped in feathers and sequins with her golden colored buttocks exposed. She is beautiful, sexualized, imagined free and mainstream. She is objectified, but presumably by her own will. She is samba, she is Brazil. The mulata as the positive outcome of celebrated miscegenation in Brazil; she is Gilberto Freyre's wish dream of racial democracy and Brazilian exceptionalism. Freyre, a Brazilian social historian and cultural anthropologist attempted to re-write history and tame the horrors of slavery in *The Masters and the Slaves* (1946). The mulata stands as Brazil's symbol of mixed-race pride and denial of racism. She is silent on issues of race.

Rap's physical trope is the African descended black male, with an angry affect, his bald head, chiseled and tattooed chest and arms. He is the subject of his marginal position. He is too black and too proud of his blackness. His apparent absence of racial mixture weakens his Brazilianess and the country's exceptionalism. He is marginal,

favelado, hip-hop, anti-samba. He is vocal on issues of race. However I am aware that the complexities of life are rarely as simplified as oppositional poles so it is worth noting that the intricacies and multiple trajectories of both hip-hop and samba are convoluted, the socio-political texts of each are various, manifold, complex and ever-changing.

In a 2005 interview with journalist Savonne Ratliff, rapper MV Bill said “our samba no longer reflects racial pride from the ghettos. Racial pride comes through Brazilian funk music, and now through hip-hop. They have white MCs with another vocabulary trying to fake the ghetto reality of black people” (2005). In my own interview with music producer, Celso Athayde in Madureira, he talked about samba highlighting Portela as one of Rio’s oldest and most famed samba schools located in that working class barrio of Madureira. Império Serrano, a competing samba school, is also in Madureira. Celso drew similarities between samba and hip-hop saying, “in the 1800s samba still belonged to poor African Brazilians but it was later appropriated by rich white Brazilians who snatched it away from the poor when they realized its money making potential.” Celso said “that’s exactly what happened to hip-hop in the United States.” He went on, “one year while visiting Salvador, Bahia for carnival I noticed something. Samba was being controlled by white people.” Salvador is a black, seaside city on the northeastern coast of the country. It was the port of entry for slavers who brought Africans captured mostly from Angola and Mozambique to work as slaves for Portuguese colonizers in Brazil. As a result, today the city retains a significant African cultural influence and boasts of its 80 percent Afro-Brazilian population. As Celso shared, my mind went back to my visit to Salvador, recalling the first thing my taxi driver told me en route to my hotel. He remarked, the city was 80 percent black. He said it with pride. I

smiled and nodded at him through his rear view mirror. That meant something and the fact that I was also black meant it was worth sharing with me.

Celso continued explaining that Salvador's carnival was very different from Rio's in that it was still a street party; there was no passarela do samba or sambódromo. The carnival streets were roped off and people had to pay to enter inside ropes. Celso said tourists paid the entrance fee and were given carnival tee-shirts to identify them as paying partiers authorized to be inside the carnival ropes. Celso noticed that nearly everyone inside the carnival's velvet rope was white, while most of the people outside the rope were black; an oreo cookie effect he said. There was no mistaking who owned samba and it wasn't Afro-Brazilians even though they had made it the great expression that it was. Celso said that day he decided to make sure the same thing did not happen with rap in Brazil. White corporate elites in Brazil would not appropriate and steal hip-hop if he had anything to do with it. He committed himself to keeping rap and hip-hop socially conscious and in the hands of young poor favela artists who were creating it. Celso and MV Bill designed CUFA with that in mind.

I began visiting Rio de Janeiro in 2005, the same year I met Celso Athayde while living and studying in Washington, D.C. I was in my second year of a PhD program in race, gender and social justice and planning to examine underground hip-hop in a U.S. city. That chance encounter would modify my research and send me to Rio de Janeiro. Celso was a 44 year old, 5 foot 11 or so, bronze colored man from Rio, a Carioca. He was clad in blue jeans, tee-shirt and sneakers with an aloof and angry affect. Celso was visiting the U.S. on tour with a translator meeting and talking with grassroots organizations about his work in Brazil. He was sharing with the folks at Empower D.C., a

community organizing group in the district, and I was in the audience. Celso discussed hip-hop, racial injustice, violence, and black identity in Brazil. We were a small racially mixed group of D.C. residents and the thing Celso said that stuck with me that night was directed at black Americans. He said “you are the greatest black people in the world, we admire you and look to you for inspiration but you are disappointing us.” The disappointment Celso was speaking of was around what African Americans were doing or not doing with hip-hop. He suggested rap in the U.S. had been co-opted, taken from the hands of the poor urban youth who created it. The lure of money and fame blinded the disenfranchised rappers permitting corporate record producers to manipulate and steal the music and the culture from out of their hands. Celso continued “the same thing happened to samba in Brazil.” “Samba used to belong to black people on the periphery but not any longer.”

Advertising for Celso Athayde’s visit on the Empower D.C. flyer, billed him as a “hip-hop activist.” But Celso spoke with little lyrical flow; he was flat, frank, no-nonsense, no smiles, like a calculating businessman. Celso was familiar with U.S. rap, soul, rhythm and blues music. That night I learned that he was visiting the U.S. by invitation of the United States International Visitor Leadership Program, a guest of then Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Celso’s tours would take him to Washington, D.C. Atlanta, and New York City. He spoke hardly any English so he traveled with a Portuguese language translator, a Brazilian woman living in the U.S. Celso told his story of growing up in a favela in Rio as a lover of music and he proudly identified as a black Brazilian. Knowing what little I knew of Brazil at the time, I was intrigued by Celso’s

self-identification as black, as well as his verbiage about black pride. Celso was no rapper. He was an *Impressario* in Rio, a music producer and manager as well as the executive director of Central Única das Favelas, a non-governmental organization that worked with *mininos de rua* (street kids) from impoverished families and also those without families who roamed the streets alone or in packs with other street kids in and around the edges of Rio. I was moved by his work.

Subsequent discussions with Celso Athayde, numerous trips to Rio de Janeiro, and hours of listening to the rap of MV Bill, sealed my curiosity of carioca hip-hop, youth, agency and activism in Rio. After my first trip in 2005 I returned again the summer of 2006 for language lessons, and then again in December of 2006 for my year-long fieldwork lasting through the end of 2007. In 2008 I returned for carnival and again for a month long follow up in June. In 2009 I returned to Rio yet again but this time accompanied by three American college students as a part of a cultural immersion course for the students. Since 2005 I have returned to Rio annually, and the place has become like my second home.

Frequent talks with Celso Athayde would prompt many similarities between hip-hop's inception in the U.S. and its flow and formation in Brazil. Celso was well versed in the history recounting, "hip-hop historicity pieces together its formation from the convergence of writers, dancers, DJ's and rappers in New York City." The confluence of these arts came to be known as hip-hop. Black, Latin and Caribbean youth living on U.S. islands of poverty during 1970s postindustrial blight were the executors of hip-hop. The culture grew with a sense of urgency and spun around the globe. Celso often referred to hip-hop as the voice of the periphery. Wherever youth were found living in under-

resourced urban areas, hip-hop was there (Alim 2008; Mitchell 2001d; Rose 1994; Spady 2006).

Celso talked about the South Bronx beginnings pointing to Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation as his inspiration for CUFA. Just as the Zulu Nation had arisen amidst gang violence, drugs, and resource deficient urban areas, CUFA had as well. Like Zulu Nation, CUFA rooted itself in those depleted urban spaces amidst all of those vices seeking to radicalize youth and bring hope and transformation to the periphery. Dispersed throughout this paper when appropriate transnational comparisons are made between CUFA and Zulu Nation and between favelas and U.S. inner cities since Celso and Bill make those observances themselves as Zulu Nation was the model for CUFA. Scholar João H. Costa Vargas' work *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities* captures his transnational approach of examining Rio de Janeiro, Los Angeles and black liberatory praxis. Vargas argues that black genocide is at root transnationally as favelas and black inner city life in Los Angeles confront similar issues of poverty, systemic racism, violence, and police brutality (Vargas 2008).

The stories Celso told that evening in Washington, D.C. were about small simple acts joined together becoming a movement. There was a small revolution rising from the favela dust where hip-hop was relaying a different reality of life in Rio. Unlike samba, hip-hop was a vehicle for exposing the truth about injustice in Brazil. I began thinking about hip-hop as agency and its impact on the lives of poor youth of color including the ways youth became empowered as subjects and how they re-imagined themselves in that light. I queried the ways youth renegotiate geographic place and space. Throughout this paper, I refer to the favela both as physical location (place), and as conceptual location



(space). Favelas were once silenced and rendered invisible by the state's power to dismiss them. But *A Favela Fala* (the favela speaks) as Pandolfi and Grynszpan cite in their edited volume documenting stories from favelados (Pandolfi 2003). Similarly, through hip-hop favelas speak and are rendered visible again as they transform and transcend their physical and conceptual condition. Hip-hop is the anti-samba in Rio shedding light on people and spaces formerly silenced and relegated to the fringes.

This kind of imposed social invisibility has sought to silence black people for centuries. W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, pointed to the veiled nature of black life and black invisibility within white society. A double-consciousness deprived black folk of a true self-conscious, forced to always view themselves through the distorted lens of others. Thus, black folk are rendered invisible even to themselves convinced of their own lack of worth (1903). Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) became convinced of his invisibility after a series of painful life events:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me. [prologue]

Youth media activists in Rio refuse invisibility; thrusting themselves to the center, making noise, being heard, seen and self-valued despite being poor and relegated to the margins of society. Like the *Invisible Man*, people on the outside see only what they choose to see or not see. The favela community and its citizen are viewed as figments of mainstream social imagination. The black and poor are vilified, not seen for who they

are. Their personhood, humanity and worth are silenced and deemed invisible. Indeed, mainstream society sees everything and anything except them.

Further, on issues of silence and invisibility, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) was convinced that no matter how poor, illiterate and submerged in a “culture of silence” people were, they were still capable of learning the tools to look critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. His “pedagogy of the oppressed” was that theory of education for resistance and education as the practice of freedom. Freire also uncovered so called “neutral” state institutions as oppressive in nature, especially the education system as official processes which worked to empower some groups (through positive representations of whiteness), while disempowering other groups (through negative representations of Otherness) (Freire 1970, Baszile 2009).

## CHAPTER 4

### YOUNG VOICES FROM THE PERIPHERY

Arriving at Rio's Galeão International airport at 5 a.m. on the cloudy Sunday morning of December 29, 2006 was supposed to be uneventful. I was beginning my long stay in the country and was already dressed all wrong. Wearing the winter coat, wool slacks and long sleeve shirt I boarded the plane with in a cold and wintry Philadelphia, only to disembark in the thick humid summer of Rio. It was still dark, the sun had not yet come up and the weather was warm and muggy. The air was holding that familiar heavy odor I always inhaled when I landed in Rio. This city smelled; it was a distinct dense unfresh odor, just hovering as if standing still. Perhaps only foreigners could detect it. And yet upon each trip to Rio I came to greet the smell of the city with a feeling of nostalgia, akin to going home. It was oddly welcoming. This was my fourth trip to the marvelous city, and I was beginning to feel like I belonged there.

Summertime in Brazil meant carnival was around the corner and the samba schools had already begun practicing their routines on site at the sambódromo. My host, Jalene was always excited during this season, and usually managed to parade down the passarela do samba with more than one samba school each year. This was her season to shine, and she somehow managed to fit pre-carnival activities like parties at the samba schools and practices at the sambódromo into her usual fast paced lifestyle as a mother,

hotel receptionist, and *preto-velho*<sup>5</sup> minister with her local *umbanda*<sup>6</sup> temple. Jalene had made arrangements with her neighbor who owned a van to pick me up from the airport and take me to an apartment rental near the beach where I planned to relax for a week before commencing my fieldwork. I sat in the airport terminal more than an hour waiting for one of the stores to open up so I could buy time credits for my Brazilian cell phone. The phone only functioned in Brazil and in some parts of Europe but I had been away for months so I needed to buy time and charge up the phone. Jalene and I finally made phone contact around 7 a.m., she sounded groggy, obviously just awoken, “you must get a taxi, my neighbor can’t get you.” I wanted to know why, so she went on to explain that there was violence in Cidade de Dues or CDD<sup>7</sup> during the dark hours of the early morning and the *traficantes* (drug traffic) ordered everyone to stay in-doors or risk being shot.

I was familiar with the problems of drugs and violence in Rio, but these sorts of things still made little sense to me. How could someone order an entire neighborhood to stay in-doors? She went on, “there was a shoot-out, the police killed three major drug dealers and afterward some favela residents began to riot, trashing the streets, throwing rocks, breaking car windows, setting vans and buses ablaze.” Annoyed, I listened, then replied “ok, tchau” (goodbye) and promptly went outside the airport terminal to hail a taxi. Once inside the taxi I asked the driver if something had happened in CDD favela. He

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5. *Preto-velho* translates “old black” and refers to disembodied African slave spirits from the colonial period who spoke through willing human hosts. They are compassionate, kind, and wise spirits.

6. Afro-Brazilian religion born in and quite unique to Rio de Janeiro

7. CDD refers to Cidade de Deus (City of God) and is the shortened name or nickname for the community used by many of its members.

said “yes,” and explained, “it is very dangerous, if the *traficante* say stay indoors, you must stay indoors.” The ensuing conversation with the driver revealed that many of the leaders of the drug traffic were in prison but managed to still wield power on the streets from behind bars. They used cell phones to maintain control, give orders, and orchestrate violence outside and their *soldados*<sup>8</sup> (soldiers) obeyed them. The surrounding community dwellers also followed orders remaining indoors for fear of being shot in the cross fire. Neighbors waited for the cues that the violence had subsided before venturing out into the streets. Paid messengers who were sometimes children who worked for the drug traffic would go around telling neighbors it was ok to leave their homes again. The system was quite intricate and I found it difficult at times to know exactly what was going on.

Jalene’s friend who was supposed to pick me up with his van was worried that his vehicle would be vandalized, shot at or set afire if he went out with it. Violence in Rio was unfortunately common, but in reality it was more common outside of the favela than inside. Remarkably, favelas were relatively safe but whenever police entered or raided, the drug traffic responded and gunshots were fired. If shooting lasted for several days, the community would go on lock down. This was one of those occasions, and my welcome to reentry in Rio. One never knows what to expect and violence is a constant reality in the marvelous city. Violence permeated Rio; it was everywhere all the time and plans were always changing because of it. I would learn this lesson early but it still frustrated me and kept me on edge during much of my stay in Rio.

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8. *Soldados* translates soldiers, but the word is generally used in reference to drug factions in Rio.

I sat back and relaxed in the rear seat of the taxi, the sun was beginning to rise and there were just a few people out on the streets. It was a couple days before the big *reveillon* celebration (New Year's Eve) on the beach. I planned to celebrate *reveillon* in Copacabana and had rented an apartment on Atlantica Avenue for a week. Jalene and her extended family would come to the South Zone to spend a few days with me at the beach. They lived in the West Zone near CDD as residents of Jacarepaguá the 4th largest neighborhood in Rio. Jacarepaguá translated "shallow pond of alligators" was very different and quite far both literally and figuratively, from the beach and tourist center of the South Zone. Life in the shallow pond of alligators was nowhere near the imagined Rio paradise of sun and ocean. Instead it was a working class concrete jungle lacking the aesthetic eye-pleasing scenes of the South Zone. However, it was convenient for me since, from Jalene's apartment, I could take a ten-minute bus ride to CDD favela, my fieldwork site. Jalene had alerted me that she was "kind of poor" and that I shouldn't expect much. She said she lived simply. She was not a favela resident though, and she took pride in that fact. Jalene had never even stepped foot inside a favela and marveled that I would spend most of my days there. She didn't think it was a good idea in terms of safety, but she liked the work of CUFA and supported their programs. Jalene even talked about volunteering at CUFA or one of the other programs inside the neighborhood association there.

Fortunately for me, Jalene was also an avid fan of hip-hop. Ja-Rule was her favorite American rapper. "He's very sexy," she gushed. MV Bill was her favorite Brazilian rapper, also very sexy she shared. Jalene told me she liked "black men and especially basketball players," and this fact I would later learn was the misery of her

mother. I would witness conversations and tearful arguments between Jalene and her mother about why Jalene didn't "marry up" and that she should stop looking at men who were "too black and too poor."

Jalene and I were new friends. We had met just four months earlier when I traveled to Rio for a four-week language immersion course at the Brazilian Language Academy (BLA). She was the friend of a friend and agreed to help me with my Portuguese speaking outside of class. For four weeks Jalene and I met daily over lunch since she worked nearby the language school. She helped me learn to speak Carioca Portuguese, or Portuguese Rio de Janeiro style which had a few distinct sounds and nuances compared with other parts of Brazil and all of Portugal. The language academy was on Avenida Atlantica, the beach strip, two blocks from the temporary flat I was renting. I attended class daily and then met with Jalene afterward to practice outside of class. In the process, Jalene and I became fast friends and when she felt comfortable enough with me she invited me to live with her upon my return to Rio. I agreed.

Besides the convenience of living near my fieldwork site, staying with her would help her pay the rent on her modest apartment and help me improve my language skills. It seemed like a good idea at the time and while I wasn't sure what I was walking into I was up for the adventure. What I did know was that Jalene was about 33, had two young children, a boy and a girl, ages 3 and 5, and she was supporting her mother and her teenage cousin whose own mother had died in childbirth. Jalene's life was full and busy. She was shrewd and calculating because she had to be to make ends meet. She was always looking for ways to bring in extra money.

A tall, lean morena woman with long dark hair, Jalene was striking and imposing, especially when she wore heels that made her tower at about six foot two inches. She was a college graduate, spoke several languages, and loved to dance, especially hip-hop, funk, and samba. Her penchant for accuracy and the need to always be correct was useful when trying to fill in some gaps of Rio's music scene history. The fact that Jalene had been a b-girl (breakdancer) when she was much younger placed her on Rio's hip-hop scene early. Jalene still enjoyed going out to dance clubs but couldn't do it as much these days because of her other responsibilities. During the 1990s she frequented Rio's hip-hop clubs traveling with a b-boy / b-girl dance crew that showed up at popular clubs to execute choreographed hip-hop moves for the sake of wowing the crowds. Alongside hip-hop, Jalene was also a superb samba dancer. She enjoyed sharing her memories of Rio's '90s dance club and carnival scenes, and was full of names, places, groups and songs as she danced her way through the history.

In Rio de Janeiro as in other parts of Brazil, breakdance began showing up first, especially on the underground club scene as dance crews were constantly grabbing attention with new moves. B-boy crews drew attention because of their occupation of public spaces and strong sense of organization (Neate 2004; Pardue 2008a). Jalene's participation as a b-girl street dancer put her in the movement as a foundational part of hip-hop's early formation in Rio. Breakdancers were even more valued than rappers. As Pardue writes "Brazilian hip hoppers who consider themselves 'conscious' and thus reflective about hip hop history and fundamental ethics hold the 'element' of street dance in a special place. It is where it all started, and according to many hip hoppers there continues to be a particular connection between b-boys and b-girls and the true spirit of



hip hop competition and camaraderie” (2008:37). In São Paulo, Brasília, and Rio de Janeiro, the narratives are similar. Brazilians were hooked on the dance before any other form of hip-hop genre. Derek Pardue whose work focused on São Paulo writes, “Hip hop in Brazil first began with dance. The persona of b-boy, or b-girl, is one who understands and is able to perform various styles of street dance. These include electric boogaloo, poppin’, lockin’, and breakdance. According to hip hop pioneer DJ Hum (known then just as Humberto), b-boys did not know anything about rap. It was just about the break beats and dance” (2008:37). Jalene’s account of the scene in Rio was in lock step with what many of Brazil’s hip-hop historians were writing and saying.

But I wondered about race, poverty, and violence, those structured violence(s) analyzed in the work of Alice McIntyre above (2000). When did youth begin using rap as a medium to undo harmful social impositions of self, space, and place? The oral histories shared with me by Jalene, Celso, MV Bill and Preta were particularly helpful in constructing the early days.

I have been told, “It all goes back to Viaduto in Madureira.” According to Jalene all the hip-hop parties in Rio started in the northern section of the city in the working class neighborhood of Madureira at the space called “Viaduto<sup>9</sup> Negrão de Lima.” For as long as most of the people could remember, Madureira has been a neighborhood that valued black culture, art and music and a place where youth could go to find black music parties. There were *bola pretas* (balls), *charm* balls, soul and funk. Many of these parties took place under the overpass or under the bridge at *Viaduto* (viaduct or overpass) or o

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9. *Viaduto* translates “viaduct” or “overpass” and refers to a space under the bridge in Madureira where black music parties are held. It is a self-contained urban space built into the environment. The overpass serves as the roof of the space. CUFA runs the space today.

*ponte* (the bridge) which resembles a large dark cave. The space is literally under an overpass which functions as the roof of the cave. Viaduto stored cars, serving as a parking lot during the day and a party space at night. When young people from the periferia had nowhere else to gather and dance they began meeting under the bridge and a tradition was born. CUFA's first community space was also under the bridge in Madureira (Dowdy 2007-2009).

Earlier, in the 1970s, DJs the likes of Mister Funk Santos, DJ Marlboro, and DJ Marki New Charm were major voices and innovators around funk and bola pretas in Rio. However it was DJ Corello, a mix-master and out-of-the-box thinker who began spinning tunes for parties at Viaduto, and in 1980 coined the term "charm" referring to Rio's black dance parties. Charm was Rio's version of R&B black soul music combined with influences from the U.S., like Philadelphia funk. Charm was urban music and appealed to Afro-urban Cariocas from the outer zones and the periphery. Disco was popular in Rio during the '70s, and charm during the '80s. By the early 1990s charm balls were attracting large crowds and dance crews were forming and showing up at the balls to exhibit their moves. Folks say that all good DJs start out as good dancers and Corello had been a part of a dance crew before becoming a DJ so he had a sense of what parties liked. He knew how to move the crowd. Later, a black cultural pride movement formed in West Zone's barrio of Padre Miquel around Charm called *Point Chic Charm* (c.1998) which used black expressive arts to educate and mentally liberate Afro-Brazilians. To unshackle the minds of black folk, Point Chic Charm incorporated poetry, samba, capoeira, and Afro-Brazilian history focusing on chief Zumbi and the quilombo of Palmares from Brazil's colonial era. Point Chic Charm also showed great affection for

the man they recognize as the godfather of funk and soul, James Brown (Dowdy 2007-2009; Pinheiro 2009). Carioca soul and funk is rooted in the sounds of James Brown.

Before the invasion of hip-hop, Viaduto was becoming a place where older people went to dance to oldies soul music for what locals termed “flashback nights” until DJ Corello got the idea to try something new. Hip-hop was making appearances in Rio so he began mixing old school music with this new thing called rap. His goal was to attract a younger crowd to Viaduto once again. The appeal worked as younger people began showing up in droves, pushing out the older crowds and Viaduto in Madureira would soon become the first, or as Jalene put it “most traditional” hip-hop space in Rio de Janeiro. The parties started on Thursday nights and went every night through Sunday in different parts of Madureira. My friend Preta who did occasional volunteer work with CUFA agreed with Jalene’s account that Viaduto in Madureira and DJ Corello were the earliest traces of hip-hop in Rio.

Celso Athayde, CUFA’s executive director confirmed the locale and had actually been one of the party promoters at Viaduto back then. He made money by sponsoring parties and charging entrance fees to events. Celso was a bit of a street vendor back then selling T-shirts and mixed cassette tapes, and producing parties. He pieced together a living around music and parties and this same space would become one of CUFA’s hip-hop spaces. *Tem Tudo* (translates “has everything”) was another popular space in Madureira that surfaced in my discussions with black music lovers in Rio. Located across the bridge from Viaduto, *Tem Tudo* was a frequent spot for soul, funk and charm parties in the 1980s and 1990s.

It was 1986 by the time funk master DJ Marlboro introduced Cariocas to break dancing and rapping on TV right from the streets of central Rio where Brazilian youth, not Americans, were seen doing the art. That debut marked the official televised arrival of hip-hop in Rio de Janeiro. The old video footage of the scene, *Culture – DJ Marlboro and Hip Hop in 1986* remains a popular hit on youtube.

Hip-hop began showing up in Brazil by the mid-to-late 1980s, appearing on Brazilian TV and Americans were also introducing it when they traveled to Brazil. Early forms of rap music and hip-hop in the U.S. had already encouraged spaces for expression and various forms of resistance ritual among oppressed youth in the U.S. Brazilians had already witnessed images of American b-boys break dancing on TV in the late 1970s (Neate 2004). Cariocas enjoy dance and hip-hop's moves caught on quickly. Pop icon Michael Jackson (MJ) also helped bring the spot light to the dance and some Cariocas include MJ in their early narratives of hip-hop in Rio de Janeiro. Jackson's 1980s music and dance styles were infectious and until this day Cariocas cannot get enough of Michael Jackson. I did not meet one person in Brazil who held ambivalent or repulsive feelings toward Michael Jackson even in light of suspicions around child molestation, they all said MJ was innocent and the charges trumped up and bogus. Jackson's talent and especially his dance skills were respected by Brazilian persons I talked with about him. It appears that Michael Jackson was somehow swept up into the hip-hop phenomenon. MJ's poppin', lockin' and moonwalk were considered breakdance moves and so he must have been a breakdancer too. In his documented travels around hip-hop's global hot spots, Patrick Neate, author of *Where You're At: notes from the frontline of a hip-hop planet* found the same dynamic in Rio de Janeiro, Michael Jackson was

considered an early breakdancer by Cariocas (2004). MJ is a part of Rio's hip-hop re-telling (Dowdy 2007-2009).

In 1996 Spike Lee directed Jackson's video, *They Don't Really Care About Us*, in Brazil, filmed in Rio's Dona Marta favela, and in Salvador da Bahia's Pelourinho square. People in both communities welcomed MJ with open arms, danced with him in the streets as the world renowned drumming group *Olodum* performed in the background. In that moment MJ functioned as conscious rappers might function bringing attention to the plight of favela dwellers and poor people of color in Brazil. The lyrics to MJ's song were appropriate "they don't really care about us" whether they were originally written with black favela residents in mind or not. Favelados have not forgotten his visit and still talk about it as if it were yesterday. While in Rio people constantly took it upon themselves to remind me of MJ's visit, and when I was up north in Salvador they reminded me there too. In Salvador in 2008 I met a 14-year-old black boy who appeared to be living on the streets in Pelourinho square. He moon walked his way over to me calling me *tia* (auntie) as most kids on the streets call grown women and said "tia, você conhece Michael Jackson?" (auntie, do you know Michael Jackson?). I laughed and said "no, not personally." This kid was unclean and reeked of body odor as if he hadn't had a bath in months; he asked for money, and then told me his dreams. He said he wanted to become a tour guide in his city because he liked to talk to Americans. He also told me he knew all about Michael Jackson and could dance like him. He said his own real birth name was Michael. The kid was definitely charming and entertaining as he used his hustle of dance and small talk to make money from tourists and onlookers.

The *Olodum Museum* in Pelourinho displayed a photo of Michael Jackson tacked on the interior wall near the entrance to their building. Sadly, in 2009 when Jackson died, Brazilians mourned as if he were their very own. There were rumors circulating that the favela of Dona Marta in Rio where parts of the video had been filmed, would be re-named in honor of Jackson (Dowdy 2007). I don't have information as to whether or not that name change ever happened, but the favelados there are said to have erected a shrine in honor of MJ in Dona Marta.

I recall sitting inside a restaurant in Rio having a quick breakfast before heading to language lessons one morning when the young guy sitting next to me, who looked to be about 20 years old and perhaps *moreno* in color, decided to strike up a conversation. This was common in Rio. “Bom dia, tudo bem,” he greeted me. I responded, and after he heard my accent he asked where I was from. When I said “os estados unidos” (the United States) he smiled, and said ah, “primeiro mundo” (first world) “e a terra de Michael Jackson” (and the land of Michael Jackson). I was struck by both his descriptors “first world” and “Michael Jackson land.” He took the liberty to tell me that Michael Jackson was the greatest entertainer of all time and then told me about Jackson's visit to Dona Marta in the 1996. I nodded and listened, but I was more interested in his terminology for the United States (first world), and was amused to learn that I was from Michael Jackson land.

Besides Michael Jackson, local DJs,' several other names surfaced in the oral history of hip-hop in Rio. Inside the rap arena circa 1992, Jalene mentioned a well-known, white college student who called himself Gabriel O Pensador (Gabriel the Thinker), who although middle-class, aligned himself with the likes of Public Enemy

from the U.S. and rapped about the periferia and the ills of mainstream Brazilian culture. Gabriel was the son of well-known Brazilian journalist Belisa Ribeiro and had not grown up in the periferia, but stood in solidarity with those who did. His first rap was highly controversial, titled *Tô Feliz Matei O Presidente* (I'm glad I killed the president) and sold more than 300 thousand units (Neate 2004). The rap was an indictment against then president Fernando Collor de Mello whose administration was known for vicious corruption. O Pensador's mother was an employee of the president at the time the rap was released. Gabriel O Pensador continues rapping and writing books of poetry today and many regard his major contribution as having brought rap to the middle class. He attracts a diverse crowd in color, class, and musical tastes (Dowdy 2007-2009; Neate 2004).

Prior to O Pensador's fame as a carioca rapper, a rap group out of São Paulo called Racionais MCs (translated Rational MCs) had formed as early as 1988. They would change the hip-hop game in Brazil forever. Each of the members of Racionais MCs were favelados from around the large industrial city of São Paulo and their lyrics depicted the racism, poverty, violence, and police brutality within those favelas. In style, Racionais MCs have been compared with Public Enemy in the U.S.A. having entered the rap scene several years after Public Enemy. They remain a phenomenal success in Brazil in regard to their sales but also their lyrics which still address social issues, human rights, and black pride. From their critically acclaimed 1997 album *Sobrevivendo No Inferno* (Surviving in Hell), the rap, *Periferia é periferia* (Periphery is Periphery):

God weeps. Much poverty, violence erupts! Our race is dying. Do not tell me it's okay! I saw only a few years down here, believe me. It was enough to worry about. With two children, the periphery is all the same. Everybody is afraid to leave early and such. Lunatics walking the streets, crazy in the fissure if your strange madness. Asking for money is easier than stealing, man! Stealing is easier

than shit, man! It's complicated. The addiction has two sides, depends on this or that, then everything is wrong. I will not be around no, why? Who sells drugs to whom? It's mothers crying, brothers killing themselves. Anywhere poor people are, slum is slum, kids with no future that I can see, periphery is periphery. Listen to my message. Thousands of homes stacked on top of each other, slum is slum. Several bars open, empty schools, kids with no future. Periphery, it is the periphery. Listen to my message.

The success of Racionais MCs opened the door to the next wave of socially conscious rappers to come of age in Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro they paved the way for rapper MV Bill. Bill told me he recognized Racionais MCs as instrumental to his own success, but says his primary influences as a rapper came from the U.S. highlighting Chuck D of Public Enemy. Now-a-days American hip-hop frustrated him. I remembered reading a quote by Bill in which he critiqued the current state of hip-hop in the U.S. and talked about fear mongering around politically charged rap like that of Public Enemy and NWA:

At a time when American hip-hop is becoming a spent force, the rest of the world is waking up to the transforming power of rap. "In the beginning, American hip-hop was great," says Bill, who started rapping in 1988 at age 12 after seeing the Los Angeles gang drama *Colors*. "But because record companies were scared of the political content and ghetto commentary of bands like NWA and Public Enemy, they injected rappers with so much money that all they can talk about now is money—or female degradation. The record industry has emasculated hip-hop in America. But at the same time, hip-hop has become the art form for the underdogs of the world. [Hodgkinson 2006]

Rap from and about the periferia was close to Bill who grew up on the margins far from central Rio. Bill comes from the West Zone favela of CDD, therefore he speaks from a social position he knows intimately. MV Bill was born Alexandre Pereira Barbosa on January 3, 1974 to firefighter, Joey Mano and homemaker, Dona Cristina. His parents had met and fell in love in the 1970s when they were young, at one of the black soul



music dances held at what was then an orphanage in CDD. Alex was born to the couple and when he was just about eight or nine years old, his parents nicknamed him “Bill” after a football mouse figurine he loved to play with. Like other Cariocas Bill was first introduced to hip-hop through breakdance, but he told me that by the time he was 12 he started rapping. With Public Enemy and the film *Colors* as his lyrical inspiration, his raps were content laden with lyrics about drug gangs, violence, and police brutality in his own community. His earliest support came from some of the older ladies in the community, tias who used to encourage him to keep rapping. They enjoyed listening to his lyrics and told him he was speaking truth about life in the favela. That was where he gleaned the MV for his name, “Mensagem da Verdade” (messenger of truth), from the tias who listened and confirmed his worldly truthful messages. In 1993, Bill was included with Gabriel O Pensador and others in a music compilation album. By that time he decided to take rap seriously and to pursue a living as a rapper. Bill had truths to tell the world, and saw rap as the way to do it. He needed a manager and sought out Celso Athayde, a man from the favelas who knew music.

Celso recounted the first time he met a very young MV Bill. “Bill knocked on my house door one day and told me of his difficulties and problems from the past. His eyes begged me to believe in him and his dreams. Alex (Bill) was thin, ugly and apparently sad. He was incapable of walking into a room full of people. He spoke little and tried to convince me that he had talent” *Cabeça de Porco* (2005:198). Bill was insecure, shy, and barely made eye contact with others. He had struggled in his young life and wanted something different for himself. Most young guys in the community were involved in violence and drug traffic and while Bill did not condemn them, he did not want to

become them. He understood that they were doing what they believed they had to do to survive within an unjust system that did not recognize them, or prepare them with skills to succeed in the mainstream sector. According to the mainstream, favelas and favelados were invisible and only worthy of violent poverty or death. MV Bill wanted to rap that narrative and expose some truth.

Bill may have been shy and apprehensive but he could rap. He came alive on stage. Celso was won over and agreed to manage Bill. They released Bill's first CD in 1998 with Phonographic Zambia records titled *CDD Mandando Fechado* in which he rapped about real stories and lives from CDD favela, changing names to protect identities. In 1999 that same album was re-mixed, three new tracks were added and the name was changed to *Traficando Informação* (Traffic Information). One of the new tracks was "Soldados do Morro" (soldiers on the hill) of which the video release caused great commotion and was censored in Brazil. Bill said his message was misunderstood by Brazilian authorities and some in the public who accused him of condoning violence, weapons possession, and drug sales. The Soldiers on the Hill video featured Bill standing alongside some well-known infamous drug dealers and many Brazilians were left questioning whose side this rapper was really on. Why did he appear aligned with well-known drug dealers and what did that image say to young kids on favela streets?

Street rumors and print journalism reported that Bill had been a gang member and drug trafficker before becoming a public rapper and advocate for justice, so as we sat outside of the CUFA building in City of God one sunny afternoon in 2007 I decided to ask Bill about the reports. "Were you ever a gang member and drug pusher?" Bill became visibly upset and asked me who told me such things. I responded, "word on the street and

some American journalists have even reported it in writing.” Bill adamantly denied ever selling drugs or taking part in gang violence. He said that just because he knows and talks with drug traffickers, people like to associate him with being one of them. “I grew up here, I know who they are, I greet them when I see them, but I have never sold drugs.” Bill was annoyed by the question and I learned later that this was one of the rumors about him that just would not die, and he knew it. He was bothered by it. As we sat outdoors talking, young kids about 9 and 10 years old, mostly boys, kept running up to him to shake his hand and say something to him, he shook hands and hugged them. Bill was tall, bulky in stature, and exuded warmth. He knew he had a reputation to uphold before the young kids in the favela and he wanted to disassociate himself from those rumors about a past life that he said never existed.

Sometime between 2002 and 2005 Bill made headlines with the release of his video *So Deus Pode Me Julgar* (Only God Can Judge Me) in a response to rumors about his life. The video contained images of the country’s capital city Brasilia and the Senate interspersed with images of drugs, violence, and a young woman giving birth. The live human birth is slightly shocking at first sight, but the camera keeps returning to the life ready to burst through the vaginal opening. Close up shots of the dilating cervix, release of the mucus cord and blood, the first glimpse of the child’s head; the baby being pulled from its mother, a black child, the juxtaposition of black life and death, and the political apparatus which doesn’t do enough to end the injustices of poor, black people in Brazil. Each day in the favelas babies are born and babies die, in poverty. They don’t have a chance. Each image pieces together an all too common narrative of black life and death in the favelas. Nonwhite children in Brazil continue to die from disease and violence at rates

far exceeding those of analogous groups of whites, and many nonwhite women continue to be sterilized without their knowledge or consent (Burdick 1998b; CONEN 1996).

Brazil's national motto of *Order and Progress* is critiqued in the lyrics to Bill's rap.

Where was order? Where was progress? "Only God can Judge me."

I keep my head up! Say what you want, I can see that already! No turning back! Only God can judge me so I go in faith! It can be the tragic death of an artist and the death of millions, just a statistic? In fact within the real Brazil you crying in the ghetto there. Nobody saw no fantasy. Segregation in reality hurts, contempt is what destroys. Most are forgotten in the shack still handcuffed, extorted and murdered... Here there is no black slave posted on soap opera shows, makes for confusion in the mind of a kid who does not like school. When stealing money see if the public does not forget that your account has the honor of a man ashamed to have to see his family starving. Order and progress and forgiveness in the land where those who really steal are not punished!

The experiences in his own life growing up black and poor in the midst of violence and racism made Bill particularly sensitive to the plight of indigent youth. He intimately knew their social position and had seen black baby after black baby born into the same conditions year after year. Bill set out to tell their stories. He spent years touring Brazil's periferia entering favelas talking to, interviewing and videotaping hundreds of youth who lived on the margins. Bill focused on 17 of those young people, all males, compiling their stories in a book on favela life called *Cabeça de Porco* (2005) which translates Pig Head, another term for housing tenement or slum housing. The book was written in collaboration with Celso Athayde, and Brazilian anthropologist, Luiz Eduardo Soares. It is a sociological treatment and ethnographic narration of the tragic lives of favela youth. These young people are unjustly and disproportionately affected by drugs and violence due to racism, chronic poverty, meager resources, and lack of opportunity. By 2006 all but one of those teenagers he had interviewed were dead, associated with

violence, drug trafficking, or police brutality. The mothers of those dead young men called Bill asking for help. He returned to their favela communities and filmed their funerals for the world to see. Bill and Celso had ample fodder for their activist commitment to tell the real stories of suffering favela youth. Young human suffering was all around them.

CUFA was designed as a response to suffering, and an alternative to the limited choices facing young favelados. Bill said “the people in the favelas need to be given opportunities. For people without education such as ourselves only hip-hop has the power to transform our situation.” Bill believed that if you gave kids a chance, showed them options, helped re-shape their identities, and taught them skills that could lead to work and respectability, they would choose the alternative. Since the state ignored favelas during most of their existence, or tried to eradicate them, the people from the favelas had to fight harder for survival, and find creative ways to respond to their plight themselves. Bill and Celso both spoke of being inspired by the music and mission of Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation. They were their model for CUFA. If the Zulu Nation could rid New York City streets of crime and help young people in trouble in the 1970s, then CUFA could do the same today.

Flashback to circa 1973 in the U.S., rap, dance, and the manipulation of technology were significant catalysts in bringing young artists to the forefront in the battle against police brutality and gang violence in New York City. The Zulu Nation under the leadership of ex-gang member, Afrika Bambaataa formed the first hip-hop institution dedicated to personal and community renewal. Bambaataa had been inspired by the 1964 film Zulu which told the fact-based story of 18th century South African

warrior chieftain Shaka Zulu. Bambaataa was concerned about his South Bronx community, and envisioned himself an African warrior fighting against white “colonizers” of postindustrial urban destruction. He told people his name was Zulu for “affectionate leader” and that he would lead them to where they didn’t know they were ready to go (Chang 2005a).

Organizing weekly meetings, Bambaataa and his peers discussed ways to eradicate the rising presence of drugs, violence and gang warfare in their community. Over time, the interpersonal violence of gang warfare did subside and hip-hop became the new battleground quickly making converts along the way. Young people were encouraged to battle using their talent and skills to embarrass or out-do one another without the use of physical violence and dangerous weaponry.

Much like the slum clearance eradication programs of Brazil, the social context of the formation of the Zulu Nation was also one of rupture, fracture and dislocation (Rose 1994; Chang 2005). New York’s South Bronx rigorous slum clearance program reached its peak during the 1970s. Urban planner, Robert Moses (1888–1981) a powerful modernist urban builder, led the white flight exodus out of the Bronx and aided in the polarization of neighborhoods and groups of people, as well as the formation of more suburbs. His plans broke up entire neighborhoods in order to build highways through them. The business interest behind Moses’ plans was to transform Manhattan into a center of wealth, connected directly to suburbs through an encircling of highways carved through the heart of neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. The Cross–Bronx Expressway would allow people to traverse the Bronx from the suburbs of New Jersey through upper Manhattan to the suburbs of Queens in fifteen minutes. It was an ambitious plan and

involved the removal of enormous numbers of people and their homes. But the displacement of people and communities was not too huge a task for Moses. Working and middle class families made their way to the new suburbs leaving behind the poor who were most effected by Moses' plan. They were quickly and systematically displaced (Chang 2005c).

Systematic displacement also resulted in the formation of City of God. Rio circa 1960 governed by the former state of Guanabara's slum clearance program designed CDD because too many poor people were living uncomfortably close to the economic and tourist centers of the city. Governor Francisco Negrão de Lima's office saw a major flood catastrophe resulting in thousands of homeless. He placed them in City of God as a temporary solution to their homelessness but it became their permanent home. Residents had been placed far out in the western suburb of Jacarepaguá to rid the city center of the unsightly poor (Dowdy 2007; Meirelles 2002; Perlman 2010). Approximately 38 thousand people reside in City of God today. Paulo Lins' novel and subsequent film *Cidade de Deus* is the story of his own coming of age in the CDD community. He recalls his family being sent there in the 1960s:

We came to Cidade de Dues hoping to find paradise. Many families were homeless due to flooding and acts of arson in the slums. The big wigs didn't joke around, homeless? Off to Cidade de Dues. No electricity, paved streets or transportation. For the rich and powerful, our problems didn't matter. We were too far removed from the picture postcard image of Rio de Janeiro.

CDD was not at all tropical in aesthetic, it was a fairly concrete community, gray with trees planted here and there. The neighborhood association building in the middle of CDD appeared to be a cheaply constructed building, concrete all the way through almost possessing the feel of a small penitentiary. There were no frills, nothing fancy, just two

floors of walls, a roof, classroom space, and a theater. The theater was the most attractive part of the building, looking more modern, perhaps recently refurbished. The facility sits on what was called a “main street” with no name. Street signs with names were rare in CDD, in fact I never saw any. Prior to my first solo visit to the neighborhood association without Celso, I called and asked him for the street address. He responded by saying there was no address. So I asked how I would find it. He said I should go to the CDD plaza and just walk up the street, and I could also ask somebody on the corner to point out the building. Instead, the first day I was to arrive for fieldwork I called Gilberto’s cell phone. He worked with the theater program and was assigned to spend the day with me answering my questions and helping me adjust. “So Gilberto, what time should I arrive and can you tell me how to find the building?” Gil told me that I should arrive by 9 a.m. and when I got off the bus at the plaza, I only needed to stay on the main road into CDD. The neighborhood association would be in plain sight, a tan colored concrete building. In desperation I decided to ask Jalene’s teenaged babysitter to walk with me and show me how to find the center. She agreed, and there it was, on the main street off of the bus route at the end of the two long blocks, a simple tan building with green trim.



Figure 4. Neighborhood Association building in Cidade de Deus (photo by C.S. Dowdy)





The building was shared between CUFA and other member programs of the neighborhood association who also operated out of the facility. There appeared to be minor tension at times around what and who the building was for, but overall all groups seemed to co-exist with relative ease. Most of the people involved wanted the best for the community. The neighborhood association was a meeting place for local political strategizing, information sharing, shows, and programs. They held sewing, karate, and dance classes. CUFA's classes included graffiti, break dancing, dee-jaying, modeling, audio/visual media production, theater, library arts, computers, football, and basketball. CUFA also offered a certificate program for students seeking skills that would translate into paid employment. Completion of the curriculum was celebrated with a graduation ceremony where students wore caps and gowns and received diplomas. CUFA's certificate program was a valuable contribution to the favela communities in Rio. In Brazil young people can attend university free. The country has almost 175 federal, state, and private universities, but only 1% of the population continued into secondary education. Admission is highly competitive. Students must take an entrance exam called the *vestibular* which is rigorous, so rigorous in fact that there are tutorial courses available to practice the actual exam. These pre-vestibular courses are expensive and out of reach for the poorest students so many of them, even if they are bright enough to possibly get in, don't have the means to pay to prepare, practice, and compete.

Gilberto told me he had wanted to go to university, but he had to work day and night and he never had time to study for the vestibular. Even if he was able to save the money for the tutorial course, he didn't have time to study. Gil had a young son, parents and grandparents relying on him to help keep food on the family table. So his alternative

was CUFA. He said that through completing his certificate at CUFA he would learn audio/media skills that would lead to paid work in a production studio. Gilberto was a student at CUFA alongside his paid work as a food vendor in the CDD plaza. He said the best thing for him in his participation with CUFA was meeting so many people from other parts of Brazil and the world. He told me he learned the value of networking through CUFA. Gil identified as Afro-Brazilian or black, and added that his horizons had been broadened with a critical analysis of race and systemic oppressions and he planned to teach his young son to think critically, love his blackness, and learn skills to work and rely on self.

Gilberto's own passion though was theater. He volunteered with CUFA's theater program and was recognized in the community as a superb actor. I watched some of his work recorded on DVD's. Indeed, Gil had skills. He told me he enjoyed acting parts that told stories about injustice among the black poor. Drama was a powerful medium for relaying important messages about the state of the world, and according to Gil, that was how he planned to change his own condition, and the under resourced plight of his community, CDD. Gil was a media activist in the most coherent sense of the word.

When I wasn't talking with Gil, I often watched the old women play loud and rowdy card games outside of Tati's house down the street. Tati's grandmother was the most boisterous of the card playing bunch. Tati (19) was my friend, and she enjoyed practicing English with me. She had gone to English language school and her speaking ability was good. Tati told me her faith as an "evangelical" and her personal development activities gave her hope for the future. Tati was also involved in CUFA's theater program and had aspirations of becoming either an actress or a nurse. She viewed herself as a

helper, and wanted to help people in her community. Tati lived on the busy main street of the favela with her mother and grandmother and a few others. I was never clear who all lived there. There were always people outside on the sidewalk in front of the house as it sat between stores. It was not in a residential section of CDD, instead it was on “Main St.” amongst businesses. Tati’s 70-year-old grandmother was usually right outside of the house sitting on the sidewalk around a small table with other women playing cards, and laughing loudly and frequently. It brought me great joy watching her play and even though she often invited me to join them for a round, I was sure I wasn’t good enough to keep up. So I watched, and laughed with them.

It was apparent that Tati’s family was very poor but they were certainly gracious and hospitable. I sat inside their home as Tati’s mother brought out a piece of fruit, held it in her hand, and asked if I wanted something to drink. I said yes, and when she returned, that fruit was freshly squeezed fruit juice for me. The home was sparsely furnished with make-shift furniture and lots of images and paintings of Jesus Christ on the walls. I asked Tati and her mother about their involvement in the community. Her mother said she was thrilled at the work CUFA was doing and the difference they were making in the community and in her daughter’s life. She praised Bill as a great man. Along with her desire to become a nurse or an actress, Tati said CUFA was exposing her to many possibilities. She wasn’t sure if she’d be able to attend university but with the help of CUFA she believed her future would be bright. Tati was very dark in skin color and never self-identified as anything other than Brazilian, but I do remember her preference in boyfriends was always white. I noticed this pattern with other black young women I talked with about dating, boys, and making babies.

Once while sitting around one of the tables at Tia's kitchen having a meal of rice, black beans, and beef, I invited a few girls to come over to drink coca cola with me. Tia brought over a big bottle for us to share. I knew the girls from hanging out in a few CUFA classes with them. They were ages 15, 19, and 22 and ranged in color from very light to bronzy brown, or morena to mulata. All three were pursuing acting careers. Samantha (15) was a beautiful color of bronze. I noticed her staring at the boys playing basketball nearby, and she kept nudging her friends and pointing at the one she liked. He was white. When I asked what she liked about him, she responded "he's the best color to match with my own skin color." "We could make beautiful babies." Miscegenation and the ideal of the mixed race Brazilian were still strong in Rio and many I spoke with viewed this ideal as proof of racial democracy. In her essay, *Interracial Sex and Racial Democracy in Brazil: Twin Concepts?* Donna Goldstein concludes that just because people prefer interracial sex, this does not amount to racial equality (1999). The everyday lives of Afro-Brazilians remain disproportionately impoverished even in the midst of interracial sex (Caldwell 2007; Sheriff 2001; Twine 1998). This thinking harkens back to Gilberto Freyre's ideology of whitening Brazil as a statement of progress and mixed race exceptionalism.

Another student I spent time with was Wilson (23), a brown young man who showed up regularly each week for graffiti class, that's where I met him. He told me he had plans to be a graphic artist after he graduated from CUFA's graffiti arts course. Wilson was a former drug user by his own admission. He said he didn't live in CDD, he lived in another favela not too far away. Wilson had plans to re-organize his life and graffiti was the tool he chose to help him do that. He had opinions about black identity

but they didn't seem to line up with any revolutionary thought. One day in class he leaned over and whispered to me that he wanted to talk with me outside after class. I said o.k. The students were in the throes of working on graffiti pieces conceptualizing their themes on small paper, making them perfect before attempting to "throw them up" (graffiti slang word) on a wall in the community. After class Wilson and I sat outside and talked. He said he wanted to share his business ideas with me. What he also relayed was that he was not black and didn't care about black identity and pride, what mattered most was money. Money was the issue in Brazil, not race or color, according to Wilson.

I was finding that race and class were always pitted against each other as if they were always separate entities and never overlapped, or that one never impacted the other. Jalene had said something similar when she argued that anybody can make it in Rio no matter what color they were as long as they were willing to work hard to succeed. When I asked Jalene why the overwhelming majority of people living in favelas were black she said that was because most black people were lazy. Jalene and Wilson bought into Brazil's self-narrative of racial democracy even when other evidence pointed out the hypocrisy. In her work on urban Afro-Brazilians in Rio, Robin Sheriff found similar contradictions about race and democracy among non-white Brazilians. The myth of racial democracy is embraced as a dream of how Brazil should be, even if it was not in fact that way (Sheriff 2001; Twine 1998).

Others in CUFA's graffiti class, some of whom were very young, told me of their dreams to make graffiti arts a paid profession in media activism. The graffiti instructor, Antonio (21) was an upbeat husky guy who proudly identified as "Negro" even though his skin color was that of Brazil's *moreno*. He also lived in the favela. Antonio's graffiti

tags and “throw-ups” always contained a positive message, “Liberdade” (freedom), “Fé” (faith), “Fazendo do nosso Jeito” (doing it our way), or simply “CUFA.” However his favorite graffiti was the large colorful elaborate works that took time and which he photographed and posted on his website. During special events like Libbra, CUFA’s street basketball league, Antonio and other graffiti writers spent the day spray-painting walls while onlookers stood by watching. These young guys were incredible artists, hoping to use their artistic skills to support themselves financially and change their social conditions. Most of CUFA’s graffiti writers were male; however there was at least one older woman in class. She was in her 40’s, lived in CDD, and simply enjoyed the creative energy around graffiti. She took joy and pride in telling me she was the oldest student in the class and was quite serious about her art.

Jonei (18) was the only female in the breakdance class so I had to talk with her. Breaking is generally another gendered activity, dominated by males, so her skill and presence made me curious. While sitting inside the neighborhood association theater seats watching the breakdancers practice on stage I had noticed the tall lanky girl dressed in baggy jeans, sneakers and tank top. She was just as good as the guys executing head spins and windmills on the hard wooden stage floor. After class I introduced myself to the dancers and asked general questions about why they did what they did and how they were introduced to break dancing. They had similar responses “it’s fun,” “it’s something to do,” “makes me sweat,” “I got into it because my friends were doing it.” The instructor told me that breaking was a great way to expend youthful energy and keep them focused on positivity, but beyond those worthwhile objectives the young breakers viewed the

dance as a way to make statements or talk-back, and design productive lives for themselves.

One-on-one I asked Jonei more questions. She identified as *morena* and from the community. She was planning to graduate from school in a few months and hoped to go to university if she found a way. Her dream was to “dance professionally in New York City or someplace like that.” Jonei told me she had little sisters and brothers at home; she was the eldest and wanted to make her family proud of her one day. Breakdance was “her release,” she said she really loved it and definitely planned to use dance as a way to succeed in life. Jonei also understood the moves of breaking as resistance ritual. The instructor had talked about the history of breakdance as resistance and revolution. As discussed in chapter two, Tricia Rose’s (1994) work captured the rupture, fracture, break, and flow as the social context from which rap, breakdance, and DJ scratches evolved. In breaking, the body erupts, breaks, jerks and flows in resistance to an unjust social order. Jonei was an inspiration. I admired her stamina and determination to use her art for progress. The dancers also performed during CUFA’s *Libbra* street events while onlookers applauded and edged them on in competition against one another.

I met Julia (20) one day while riding the *ônibus* (bus) toward CDD, always an adventure. Perusing a local map I noticed the young black woman sitting next to me so I nodded, said hello to her, “bom dia, tudo bem” (good morning, how are you?) and decided to ask if she could help me with directions. She said “sure.” After some small talk, I asked her where she was from. And without stuttering she responded with a glint of pride, “moro na favela” (I live in the favela). She didn’t offer the name of the favela, simply “a favela” knowing that foreigners like myself would understand the term. There



was pattern I was noticing, younger favelados did not hide the fact that they lived in favelas. For them there was no shame attached to the space, rather there was decidedly pride. While the denoted meaning of favela remained the same, the connotation of favela space was changing. I interpret this as an act of resistance and agency. Julia and I exchanged cell phone numbers and stayed in touch. I met up with her two more times and learned that she cleaned houses to make money but wanted to open her own clothing boutique inside the favela. She wanted to sell party outfits and hip-hop gear.

It was not uncommon to see young favelados sporting T-shirts with the word “favela” written across them. *Favela chic* is an international brand. MV Bill was frequently seen sporting tees with “Cidade de Deus” “CDD,” or “favela” on them.

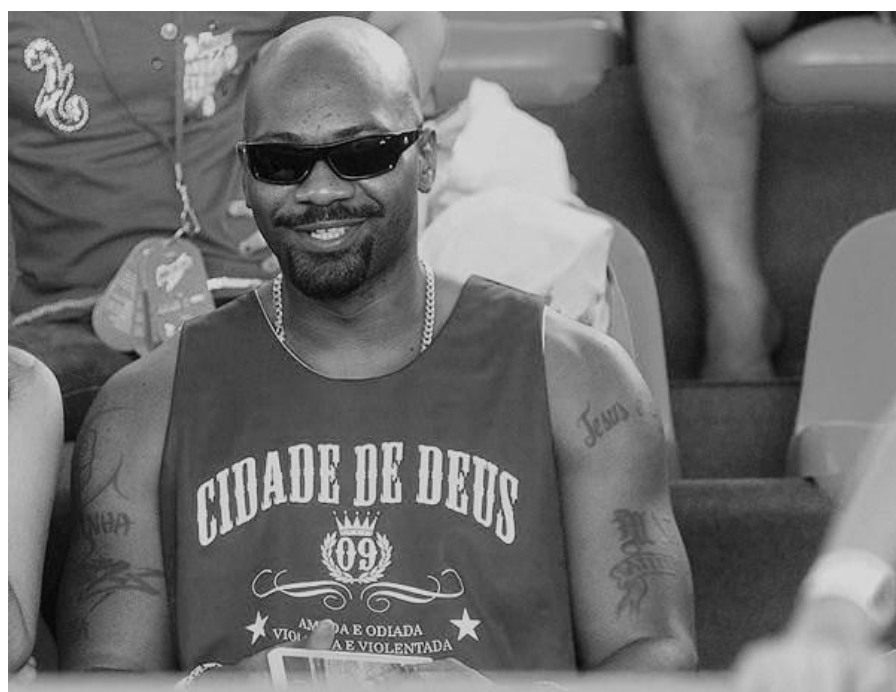


Figure 6. MV Bill sporting CDD tank-top

There was no shame in the recognition and naming of favela. This boasting regarding location was common in hip-hop. Songs like “Eu sou Favela” (I am favela) and

“Minha favela” are popular both within the favela and outside of it (Dowdy 2007-2009; Perlman 2010). But the celebration of Otherness and the glamorization of favela space has its own problematic elements too. The favela remains under developed and under-resourced. However, Rio’s 1,000 or more favelas (number based on Perlman’s research) are being re-imagined by their younger inhabitants who enjoy where they live. Favelas today, like quilombos of yesterday, function in many self-contained ways even while reaching out globally. They are rooted in the favela and simultaneously rooted in a virtual global community. Young favelados especially,

are strongly linked to their territory, to the point that frequently the names of the groups, the texts of their songs, the T-shirts and clothes they use make reference to the name of their community of origin (Vigário Geral, Vidigal, Cidade de Deus, Pelourinho, Candeal, Alto Vera Cruz, Alto do Pina, etc.). Surprisingly, the intense and repeatedly affirmed territorial commitment is not translated into parochialism or nationalism. Their “love for the community” goes hand in hand with open adherence to the signs of globalization (Coca-Cola, Nike, etc.) and the connection between their place and the universe is established through the Internet, sites and journals. [Ramos 2006]

In his essay on race and space in North American rap, Murray Forman (2000) argues that rap tracks, with their almost obsessive preoccupation with place and locality, are never solely about space and place on the local scale, rather, they also identify and explore ways in which these spaces and places are made meaningful. Struggles and conflicts as well as the positive attachments to place are all represented in the spatial discourses of rap. It is a complex exploration of local practices and their discursive construction.

The agency of these youthful local media activists and their abilities to think outside of the box in simplistic and complex ways signals agency and resistance. MV Bill gives the credit to rap and hip-hop, as he remarked to a journalist once that hip-hop was

the only thing that could *save* youth in the favelas. The language of *salvação* (salvation) connected with hip-hop was common amongst hardcore hip-hop heads in Brazil. That salvation was understood in terms of hope, purpose, vision, and identity. Much like religion, hip-hop was believed to be a force and a set of beliefs that could help even young thugs reorient their lives. Derek Pardue's (2008a) transcript of a rapper called Razor at a public meeting in São Paulo is telling:

Greetings. Satisfaction to you all. It's like this. I used to be part of the movement during the early '90s, but in 1995 I began to steal cars, use drugs, steal from family members and abandon my children. Three dark years passed my friends. It was a time of feeling lost with no direction. I was on the bad side of things. I was that guy on the corner, who you used to look away from, who you used to discount as nothing. I didn't believe in anything. Nothing was real; nothing was true. I don't remember even time passing by. But, recently, I was "saved" and am on my way out of dependency. I am on a new path. Hip hop is that path...I am here representing myself and all the lost souls out there in Mogi, who turned the tables and now embrace with a full heart and mind the power of hip hop. This is what is real. Hip-hop is all about reality and truth. [2008:4-5]

My opportunity to talk with young people living in and around CDD and hear elements of their stories revealed everyday acts of agency and simple resistance. Each shared the importance of knocking down doors for their own lives but also the need to pave paths for others in their community. Their narratives were not the stereotypical favela youth narratives of deviancy, drugs, violence and waste and even when I found myself disagreeing with someone's analysis of race, class, or why poverty persisted, I respected their agency and daily acts of resistance to change themselves and their community. The "anti-samba" was at work in CDD. The next chapter will look more closely at constructions of race and space in the favela and how young people undo race,

create new discourses, and move forward into anti-totalizing modes of thought and action, one of which I call, neo-négritude in response to négritude.

## CHAPTER 5

### UNDOING RACE AND SPACE

*Não sou o movimento negro, sou o preto em movimento* –MV Bill

(I'm not in the black movement, I'm black in movement)

During Live Earth on July 7, 2007 Rio de Janeiro I joined approximately 400 thousand people gathered on the South Zone beach of Copacabana for Al Gore's benefit concert to bring awareness to the environmental abuses that create global climate change. Rapper MV Bill was the fifth act to perform alongside U.S. notables Lenny Kravitz, Macy Gray and Pharrell Williams. Bill being a native of Rio was at home, both on stage and literally so he entered with an extra pound of hip-hop swagger greeting the thousands of people on the hot sands with the opening words to his rap:

<i>viva todos os afro-descendentes do Brasil</i>	“to all the Afro descendants of Brazil”
<i>viva o povo das favelas</i>	“long live the people of the slums”
<i>viva o povo do mundo</i>	“long live the people of the world”
<i>viva afro descendants</i>	“long live the Afro descendants”
<i>Zumbi vive</i>	“Zumbi lives”
<i>produto do gueto, CDD, MV Bill</i>	“product of the ghetto, CDD, MV Bill”

The final verse of Bill's rap included the signifying word, *négritude*, an encompassing term recognized by seasoned hip-hop fans in Brazil in reference to the unity of the hip-hop community alongside funk, soul, R&B, and other black genres. Broadly, in this context, *négritude* is understood as the quintessential nod to the whole of the African Diaspora. But Bill's words "não sou o movimento negro, sou o preto em movimento," "I'm not in the black movement, I am black in movement" could be indicative of positioning himself against Brazil's official Black Movement which would be culturally and politically loaded for a conscious black rapper in Rio. How could he use the term *négritude* within a rap that situates himself in opposition to the black movement? Nevertheless the hyped crowd danced and sang along. The music moved the bodies, but the words moved my thoughts. The sun's rays were intense on the scorching beach so I leaned back under a palm tree to catch a breeze and think about those words, all the while peering over the thousands of bobbing heads. What was the not so hidden transcript within Bill's rap? What did it mean to be black in movement but not in the black movement? On stage, Bill and his little sister Kmila gave their usual energetic performance while the multi-colored sea of bodies fully entertained, jumped, jammed and swayed.

However entertainment was not the only aim of Bill's rap. Bill was doing what American rapper KRS-One called "edutainment" back in 1990. KRS-One framed afrocentricity and socio-political knowledge within rap. Bill's subtext dealt not only with blackness as personified in the hues of persons, but also blackness as concept, space, and as movement. Black pride, black agency, and black cultural awareness were themes. Blackness was the signifier with the purpose of transporting the Copacabana beach crowd

to another space. An analysis of the text expressed the ways young black favelados in Rio make meaning around identity and space in hip-hop. Bill's words affirm the overwhelming African presence in Brazil. When he says "long-live all the Afro-descendants of Brazil" and then salutes the slums with, "long-live the people of the slums," Bill is giving a nod to favela spaces where a disproportionate number of black people reside. He follows with "long-live the people of the world," "long-live Afro-descendants," "Zumbi lives," "product of the ghetto, CDD, MV Bill." By concluding with a reference to himself and his favela, CDD, Bill aligns himself within a long history of black space and poor black people around the world. From Zumbi to Bill, and from quilombo to favela, a bridge from past to present is invoked. Colonial era Zumbi, Afro-Brazilian chieftain of that great quilombo, Palmares, and Bill, present day rapper and urban warrior representing that well known favela called Cidade de Deus or City of God. In this performance Zumbi lives through Bill and the quilombo lives through the favela. Together, the black warrior spirit and informal black spaces are irrepressible.

By beginning his rap with language about blackness, poor people, warriors, and off-the-grid spaces, Bill introduces a discursive rendering of hip-hop as black identity performance, black resistance, and black spatial dignity. He uses the phrase *o povo* which translates "the people," but not just *any* people, rather a familial people, *my* people, a conscious word choice expressive of the Afrodiaspora. Bill assumes a global citizenry where Afro-descendants and favela spaces are cast as subjects and lead performers in their own narrative. I suggest that the totality of this greeting references a neo-négritude that revels in a universal black kinship born of collective black bodies and informal black spaces on the peripheries of society. Bill subverts and inverts the standard narrative of the

favela by affirming blackness where it lived in reality, but also where it is imagined, assumed, and situated, in those informal terrains shaped within a history of oppression and resistance.

All the wailing (makes me think) about our history  
 marked with glories I feel that in my chest  
 It is victory Seduced by the combative passion  
 I looked for an alternative (can't run anymore)  
 I am hostage to militancy Who knows what comes  
 you know there is no victory without sweat  
 you have to be twice as good or be cornered with no voice...

Using the language of positive black assertion is radical in a country that has historically abhorred blackness, despised the Negro and sought her obliteration via “whitening.” The national hegemonic narrative props up whiteness as the highest standard of humanity. Brazilians of African descent continue to resist being called black or African, but refuse to acknowledge the country’s color stratification system, choosing instead to imagine itself a racial democracy where race or color does not matter (Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001; Skidmore 1974; Skidmore 2010; Twine 1998). In response it is the rappers in Brazil who have embraced what has been called an American view of race and racism. They admit to being strongly influenced by American race ideology, civil rights, and black power movements, hip-hop’s Public Enemy, and figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. which makes rappers in Brazil controversial and counter-cultural (Roth-Gordon 2002a). Espousing these alternative perspectives is not uncommon within conscious hip-hop circles in Rio because they understood hip-hop as historically rooted in black American race struggle and aligned themselves along that trajectory.



As in the framework of race in the United States, a dual race analysis (just black and white) amassed the leverage necessary for movement effectiveness. A multicolored analysis divided people of color while whites maintained power and control. MV Bill told me that white power wins when people of color are not consolidated, and that was why a dual analysis of race where people of color organize and resist white supremacy was most effective. He told me that blacks in America are all black no matter how light or dark their skin color and that's the analysis he and other hip-hoppers preferred. Even if the dual race or color analysis is not historically particular to Brazil, the issue remained the same: advantages for white people, disadvantages for all people of color—and that was a major injustice.

I recall my earliest conversation with Gilberto in CDD, talking about the differences between Malcolm and Martin and his admiration for the black pride of African Americans. We were sitting outside on the wall near the association building, and Gilberto was in a talkative mood that day. He had his young son with him, Gil Jr., a somber looking seven-year-old. Gilberto talked about Colin Powell, saying he wanted his son to have that same kind of black pride. Gilberto was being decidedly radical in that moment of discussion because he talked about blackness in what many called “American ways” referring to a dual race system. Using a word like “pride” alongside race or color was controversial in Rio. The only pride most people spoke of was Brazilian pride saying there should be no need for things like black pride, white pride or brown pride, only Brazilian pride because “we are all Brazilians.” Gilberto continued, “it is significant for my son to have role models of black men who are doing great things.” All of the black role models Gilberto mentioned to me were African American.

This conversation reminded me of another complex discussion about black role models and the influence of the U.S. on Brazilians' view of blackness. On my first exploration trip to Rio in October 2005, I contacted Celso Athayde a day after I arrived. I was attending a bi-annual meeting of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD) held in Rio that year. Celso told me to contact him if I made it to Rio, so I did, and he graciously drove to meet me at my South Zone hotel between Ipanema and Copacabana. I had two African American friends join me as Celso gave us a favela tour of Rio. Celso didn't speak English so he brought along his own translator, one of CUFA's social workers who spoke English well enough. After taking us to visit three different favelas where CUFA did work, Celso took us to lunch at an outdoor diner. During lunch we somehow found ourselves deep in discussion about then U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice. Rice's office was responsible for the International Visitor Leadership program that sponsored Celso's trip to the U.S. earlier that year. I knew he had great respect for her so I thought it would be instructive to hear his thoughts. There in the midst of enjoying black beans and rice smothered in *ferofa* (toasted manioc flour) with beef on top and potato fry wedges on the side, we talked about blackness.

My friends were not interested in listening and spent time arguing and pushing their political agendas with Celso. His translator could hardly keep up. The bulk of their argument was around why they felt Secretary of State Rice, even though she was a brilliant black woman, was a "sell out" and why Celso should re-think his opinion of her. Celso listened to them and then when he got a chance to speak he said with strong conviction "Condoleeza Rice is a black woman who has reached a very high level in U.S. politics, she is the most powerful black woman in the world, and therefore she deserves

respect.” Her politics did not appear to matter to him. She was black, educated, successful, and powerful. That was enough. In retrospect, I remembered Celso telling the small group of us at an Empower DC event months earlier, that African Americans did not realize how much the rest of the black world looked to them as role models. He said the whole African diaspora was proud of us, calling African Americans the most liberated black people on the planet, but he was concerned about the direction some of us were going in, and then he began his critique of gangster rappers, misogyny, and materialism. He said American rappers in particular, have the mic, they have the voice and the attention of global youth but what are they using that voice to say? Celso’s discourse on race, black pride, and identity were compelling and decidedly radical and “un-Brazilian” in the terminology of Jennifer Roth Gordon.

Jennifer Roth Gordon (2002a) writes that it is considered “un-Brazilian” to discuss race in Brazil. “Set within a Brazilian context of ‘racial democracy’ where any discussion of race has historically been considered ‘un-Brazilian,’ rappers disrupt the desired silence around issues of race, often writing lyrics which overtly address race consciousness, racial identity, and racism.” Rappers contest the imagination of racial democracy by creating counter hegemonic narratives subsumed in alternative black spaces. The favela, *cortiço*,<sup>11</sup> *conjunto*<sup>12</sup> or quilombo are signified black spaces in Brazil. The city of Salvador in the northeastern state of Bahia is also black space, said to be reminiscent of the African country of Angola. I once met a black man on the street while

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11. *Cortiços* were old single-family houses subdivided to accommodate multiple families room by room.

12. *Conjuntos* are housing developments built by the government for displaced *favela* residents (i.e. cdd is a *conjunto*)

visiting the city of Salvador. He said he was a native of Salvador, and called it “little Angola” arguing it retained much of the culture and spirit of Africa’s Angola.

Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde had been the African colonies of the Portuguese and the places from where a significant number of black Brazilians trace their heritage, particularly Angola and Mozambique. Kim D. Butler (1998) researched the ways former slaves in post-abolition Brazil sought knowledge, connectedness, and created fresh meaning around being African in Brazil. Self-determination and identity rooted in African place and ritual were crucial to their new existence. What did it mean to be both Brazilian and African? Scholars of *négritude* embraced these former colonized spaces along with the whole of the continent, taking pride in place and space. Africa was not the dark and backward continent dreamt of by colonizers. Africa is the symbolic and unified center for Afro-descended people, the black space in the ideological framework of *négritude*. This same ideology purported that Africa was altruistic, communal and warm while Europe was self-absorbed, conquest oriented and cold (Balandier 1963; Beier 2002; Césaire 1950). The message conveyed by proponents of *négritude* was that there was hope and possibility in places predominated by black people.

Recalling MV Bill’s rap lyrics above and his inclusion of the word *négritude* in the rap, black people and black space are subjects in his “Sou preto movimento.” The music video to the rap opens with black junior high school aged students in a classroom and they are yelling, throwing paper and being rowdy adolescents. When *o professor* (the teacher) enters into the room the students run to their seats and sit at attention. The teacher commences his lesson with the question, “sabe o que dia hoje?” (do you know what today is?). The students looking serious and pensive say, *não* (no) but begin yelling

out their guesses. The teacher says “dia do orgulho negro” (it’s black pride day) and the rap begins. MV Bill is wearing a dark suit and tie and seated at one of the student desks. He is rapping. The teacher is showing slides of projected images of Zumbi, Bob Marley, Mary McCloud Bethune, and Harriet Tubman. The children look like they are reflecting, imaging, hoping, and dreaming of themselves through the projected images. And then the scene moves from the classroom to the favela streets with images of black girls playing jump rope and boys playing marbles, flying kites, running and riding bikes.

Every scene in the video is shot in the favela. The images are mostly grainy black and white but intense color enters each time a child’s dreams are realized. The dream scenes are cartooned and multi-colored and each cartooned image flies up into the skies. One little girl becomes a ballerina, while a boy becomes a builder. The children become teachers, astronauts, and race car drivers. In the final scene Bill shows up with his camera and takes a photo of the group of bright and smiling black children. Through his camera he sees them as they are, and then as they shall be. Bill smiles and nods, there is a glint of pride in his face. There is hope and a future for the black children living in this black space, the favela. The teacher and the children portrayed in the video were not just acting, they are really favelados themselves and I met many of them during my stay in CDD.

An analysis of the video is critical because it is deliberately filmed in the favela which is imagined “black space” and all of the children in the video are black children, yet they are thriving there. They have dreams there in that “black space” and their dreams are realized even though they are from “black space.” The video speaks to the fact that good also comes from the favela. The children, the people, the favela resist damaging

negative totalizing constructions of who they are based on where they are from. There is good and bad, hope and hopelessness, life and death in this black space.

The video “flips the script” and challenges central totalizing narratives about who lives in the favela and what they are capable of doing or not doing. The video images disengage the white gaze as if saying “what you think doesn’t matter,” what matters is how we choose to see, view and construct ourselves. Here, blackness is not defined as all bad, or as the absence of whiteness. It is not based on what white is not. Blackness is not a counter construction of whiteness, blackness and “black space” stand in counter opposition to no one. *Black Is*. The disengagement of the white gaze in defining blackness is what I call *neo-négritude*. Hip-hop expresses this most critically. For an explanation of how *négritude* becomes *neo-négritude*, the next section covers a brief theoretical trajectory of blackness and *négritude* in relationship to *neo-négritude* and youth in Brazil.

Abiola Irele (1965) once wrote, “*négritude* appears as a culmination of the complete range of reactions provoked by the impact of western civilization on the African, and of the whole complex of social and psychological factors that have gone to form black people’s collective experience of western domination. Its roots thus lie far down in the total historical experience of the black man in contact with the white.” Further, the main interest of the historical origins of the movement lies in those indirect forms of resistance provoked by the colonial situation (1965:323).

African people had to suddenly justify their existence, reconstruct themselves and re-imagine self and community (Hodgkin 1956; Irele 1965). This was a life sustaining impulse for colonized people and their descendants. “Colonial rule was not only a

political and economic affair, but it also imposed a specific framework for the African's experience both of the world and of himself. The fact of political domination created areas of contact between Africans and Europeans all over the continent under conditions that constantly underscored racial and cultural differences. The colonial relationship thus involved the total cultural situation, and the nationalist movements were in fact efforts at cultural as well as purely political autonomy" (Irele 221). This cultural and political autonomy is poignant since *négritude* grew out of a critical need to rethink and reaffirm culture, place, and continental solidarity. It challenged the center. And it is within this milieu that the artists, writers, and poets rise to the surface.

Early poets and writers of *négritude* challenged identity, space, and purpose, re-imagining Africa and Africaness *in response to whiteness*. Hip-hop certainly lends itself to the ideology of *négritude* with its rooted emphasis on black people and urban ghettos. Blackness has always been signified in the culture of hip-hop. Pardue (2008a) writes that hip-hop is the vehicle of choice (and, at times, necessity) for thousands of youth in their retelling of 'reality.' It stands at the center of how black working-class persons apply *négritude* as individual attitude, collective philosophy, diasporic imagination, and political strategy. Hip-hop is a part of racialization within Brazilian popular society (2008a:91).

However, a significant historical critique of *négritude* was that its poets and other proponents viewed Africa through the lens of anti-whiteness which reactively produced ideas of mother land innocence and purity. Africa was re-imagined as almost too good to be true. James Baldwin (1962) was a critic and condemned this romanticized notion of Africa as a symbol of innocence and purity saying the objective of colonized Africans

should be contending with and loving this new world into which they were “born and held citizenship. This new world was flawed but it was now their heritage as well.

Baldwin spoke not of an infantile American sense of being made happy but of the tough and universal sense of quest and daring growth.” In *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)

Baldwin wrote that his [black folks] survival depended, and his development depends, on his ability to turn his peculiar status in the Western world to his own advantage and ... to fashion out of his experience that which will give him sustenance, and a voice.

Baldwin’s insight and critique of *négritude* was a challenge to African descended people to make their own space where they were, not in reaction to where they came from and not in response to the white power center or the white gaze. MV Bill’s opening rap did not focus on Africa to the extent of romanticizing the place; rather it understood Africa as a proud heritage. However, the business of the day was making life work well for Afro-descendants in Brazil since that was their homeland now. Baldwin’s tough stance addressed making something good out of where you are here and now since Africa is no longer your home. The images in the video *O preto em movimento* functioned in that way from beginning to end the lens was on black space, black children, and in the end MV Bill snaps a photo of a group of smiling black children. The gaze behind the camera belongs to Bill. It is not a white gaze. This is much more nuanced than a simple de-centering of whiteness, and re-centering of blackness, it is a refusal to play the game. Black identity is no longer carved from reactions to white constructions. Black simply is what it is. The brilliance of hip-hop neo-*négritude* is that the community functions as if the imposed center does not exist. They disengage oppositional constructs of whiteness, class, and meaning-making. Whiteness is not an issue since hip-hop is not a rational



dialogue with white people about black lives. Hip-hop does not concern itself with opposing whiteness; rather hip-hop's discourse is for and about black people, literally reveling in blackness in movement.

Displaced people and displaced spaces undergird the message of hip-hop. It is good to be black and good to be from the periferia. "F tha' mainstream." Favela space is re-appropriated by favelados. "Brazilian rappers," writes Jennifer Roth Gordon (2002a) "re-center the periphery as a site of consciousness raising - giving voice to hundreds of favelas and suburbs which often remain unnamed on maps and in the Brazilian political agenda." Hip-hop is a movement that creatively reshapes and re-imagines the world around itself. Derek Pardue writes that favela spaces are assumed problematic, naturalized as violent, degenerate places. Favela identities are also oppressively shaped by those from outside and must be challenged:

Popular opinion spatializes violence as a natural part of the periphery or suburban landscape. The general association of violence to discourses of social inequalities in the form of place designation is common around the world. Hip hop has been an important vehicle for marginalized persons to speak and thus deconstruct such reifications. Hip hop is a global phenomenon in this regard. In the United States, such associations of space and society are part of the 'moral panic' pattern, which has remained relatively constant since the 1970s and the beginning of what is termed deindustrialization. [2008:64-65]

Derek Pardue's work is grounded in São Paulo and of those periphery spaces he writes:

The periferia is a field of contestation around issues of semiotic and geographic control with representatives on all sides riffing off of historical key terms held in common. Violence, marginality, criminality, citizenship, and illegality are among the discursive tropes interlocutors invest in as they claim higher knowledge and exercise politics over São Paulo's most polemic spaces. Whether expressed in terms of public policy, educational programs, crime statistics, environmental disasters (i.e. mudslides, massive flooding) or in hip hop cultural practices, the periferia is a problematic place that generates debates focused on human value and territorial management. [Pardue 1008:64]

In his work on the production of space, Henri Lefebvre (1974) discussed social space as everyday practices and spatial imaginary. Space is produced and re-produced based on need and the chosen practices of its inhabitants. Slum dwellers and squatters fashion space via images and symbols altering its original intended uses and conceiving them in oppositional ways. People reside in spaces of imagined meaning made real, kept alive and accessed by the arts and literature. This transcends and refigures perceptions of place and space by outsiders and power elites (1974).

Even outside of black identity and the periferia hip-hop has a way of *occupying* institutional hegemonic space, subverting it for its own purpose. Hip-hop does not comply with the designated apparatus of urban space, it subverts, deconstructs, and reconstructs. An example of this subversion is the way in which the hip-hop space under the bridge in Madureira, Viaduto is re-imagined and re-occupied. The viaduct is an expressway, engineered, designed and built for quick transport of vehicles from one part of the city to another but architecture, geography, law and urban planning are not able to predict the various ways in which urban spaces may be manipulated and re-imagined. Part of the viaduct is a bridge that goes over Madureira but CUFA possessed the space under the bridge and created a community center for hip-hop arts. The surface of the bridge functions as the roof and ceiling for the community center. Graffiti artists, breakdancers, skaters, and rappers meet under the bridge to produce their respective crafts. The basketball court under the bridge houses CUFA events like *Hutuz Prix*, and league tournament games *Libbra's basquete da rua* (street basketball). Legally, this location is governed by traffic laws, but the space under it subverted the intended hegemonic function. These events constitute themselves as political and artistic strategies

of occupation of spaces in the city, developing counter-hegemonic forms of creation and identity art (Pinheiro 2009). Whether it is imagined black space or institutional hegemonic space, hip-hop has a way of subverting space for its own purposes.

Celso expressed deep concern about these black spaces and wanted to commemorate the history of favelas. He proposed an official day of reflection called, *dia da favela* (day of the favela) in Brazil. In the year 1900, the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, a chief of police in Rio ordered the extinction and permanent removal of huts and slums on the city's hillsides ushering in an official slum clearance policy that would dislocate thousands of slum dwellers from their homes and communities. A century later, Celso introduced an idea that would bring dignity to people and communities on the hill. "We do not want another holiday and do not want to celebrate. We strive to make this day a time for reflection. Slum and squatter stigmas are more than a century old. We need to find alternatives to turn this stigma into charisma." On November 4, 2010 Celso traveled around and met with mayors in Rio and São Paulo and other cities to discuss the plan. He sought 1 million signatures in support of the day of the favela. Twenty-six states in Brazil supported the idea in 2010. The historical crimes were evident since the emergence of the first shacks in Rio, Brazil's relationship with the slums had been controversial and unresolved. Favelas were treated as a social pathology to be cured based on policies of removal, and yet favelas have also been the birthplace of significant music, art, and social movements.

### The Formal Black Movement

MV Bill's musical slight on the formal black movement in Rio remained. The lyrics to *O preto em movimento*, "I'm not in the black movement, I'm black in movement" sounded like an indictment against formal black movement. I wondered what MV Bill meant by those words and why he appeared to disassociate himself with the formal black movement in Rio so the very first time I met with MV Bill I asked him. We were on his turf now miles away from the beach and tourist attractions of the South Zone, sitting on a concrete wall in CDD favela. He was a tall, dark, bald, and muscular man with lots of tattoos, what some people in the favela affectionately called a *negão* (big nigga) or in his case, a big, handsome nigga. He was charming, with small dancing eyes and a warm smile. By all accounts of the women I talked with, Bill was a handsome man.

A small group of people were milling around inside one of the community rooms where food was being placed on tables for a reception at the neighborhood association building. CUFA was in celebration mode, they had just sealed a partnership with *O Globo International*, the largest and most powerful media conglomerate in all of Latin America. This was an important milestone in CUFA's short existence and *feita* (party) was in the air. We didn't have much time to talk that day but I managed to ask Bill the question that was on my mind, "what are your thoughts on Brazil's black movement?" He paused and then said with a sly grin as if aware of my assumptions "if you want to know about the black movement you have to talk to someone else, I'm not a part of that." Bill was reiterating something I had been hearing since being in Rio and that was that hip-hop culture and Brazil's formal black movement were worlds apart. He went on to say that at one time he identified with the work and vision of the formal black movement,

but not anymore. Now he prefers to think of himself as “black in movement not in the black movement,” the title of his rap.

Further, Bill shared that years earlier when he needed the public support of the formal black movement after being unduly harassed by police officers who mocked his skin color and tattoos, calling them “monkey marks” and labeling him a drug dealer, the formal black movement was silent.

The movement doesn’t defend the humanity of black people, it doesn’t teach black people to be proud of being black. He even suggested that the movement only cared about respectable higher class Afro-Brazilians. I asked if he thought it was in essence a class movement, and he said yes. “The black movement does not represent the poor here in the favela.” Bill was not the first to make that statement. My young friend Preta (24) had said the same thing many times before. I left that conversation with Bill feeling sad. My sense was that he carried deep disappointment and maybe a level of pain about the black movement in Rio. There was something palpable there.

There were also those in the Movimento Negro (the black movement) in Brazil who viewed hip-hop as problematic and divisive. Mariana (28) was a supporter and participant in the formal black movement in Rio. She did not grow up in a favela, she grew up in Madureira a north end working class bairro. She was a college graduate and currently worked in hotel management. Mariana identified as Afro Brazilian and middle class. She agreed with Bill’s and Preta’s assessment saying yes, the black movement was indeed a class movement. “We in the black movement want to improve our economic condition and educational status, and the movement helps us do that.” Mariana went on to critique the hip-hop movement saying it was silly and just for entertainment. She said

hip-hop wasn't going anywhere, "hip-hop is pointless, it stays in the favela; what does it do, what is the point?" Mariana did not view hip-hop as beneficial to the lives of young favelados in any way. It was violent and linked to drug cartels. Mariana said the only reason MV Bill got into the spotlight was because people assumed he was a drug dealer, he was harassed by police, which led to him making a TV commercial to refute that image and defend his reputation. It was that act, not hip-hop, that catapulted Bill into the limelight as a public figure. I asked Mariana if she thought Bill was indeed a drug dealer using hip-hop as a cover. She said no, she thought he was an honest guy trying to help his community but was misrepresented. But she did not think hip-hop was the way to make the change he wanted to make.

I was sitting with Mariana and her family in the middle of a mall food court in downtown Madureira one afternoon. She, her sister, and mother had a Saturday afternoon routine of getting their hair done at the salon in town, and then going to the mall for lunch. Mariana's sister Xuxa had her twelve-year-old son with her. Mariana's mother was a dignified highly educated black woman of about sixty-five years old who nodded in agreement with everything Mariana said. She also looked interested and yet puzzled, and I imagined she was wondering why I was researching hip-hop. Hip-hop was not special, certainly not worthy of academic study.

Mariana's story was intriguing. Last year when I was in Rio for a language immersion trip, she was pregnant. Upon my return, her first child, a daughter, had been born. Upon seeing the very fair complexion and sandy straight hair of the child, I asked if her father was white. She said yes. But I knew that the man she called her "boyfriend" was not white at all. He was a very dark skinned man, and Mariana was also dark skinned

herself. She said she decided to have her son with a white man who was a family friend, but that she was still in a relationship with her dark skinned boyfriend, whom she said she loved very much. I was speechless. Mariana wanted to have a baby before turning 30, so planned to have one, but planned to have it with a white family friend and not with her black boyfriend. I didn't ask any questions but I thought the implications were clear. She wanted a child with light skin. So, while Mariana praised the work of the black movement in matters of class mobility, she still consciously chose to procreate with a white man in hopes of producing a fair skinned child who might have better opportunities at life. The economic strides of the formal black movement were apparently not enough to insure the same access and quality of life for black Brazilians. Lighter skin color was still a better bet tipping the scales in the direction of favor and privilege.

From the point of view of younger, black favelados who were critically aware of Brazil's formal black movement, they told me the movement did not represent them nor did it represent the spaces where they resided. The movement was void of fostering a sense of black pride amongst the poor. Many young hip-hop heads I spoke with suggested that if the formal black movement was useful in improving the lives of Afro-Brazilians, it did nothing in terms of making a difference in the favela where the majority of black and poor people lived. Others insisted the black movement in Brazil "talked too much but did nothing" in contrast to hip-hop which they said "is about doing something, hip-hop is about change." "Hip-hop taught me to love myself," said one 19-year-old black male in CDD. "Black is beautiful," another young male shouted gleefully in English, in the midst of my questioning.

Preta (24) agreed, she identified as Afro Brazilian and middle class. Most would refer to her as *morena* because of her color and hair texture, but she called herself black. Preta was college educated and did not grow up in a favela. She was from a South Zone *barrio* a fact which already put her at a class advantage. Botofogo was just a couple *barrios* over from the ritzy Lagoa and Leblon areas. Her view of race, hip-hop, and black movement was that hip-hop was the real black movement in Rio. She said the formal black movement was overly focused on class. “They do nothing for poor blacks. Hip-hop is located in the favela where the poor people are, and hip-hop offers a sense of black pride which all blacks need.” “No one here wants to be black, they think it’s ugly to be black, but hip-hop challenges that idea.” Jalene once told me the exact same thing after an encounter I had with a little girl, “no one here wants to be black.”

The little girl caught me by surprise. Early one afternoon I was sitting in a very tiny room CUFA used as its library inside the neighborhood association building at CDD. I was talking to some of the youngest children there while helping them practice writing their letters when one little girl who told me she was 7 years old introduced me to her cousin. He was a little brown little boy sitting next to her. She was a fair skinned little girl with sandy brown hair. Somehow she and I arrived at the topic of color. She told me she was *branca* (white) and her cousin, the little boy sitting next to her, was *moreno*. She was decidedly doing the talking for her cousin who didn’t utter a word the entire time. I added that I was *negra* (black) when she paused and looked me over and said no you’re not *negra*, you’re *morena* too. “Negro é muito feio (black is very ugly) and you are not ugly so you are not black.” There was a very black dark skinned little girl about the same age sitting across the table whose countenance dropped, she looked ashamed and saddened.



Upon overhearing our discussion one of the young Brazilian women who teaches at the community center interjected, “black is not ugly, I’m black too.” Lola (21) was a striking dark skinned woman with long black hair. She helped CUFA in their arts program. She looked at me a bit exasperated, “we still have a lot of work to do with the kids as it relates to issues of color here.”

The longer I was in Rio the more I was realizing two things. One was that black self-loathing still persisted, most noticeably amongst the poor. Two, was that hip-hop and the formal black movement were often philosophically divided. The multifaceted, multilayered dimensions of race, class, and space were the chasms that separated the two movements. Three was that the formal black movement usually did not recognize hip-hop as a political force or cultural entity of importance, and some hip-hoppers chose only to identify with the black movement in oppositional ways as Bill’s rap signified, “I’m not in the black movement, I am black in movement.”

Celso was diplomatic in his description of the formal black movement saying, “the black movement exists to change laws; the hip-hop movement exists to change minds and convince poor blacks of their own power.” There is a difference between changing laws and realizing personal power and agency. Celso said the black movement had an important role and the role of hip-hop complemented that role. The formal black movement was overtly political advocating total equality in all sectors of life for Afro-Brazilians, and that was necessary. Celso told me he considered hip-hop and CUFA in Brazil as a part of the formal black movement, not separate from it.

### Concluding Thoughts on Undoing Race

“Color discrimination is real” Arte (23) told me. He was black and sold Afrocentric T-shirts really cheaply in the favela, shirts with images of Malcolm X, Zumbi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. on them. He was a very charismatic *gato* (cat) who women seemed to adore. He identified as “muito, muito, muito negro” (very, very, very black) in spirit if not in skin color. Arte and I met up on the bus one afternoon at the *rodoviária* (bus terminal). I was leaving a friend’s apartment in Copacabana, he said he had just left his girlfriend’s apartment. We were both on our way to CDD. We sat next to each other on the 45-minute bus ride to the favela and talked. I had been curious about word on the street that MV Bill’s wife was white. Jalene told me that even the men in hip-hop who “boasted about all this black pride stuff preferred white women.” I knew Arte would know, so I asked him, “is Bill’s wife white?” “Yea” he said, and then pointed to his forehead gesturing, “what is Bill thinking? ... people here call her *morena* because she has dark hair, but really she’s white.” He went on to tell me that the minds of many of the black men in Brazil were still colonized making them prefer white or whiter women as marriage partners. So Arte seemed to imply that Bill had good intentions, thinking his wife wasn’t white because she’s not blonde with blue eyes. In other words, when the American dual fixed race polemic worked for rappers they used it; but in matters of love, they reverted back to Brazilian fluid multi-colored narratives, i.e. she’s not white, but she’s not black either. Arte’s analysis was intriguing. He was exasperated and added, “but black women are beautiful too.” Arte seemed annoyed and above it all.

Clearly, the situation regarding race and color in Rio is complicated and fluid. This generation of young people has a lot of analysis to do both personally and socially in

order change life for themselves in sustainable ways in Rio. Gilberto Freyre's 1940s treatise on race in Brazil is still held up as the ideal. Brazil as an erotic paradise where the Portuguese, Indians and Africans lived in racial harmony and sexual freedom creating the wonderfully mixed race of people they are today. Freyre constructs an ideal of Brazilian exceptionalism as it relates to race relations. And even though his concept of racial democracy in Brazil has been debunked by many arguing Freyre conveniently omitted the realities of power, bondage, objectification of brown and black bodies, and rape in his history, he is still held up as a race icon in Brazil.

Nevertheless, the facts show that Brazil has one of the highest inequality levels in the world and the largest black population of any country outside of Africa. With a population over 200 million, approximately 50.7 percent (97 million) of the total population is black or *mulato*, and typically represent those in the lowest income levels. They constitute the majority of the unemployed and make-up the largest numbers of those residing in the favelas. More than 70 percent of favelados are black or brown people. Several studies have documented that incomes of white Brazilians are, on average, twice that of black Brazilians ([guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), [indexmundi.com/brazil](http://indexmundi.com/brazil)). Blacks are paid less, occupy lower status jobs and receive less education. Black children die from disease and violence at rates far exceeding whites; police brutality and prison sentences are disproportionately dealt to nonwhites over whites (Burdick 1998b).

Up close, Brazil's public discourse of racial equality and democracy is not supported. Blackness is not viewed as equal. Up close its citizens act out a different narrative, one contrary to the frequently unexamined public narrative of racial democracy. France Winddance Twine's research states that even people who spout the

appropriate line about Brazil being a racist country have difficulty identifying racism in their own thoughts, deeds, or experience; speak mainly of individual rather than institutional racism and do nothing to stop either (Twine 1996, Burdick 1998b).

In discourse and in practice, despite Gilberto Freyre's utopian historical narrative of Brazil, skin color associated with police brutality is prolific. This important manifestation reveals itself in the ways black-Brazilians are treated by the police. They receive fewer protections than white Brazilians and suffer more discrimination and brutality. A racial democracy, Brazil is not. I suggest that neo-négritude as analyzed above in MV Bill's *O preto em movimento* video and resistant acts of black self-love as intentionally embraced and practiced by younger Brazilians are preliminary answers and steps in a hopeful direction.

Who could love blackness in a country with this legacy? Cultural critic bell hooks (1992a) suggests that it is dangerous to love blackness in a white supremacist culture, "so threatening, so serious a breach in the fabric of the social order, that death is the punishment." This loathing of the black-self is not indicative to only Brazil but has poisoned every colonized global space where African people are located. It is a learned, internalized, and oppressive legacy that continues to debilitate the self-concept of African diasporic people; as well as the false concept of superiority embraced by the European colonizers and their offspring. Black self-loathing is as old as the colonization project itself. The process of decolonization takes time and intentional critical effort. In her introductory chapter of *Black Looks: race and representation* bell hooks quotes Samia Mehrez:

Decolonization... continues to be an act of confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought; it is hence a process of considerable historical and cultural liberation. As such, decolonization becomes the contestation of all dominant forms and structures, whether they be linguistic, discursive, or ideological. Moreover, decolonization comes to be understood as an act of exorcism for both the colonized and the colonizer. For both parties it must be a process of liberation: from dependency, in the case of the colonized, and from imperialist, racist perceptions, representations, and institutions which, unfortunately, remain with us to this very day, in the case of the colonizer... Decolonization can only be complete when it is understood as a complex process that involves both the colonizer and the colonized. [hooks 1992a:1]

Self-love is a political act of resistance. Cornel West (1994) said a love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion. He also added: “a love ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather it is a last attempt at generating a sense of agency among downtrodden people. Self-love and love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one’s community” (1994:29). Hip-hop’s in-yo-face swagger celebrates black bodies, black subjectivity, and black space disrupting those narratives of color, class, place and space. Rap spits in the face of damning meta-narratives through radical truth-telling and counter hegemonic responses.

Derek Pardue writes “hip-hop culture is important as part of the dynamic of contemporary racial formation in Brazil, because its sustained practice has provided experience and material through which thousands of Brazilians rethink the status of race within their own conceptions of self, personhood, and citizenship” (2008a).

## CHAPTER 6

### UNDOING VIOLENCE

April 19, 2011: this morning my friend DeeJay Funk who lives in Rio's largest favela called Rocinha, posted these words as his facebook page status update:

**DeeJay Funk:** "Police are invading the favela... just waiting for the shooting to begin..."

His facebook friends respond to his post:

"ok, think u better stay indoors...lol..."

"hope things will be alright..."

"its' live on the TV news... be careful my friend"

"Keep us posted DeeJay"

"Be safe bro!!!"

"Stay safe all of you x"

"Don't enter the line of fire man!"

"Be careful!!! My thoughts are with all of you!! Don't you point your gun at me a\$\$hole!"

Nothing new, it was just another day on the hillside in Rio de Janeiro's ongoing drug wars between the traffic and the police. Government sanctioned violence in Brazil is a past and present reality. Currently the police are actively occupying and "cleaning up" favelas in preparation for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics to be held in Brazil. Therefore the state sanctioned violence continues to rage.

Whether organized or unorganized, young people have found ways to mediate the poverty and violence that surrounds them. Labeled the “new mediators” (Ramos 2006), groups of young people living in favelas organize themselves to confront violence and build “new stereotypes” (terminology used by Ramos) that disassociate them from the label of criminality that often follows favela youth. One of the ways that young people have organized is around the arts, including but not limited to hip-hop as resistance ritual. This chapter also examines the ways race, class, and gender identity is framed in relationship to violence and favela spaces, as well as the ways youth negotiate everyday violence as creative contributors to ceasing the fire.

The real and symbolic vitriol between favela residents, young people and the police is steeped in a long history in Brazil. I encountered a man who is quite old now, but he remembered being tortured by the police, sanctioned by the government when he was a young man. It was during the time of Brazil’s authoritarian military regime (1964-1985). In 2007 I sat in front of the wide picturesque living room window in the apartment of the aging filmmaker who lived near the beach in the South Zone of Rio. Senor was in his 70s, loved cats, and had an amazing view of the beach and ocean. I positioned myself in the chair closest to the window so that I could gaze out at the ocean on what was a beautiful clear and sunny afternoon. His cats crept, purred, and glided against my bare legs. Senor told me about his work “back in the good days.” His English was flawless so he took the opportunity to use it while I was visiting.

Senor used to make films and apparently I was supposed to know them. His work was that popular. I listened. Finally Senor told me that when he was a young man he was a resistor during Brazil’s military dictatorship. He and his activities had been under

surveillance. Senor was eventually taken captive by the government, violently tortured and imprisoned. His art and activities were considered subversive. The painful memory of the experience visibly resurfaced as he spoke so I didn't ask questions about his activity, I just listened. He told me his story of torture to let me know that he stopped believing in God that day since God had not protected him from being tortured. God could not in reality exist. Hundreds of Brazilians suspected of anti-government activity were tortured and killed during the military regime. The revolutionary guerillas were more often than not elite youth, not poor youth, so I guessed that Senor had been from the elite class. My visit with him was rare and memorable. I didn't see him again during my stay in Rio, but his personal story of state sanctioned violence remained with me.

MV Bill's rap, *Soldados do Morro* (soldiers on the hill) addresses the violence they live with in Rio. Soldados do morro was Bill's response to living on the hill in the midst of persistent violence especially at the hands of the state through the police. Soldiers on the hillside are young men who possess weapons, are usually involved in drug trafficking as their only viable means of employment, and view themselves as protectors of their communities from outsiders and the police. They are armed and potentially dangerous.

Many is the time I've felt less than a man  
 Unemployed, with my child going hungry,  
 It's easy to criticize me.  
 Society created me and now demands my death  
 Condemning me to die in prison  
 Transformed into television news  
 I've been a beggar, already humiliated myself  
 Pleading for a job, "I have a small child, good sir"  
 Long waiting list, me and 300 others  
 After an eternity, "no openings at the moment"  
 The same story every day, all this generates revolt



I am hooked, who is to blame?  
 Those who are making this war never die in it  
 I distributed the drugs that destroy the favela  
 Making money from our reality  
 I am caught between crime and necessity  
 Those who should be providing protection  
 Invade the favela with weapons in hand  
 Those who have come seeking our votes, they too have killed

Violence was in the skies. One morning I awake early to clear blue skies and bright sun. Those of us inside the 11<sup>th</sup> floor apartment stood on the large veranda taking in the concrete vista tops of buildings and enjoying Brazil's late fall, early winter weather. Closer to the equator this tropical climate felt great even though it was what many Cariocas might consider cold. Suddenly we were all snapped to attention by the ominous sound of violent noise, gunshots and the shadows of two helicopters looming above. "Ghetto-birds" was what some people back home called them because of their omnipresent flight above urban neighborhoods. One was black, the other metallic, both clipped our view and interrupted the moment as they dipped and soared around two nearby morros (hillsides) releasing rounds of bullets aimed down toward the hill.

It was May 22, 2009 and just three days into my sixth trip to Rio, this time with three undergraduate students from the university. It was their first time traveling to Brazil and each of them seemed excited, curious and bursting with the popular imagination of Rio. Their heads and words were filled with the metaphors of this great city, sun and beaches, sensual, romantic, the cidade maravilhosa they'd heard so much about. But at this particular moment we all stood still there above the city on the veranda of that Copacabana penthouse gazing surreally into the sky. "Are those gunshots real?" one asked.

They were real all right. Welcome to Rio de Janeiro. Once again I was thrown back into the harsh ever present reality of danger in Rio, and my own ongoing analysis of violence in the favelas where the homicide rates figure among the highest in the country. This trend had been occurring since the 1980s and only increasingly since that time. Beginning in 2003, Brazil surpassed the number of 50 thousand homicides per year. The victims of intentional lethal violence were mainly young black men, and residents of favelas (Ramos 2006).

In Rio the situation was most grave as many of the black poor are murdered daily. Police violence directed at these same young citizens has gone unchecked for far too long. Public safety enforcement and civic officials have been complicit in the execution style rogue military police killings of favela youth. Researchers, Amnesty International and other human rights watch organizations have well-documented cases of excessive and unwarranted police violence against Brazilian favelados, especially those who are black and male (Caldeira 2002; Frayssinet 2007; Goldstein 1998; Goldstein 2003; Hagedorn 2008; Holston 1999b; Holston 2006b; Howes 2008; Inciardi 1998; Mitchell 1999; Motta 2009; Moura 2009; Neate 2004; Neate 2010; Oliveira 2000; Padilha 2002, 2007; Pardue 2008a; Penglase 2003; Perlman 2010; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1999b; Soares 2005, 2006; Tourinho Peres 2004; Vargas 2008; Zaverucha 2000).

Favelas were frequently the target of police raids, they were policed with a strong external arm where decisions were made differently, and firearms resorted to hastily, both by police and favela thugs. Residents live off the grid, mostly on hillsides, stigmatized and alienated from the mainstream. There is a code of the streets that favela residents ascribe to, as well as a code of favela policing that Rio's forces ascribe to. Elijah

Anderson calls this code of the streets “a public manifestation of alienation, a kind of adaptation to a lost sense of security of the local inner-city neighborhood and, by extension, a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system” (1999).

This ideology of alienation supports an oppositional culture that develops in response to the unmet needs and unmet securities that should be a part of every citizen’s experience. In response, a type of outlaw culture frames the thinking of many favelados, especially the thinking of the boy soldiers. If they are supposed unworthy of decent housing, education and police protection, they are forced outside of the law by their social position, and then by choice. In many impoverished and economically depressed communities around the world, particularly those of color where drug and crime persist, faith in the criminal justice system is eroded and social behavior in public is organized around the code of the street. “At the heart of this code is a set of prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence, among so many residents, particularly young men and women” (Anderson 1999).

When citizens are stigmatized, under surveillance, not protected in their own community or their own country, contempt fosters between those resident citizens and the state. The police as the face of the state produce acts of systemic and physical violence. Young, black males are the primary target of the state. Their lives don’t matter. This revealed itself in the disproportionate number of poor black males killed daily in the state of Rio, and in the country of Brazil. The poor are systematically obliterated each day.

Back on that 11<sup>th</sup> floor veranda in Copacabana we maintained our bird’s eye view of the shootout which we would later learn was between Rio’s civil police and drug

traffickers on a morro in Zona Sul's (South Zone's) Pavão-Pavãozinho. From our location we could only hear the gunshots and see the helicopters; we couldn't see the people living on the hill but it seemed that somebody was shooting back at the police helicopters. We could see workers on hotel and apartment building rooftops, eleven stories or more above, watching the action, some ducked for cover while others continued their work of painting, repairing buildings, washing windows, watering gardens and cleaning rooftop pools; it was just another day in Rio. My three young companions were slightly fearful, but also said the action seemed surreal, as if they were watching a cop show on TV. The altercation ensued for more than an hour. We waited for the helicopters to depart and things to appear calm in the streets below before heading out in the opposite direction toward another favela called Chapéu Mangueira located above the very serene Leme beachfront neighborhood.

Shoot-outs between drug traffickers and police were not uncommon in Rio, but this occasion was slightly atypical. We would later learn from friends, people in the streets and news reports, that this was the continuation of a special police operation by Coordenadoria de Operações e Recursos Especiais (Coordinators of Operations and Special Resources), C.O.R.E., an elite squad of Brazil's civil police department. The Civil Police served as criminal investigators and detectives with the goal of preserving public order and safety. This day C.O.R.E. was responding to information regarding the whereabouts of certain drug lords in the South Zone community very near tourist hotels, restaurants and beaches. The current governor of the state of Rio, Sérgio Cabral Filho whom Brazilians simply called "Cabral" had implemented a new zero-tolerance policy aimed at ridding favelas of drugs and crime. With over 1,000 favelas (Perlman 2010) in

and around Rio the governor had a huge task before him. Cabral was elected governor based on his antiviolence and anticorruption campaign platform but in December 2007 before taking office the following month, drug kingpins staged massive city-wide protests against the new governor paralyzing the city for a few days. There was strong reaction from gangland against his nomination. But Cabral finally managed to assume office, and by December 2008 had succeeded in cleaning up one of the oldest and best organized favelas of the South Zone, Santa Marta. Santa Marta has a long history of independent community organizing that folks in Rio look to for inspiration (Perlman 2010). The governor's plan was to continue wresting control of all favelas from drug gangs. This was only the beginning.

In her forty-year study of favelas in Rio, Janice Perlman (2010) highlights the sobering fact that Rio de Janeiro is one of the most violent cities in the world. According to the UN, the country of Brazil has the highest rate of homicide in the world, 90 percent caused by firearms. When Perlman began her work in Rio in the late 1960s favela residents primary fear was that their homes would be demolished by favela clearance programs. Today, they fear for their very lives. Lethal violence has steadily increased over the past four decades (2010:165). But even with its high levels of publicized crime and drug violence, Rio continues to be one of the most renowned cities in the world. Pristine beaches, fútbol, carnaval, o Cristo (soccer, carnival, the Christ statue), mouth-watering food and beautiful women are major draws. A world class tourist city with a growing economy heavily based on eroticism and tourism required a flawless public safety image. That image is lacking. In Rio I always experienced a heightened sense of

awareness, always hyper-alert to my surroundings as the reality of crime and violence were always closer than I thought, a heartbeat away, around every corner.

I was first made aware of the severity one late afternoon while standing at the corner of Avenida Nossa Senhora and Rua Constante Ramos in Copacabana with Jalene and her mother. It was the end of my second trip to Rio. I was there for a six-week language immersion course at one of the local language schools. Jalene and her mom came to Copa to see me off. We were standing on the corner waiting for a taxi to the airport. I had my luggage and a laptop bag with my wallet in it which contained a few extra *reais* (reals, Brazilian money). I figured I'd use up the reais so reached into my shoulder bag, pulled out a fifty to give Jalene and her mom so they could take a van back home to Jacarepaguá which was at least an hour van ride away from Copacabana. Within seconds of taking that money from my wallet six young boys, all black, began swarming around us like vultures. They looked to be about 12–14 years old, calculating their moves to see how quickly they could snatch the money, my wallet, laptop, or all of it, and get away while we were still distracted. But we noticed them and looked them in their faces. Jalene, who is very tall and impressive looking, gave them a stern look and said to me, “come on, let's go back into the building and wait there.” Just as quickly as the boys appeared, they disappeared, fled on foot in different directions into the streets. “Crime está perto sempre” (crime is always near).

Crime is everywhere as Rio prepares to host a number of world events including the Rio Plus 20 Earth Summit in 2012, the World Cup in 2014, and the Summer Olympics in 2016. These global events are the impetus behind the governor's new strategy to ensure security for its citizens and visitors. Security had to be stepped up, the

city must guarantee a high level of public safety if international tourists are going to travel and spend money there. Tourist revenue for the country is expected to be very high. Governor Cabral's campaign to clean up the favelas, eliminating drug traffic and its associated violence was developed with the State Public Security Secretary Mariano Belatrame who is responsible for implementing the plan. The program objective includes setting up permanent police bases throughout the favelas, and integrating them into the neighborhoods with the hope of establishing government control there. The previous situation was one of self-monitoring, community policing, and cruel street justice. Official reports say that the program has permitted the return of teachers, doctors, nurses, and social workers to the favelas. But there is cynicism around these reports due to the need to project an image of security. These frequent reports sent to the media are part of a calculated strategy aimed at making people "feel" safe even if the reality of safety was questionable.

That same afternoon after the raid on Pavão-Pavãozinho, I walked with my companions south-east down the street away from the police cars until we arrived at the foot of the hill leading up to Chapéu Mangueira above Leme. This was another favela like Santa Marta, known to be safe. Tourists visit because of its prime South Zone location and, great ocean views. I was visiting because I had a friend who lived there. We took our time walking up the steep half-mile hill into the *comunidade*. After catching our breath at the top we decided to stop to have lunch at the local *pensão* (kitchen), black beans, rice and beef, all for only R\$6,00 each (US \$3.00). Meals were always cheaper in the favelas. Chairs and tables were outdoors near the entrance to the sports center that also housed the community kitchen where the *cozinheira* prepared meals daily. There

was a small wobbly table with an old TV resting on it, the kind with rabbit ear antennae and snowy images. It seemed to always be on the same channel. Perhaps it was the only channel that worked. Newscasters were reporting the gun-fight that had occurred just hours earlier noting that the sweep culminated in the killings of three drug traffickers, shot dead by the police. There were several others relaxing and having lunch at the pensão. All eyes and ears were fixed on the newscast; folks were curious and suspicious regarding the details of the drug raid and were commenting.

Everyone talked about violence in Rio. Four brown women wearing matching thin sleeveless blue work jackets and jeans were conversing about the shooting while watching the newscast. I said hello and made small talk before asking them whom they worked for; they replied, “the governor’s office.” I wondered if they were somehow a part of the governor’s new high profile presence in favelas and if so, what was their function? While there in Chapéu we noticed at least one police car driving along the main road inside the favela. Driving cars along favela roads posed problems because favelas were not built for automobile access. Streets are narrow, unpaved, ragged with dirt and stones, and most favela communities, like this one, were built on steep hillsides. Regular police presence inside favelas, even this one, was odd. This internal slightly civil style community policing was a new dynamic to me.

Even though police in Brazil were infamously known for shooting and killing favelados on a regular basis, they were not known for policing communities in a civil manner or providing protection for residents. The governor’s plan was in effect but I wondered how the community perceived the change. People had many opinions and theories about violence and police. When I engaged hip-hoppers in the favelas about



crime and the police, many referred to the 1988 American film, *Colors*. MV Bill, Gilberto, Celso, Arte, all said the film *Colors* was pivotal for them. Filmed Los Angeles, *Colors* depicted cops portrayed by Sean Penn and Robert Duvall, trying to mitigate gang violence between the Bloods and the Crips in South Central. The relationship between cops, gang members, and the community was like real life they said. This film was the topic of many conversations within Rio's hip-hop community and also the film that influenced MV Bill to become a rapper. More recently there was buzz on the streets about the 2007 film *Tropa de Elite* (Elite Squad) by José Padilha (*Bus 174*), based on the book by Brazilian sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares detailing real accounts of Brazil's elite police squad (BOPE) as they bust up drug gang violence in Rio's favelas. The film set in 1997 reveals violence and internal corruption in the force. Favelados and even those who did not live in favelas resonated with the film and the overwhelming theme I persistently heard from people was that the police were not to be trusted.

However, my friend Tati from CUFA's theater program who lived on the busy main street in CDD, she said she thought the governor's plan was good. Official police presence makes her feel safer. She happily called her community "the new City of God." Tati told me about returning home from church with her mother one evening and getting caught in a crossfire between cops and drug traffic. Tati and her mom ducked behind a car and waited for the flying bullets to cease, afraid but glad to see the police at work in her community. The police were pushing out the drug traffic and had to use violence to do it. She thinks most of the neighbors in City of God appreciate the presence of the police in the community.

Walking through the community we passed several officers sitting or standing but always with their weapons in clear view. Some were in cars slowly driving through the streets, watching, looking very alert. We walked past the police base, an old wood *barraca* (shack) with a cop on duty, sitting outside guarding it. Tati said the cops lived there and took turns guarding the house. Tati was upbeat and optimistic, very proud of her community. As for me, I wasn't sure I felt safe, but I did feel watched. The community cook, Aunt Tia, had a different opinion. As an older black Brazilian woman in her mid-fifties who had been around for a while she knew the goings and comings of life in the City of God and had opinions about lots of things related to drugs, violence, and politics. She operated the *pensão* next door to the neighborhood association building where CUFA was housed. I ate there frequently because her food was tasty and I liked talking with her. Tia called me "*Preta*" (black). I sat at one of her tables and talked for a while. "Preta," she said, "I don't trust the police and I don't think their presence here makes any difference at all." She said, "often times the police are corrupt." And she told me to be alert, "it may look like the drug traffic is gone, but they're still here running things behind the scenes. If a dealer can run things from behind bars, they can definitely run them from their hiding places."

Prior visits to Rio presented a different story about presence and contact between favelas and the police. Favelas were more akin to occupied territories. Police were external to communities, watching them, containing them, keeping an eye on residents but with the goal of protecting people outside of the territory from those who lived inside. Police institutions had not made the transition from protection of the State—their role under the military dictatorship—to protection of the citizens, especially poor citizens who

were dealt with as if they were enemies of the state. This style of policing persists even within the democracy police maintain vestiges of military dictatorship.

The very next day after the raid on Pavão-Pavãozinho *O Globo* (the Globe) newspaper (online May 22–23, 2009) and other Rio dailies plastered yesterday's story on its morning pages. "Three *bandidos* (outlaws) killed by police during favela drug raid." Bottles of champagne, marijuana, nine pistols, five machine guns, six grenades, a 12-caliber shotgun and drugs were confiscated. Photos taken of the surviving *bandidos* showed two of them hands tied behind their backs and sitting on the floor. Another showed three more handcuffed and standing near a table lined with weapons, champagne and drug paraphernalia (Motta 2009). They were all black and brown young men, the typical profile of street level drug traffickers, criminals and petty thugs in Rio; at least the typical profile of those who were policed, caught and arrested.

The governor's decision to heighten surveillance strictly within favelas when everyone knew that drug traffic and usage occurred just as frequently outside of favelas was problematic. Folk wisdom on the streets commonly argued that drug trafficking was more prevalent among Brazilians who lived outside of favelas, by the rich white "playboys" as they were called, or that the primary drug users were tourists out to have a good time. I had been inside favelas when obviously out of place foreign white guys showed up looking for something. Just today *O Globo* newspaper reported another case of the Military Police (PM) catching foreigners with drugs. Several corrupt officers were also caught bribing tourists for money to release the charges. This was a common event.

Rio: The cable 23 Battalion (Leblon) Parahyba Anderson Dias was arrested on the spot, on the afternoon of Wednesday, in the Leblon belvedere, demanding bribes from two tourists whose name and nationality were not disclosed. The foreigners

had been arrested with drugs by the PM inside the Rocinha favela in the early hours of Wednesday. They said the police asked for \$5,000 or \$10,000 not to record the occurrence. The tourists had been allowed to go to their hotel to get the money and deliver it to the PM, at 16h, in the gazebo. The two, however, denounced the attempted bribery in the Police Special Tourist Service Office. Police officers accompanied the action and arrested the PM in the act. Two other police officers of that battalion would also be involved, but have not yet been found. The case is being registered in Deat. [Mascarenhas, 2011]

But it didn't matter who the actual drug dealers and users were, the favelas were always suspect, the culprits, assumed guilty in every case and treated that way. In a 2005 report Amnesty International accused Brazil of "betrayal" of its poorest citizens who were actually more likely to be victims than perpetrators of crime (Goodwin 2005). Similar sentiments came from residents during this 2009 shoot-out. Letters poured into newspapers from concerned and angry residents of Pavão-Pavãozinho expressing their outrage about what happened in their community that morning. One particularly compelling letter in the paper came from a young favelada named Èrika Moura who wrote:

Today is more a day of terror, a camouflaged civil war that the less favored masses financed and paid for due to lack of resources. I will describe the scenes from today: children were going down to school and returning; construction workers were urbanizing the community; neighbors going to work; women returning or leaving their homes; children alone at home so that their parents could go out to earn sustenance; entire families held hostage from a type of operation where most of the time the injured are innocent children of social inequality. Everyone shouts, everyone runs, cries. Mothers want to go up the hill in the middle of the shooting; parents are searched and coerced when leaving for work because they don't have study education, pretty clothes, an assumption of a good reputation... if so, why are they living in this community?

I am a member of the Pavão-Pavãozinho / Cantagalo complex and today I was going to work and returned at 11:30. I was turned into a hostage from the operation and witnessed the panic of neighbors. A shower of bullets without direction came from helicopters that appeared from the gloomiest part of the horizon. No one knew where these bullets from above were going. They (police?) are behind the margins, they are receiving shots from outlaws, the people they

search for represents only three percent of the community, and for this, 97 percent must pay.

The community has 97 percent workers and they are not law-breakers, society judges without knowing. They are those who are not respected, they are coerced and humiliated, when a person is assumed to not have a good reputation and lives in the community, when they go down the hill they are delinquent until they prove otherwise.

I would like to propose that they who invented this type of operation, buy a house in the community, put their entire family, dear ones and loved ones there, including their successors, without security, and send a helicopter to come shooting. This is Russian roulette on the head of the poor masses. I don't know how I wrote this, after I finished witnessing everything I wrote with a soul filled with pain and suffering, for not being able to do anything to change the reality of my community. Érika Moura (2009)

Moura was obviously outraged at police and public officials but not blinded. Her letter was penned with pathos in the melee of the moment but her passion did not cloud her analysis. Regardless of whether or not this was a state drug clearance program, she nailed the issues; her social critique was on point. Moura asked reasonable questions of justice in her letter to O Globo. Why was her community always presumed guilty prior to any facts? Why didn't the lives of people in her community matter in comparison to the lives of others? Why would the police risk the lives of 97 percent of her community in search of a few bad guys? If it was true that 97 percent of Moura's community was made up of hardworking, law-abiding citizens, why would the police receive state sanction to swoop down upon an innocent 97 percent with helicopters and a barrage of bullets? Did the safety of that 97 percent of the population matter? She wrote the letter while the violence was occurring just outside her window uncovering a painful and ongoing reality of life in the favela. This was *not* a day unlike other days. It was an all too familiar day.

She describes being perceived each day as marginal before she even does or says anything, based solely on where she resides. They are *o marginal*.

“Marginal” is not simply about living at the margins of society, denoting place or space; *marginal* here in the Portuguese signifies something more heinous. It carries greater shame than it might in English. The people of Pavão-Pavãozinho are considered “delinquent,” scum from a slum, economically, morally, and ethically impoverished. There is a general perception that the periferia “naturally breeds a certain type of person—an uneducated, traditional, tragic figure with criminal tendencies. This is the *marginal*, a discursive and ideological imposition of ‘natural’ hierarchy based on sociogeographical dynamics” (Pardue 2008c). Moura and her neighbors were instantly judged as less human “Others” and as a result “Russian roulette was played upon their heads, upon the heads of the poor masses where innocent children of social inequality are the primary injured.” Moura called this a civil war waging within her city against all those who reside in marginalized spaces. Her community was “judged without knowing,” “disrespected” and “humiliated” for “not having a good reputation” and for living on the hillside. Moura challenged those public officials who make the decisions to bring their families, purchase houses there and live on the hill to see how it feels to be judged, humiliated, and shot upon daily. Come see how it feels to have your family and friends live in constant danger, not at the hands of thieves, drug traffickers, or gangsters, but by the external strong arm of the police who were the face of a state that did not care for its poorest citizens.

Clear words penned by a resident, not a trained social scientist, but Moura unraveled the core themes at work in the criminalization of poverty. Folks in the favelas were presumed lazy, guilty and undeserving of the most basic human rights and services.

A social identity constructed by outsiders, one in which their own country betrayed them. Part of the work of CUFA was to act as mediators between the police and community residents in the favelas where CUFA was present. Essentially they mediate between state and citizen. They also mediate preventively catching youth before they are lured into the ranks of criminality since many young males in particular turn to crime as a way to live. CUFA teaches the young that there are options, and that they need to know how to respond to the fact that they are always presumed guilty, stigmatized because of where they live and what they look like, especially if they are black, brown, and male.

One night Franco (16), the young cousin of Jalene returned to the apartment appearing distressed. Jalene looked at him and knew something was wrong, “o que aconteceu?” (what happened?). He responded, “eu fui roubado” (I was robbed). While on the bus some boys roughed him up and took the only money he had on him which about \$R5 (US \$2.50). Looking defeated Franco sighed, hunched his shoulders and went to bed. Jalene herself had been robbed at least three times in the year that I was there. Once she had just left the bank in broad daylight when two young men walked up closely on each side of her, one showed her a knife he had hidden in his jacket. He told her to smile and to give him all the money he’d just seen her withdraw at the bank. Another time she was waiting at a bus stop in the evening on the way home from work when two young men pushed her to the ground, took her bag and started going through it, they took her wallet and cell phone and threw the bag back at her. She sprained her foot in the fall and had to wear an orthopedic boot for weeks. In each case Jalene’s family never called the police to report the incident. They said that was a waste of time. The family lived as if violence was just a normal part of life and they had to try to avoid it, maneuver it, or

manipulate it in some way. They just had to suffer the consequences and move on with life. Crime perpetrated by both young street kids and older thugs was prevalent. Each day before I left the apartment, Jalene's mother warned, "*cuidado!*" (be careful!).

Walter de Oliveria (2000) a Brazilian psychiatrist and public health worker tells one of his own stories of witnessing a young police officer running after a "skinny, ragged-clothed black kid" with his gun drawn. The kid had just stolen a watch from a man. When the cop caught the kid and found the watch on him, the victim was thankful but hesitant to identify the kid as the thief. The young cop let the kid go and explained to Dr. Oliveira "the kids who steal are not the ones to be blamed, it is a social problem." He explained how abandonment and neglect create "street kids" and the kids' involvement with drugs and street crime. "After all, if anyone is to blame, it is our corrupt system that makes the children become marginals and forces us to do certain things. If I was in their situation I probably would have to do the same." This young officer was doing his job, but he understood the systemic issues as work that created little "street urchins" who would eventually grow older and become gang members and drug dealers policing their own favela communities, a new generation of soldiers on the hill. The vast majority are black and brown.

### Violence and Race

Blackness as inferior and undesirable is writ large in the country. This fact poignantly impacts every other systemic and social reality of black youth. They die early. The majority of street children, working children and children involved in drug trafficking, theft and child prostitution are more likely to be black than white. Consequently, the children most at risk of police violence are also black.



A detailed study of resistance reports of the city of Rio de Janeiro focusing on the years 1993 to 1996 revealed that the majority of victims of police violence were young males (15 to 29 years, with emphasis on the age group between 20 and 24 years), and that 64% of them were black. In the State of Rio de Janeiro, according to data of the Secretariat of Public Safety for the year 2005, the police was responsible for 14.2% of intentional violent deaths. The resistance reports say the registries of deaths resulting from confrontations with the police, rose 280% in six years (from 289 in 1999 to 1,089 in 2005), demonstrating an outstanding increase in lethal violence practiced by the police concentrated on black males (Ramos 2006).

Mitchell and Wood (1999) look into claims of racism as it relates to police brutality. They use empirical data from Brazil's 1988 National Household Survey to support the popularly held perception that Afro-Brazilians receive less protection and more police brutality than do whites in Brazil. Their survey uses a stratified random selection design collecting socio-demographic and broader data from approximately 80 thousand homes. Their research also includes historical material from the work of Thomas Holloway (1993) mentioned above, and others, to show a historical bias against poor and non-white persons in Brazil. They conclude that Afro-Brazilians are not treated as equal citizens as seen in the data based on police behavior and their attitudes towards Afro-Brazilians.

Chevigny (1995) adds that the distribution of income in Brazil is radically unequal and unjust. The regions of Brazil are unequal in wealth, with the states of the north and northeast mired in the most poverty (1995:148). The extremes between the very wealthy and the very poor are striking. "Brazilians have traditionally had very little faith in the

equity and fairness of their justice system. Interviews and public opinion surveys are loaded with striking condemnations, such as ‘In Brazil justice only functions to favor the rich,’ or more simply, ‘it’s a joke!’” (1995:150). Many cops are black in Rio. Policing is a job most do not desire. Those who end up policing are there because they could not acquire other legal means of employment. They are poorly trained, poorly equipped, and poorly paid. They are also exploited earning less than a living wage the system ensures police corruption. Cops will find other ways to make money even if those methods are illegal. The cyclical nature of systemic violence with the variants of poverty, gender, racism, and police corruption persists. Salo (38), a white Brazilian who teaches in one of universities in Rio said it this way “the system in Brazil makes it difficult for anyone to succeed. It works against people, not with people.” If this was the perception of a white male in the country, it can only be magnified when the variables of race, male youth, and poverty are thrown into the analysis.

Hip-hop, gangs, violence, and police have tussled with one another since hip-hop’s inception. The thorny relationship between urban policing and black males go back to the days of 1970s gang warfare, urban dislocation, economic impotence and white flight. Afrika Bambaataa’s Zulu Nation formed in response to urban policing and gang violence. The variables were all the same according to Celso Athayde, only the countries and decades were different. Postindustrial residue, state retreat, limited resources, sharpened class and race divides, stigmatized, marginalized, impoverished, and overcrowded, the Bronx was like a favela. Black and brown youth looked for ways to make sense of their existence as violence of one sort of another always seemed to follow poverty. From Brazil to U.S. ghettos, Vargas (2008) labels it all attempts at transnational

black genocide and applauds black community members who consistently find ways to resist. Sometimes those methods of resistance involve gang membership.

Gang violence expert, John M. Hagedorn (2008) states in his study, “gangs are shaped by racial and ethnic oppression, as well as poverty and slums, and are reactions of despair to persisting inequality” (xxiv). Youth gang activity had returned to the Bronx circa 1968 and Afrika Bambaataa became another so-called “menace to society” like other males his age. He rose to leadership in the Black Spades. Violence, turf wars, and drug abuse was life as normal, alongside hyper police presence and police brutality. In order to get gang warfare under control, police were often involved in shoot-outs against gangs, or caught in the middle of a gang on gang battle. They were labeled “pigs,” back then police were not trusted and were often viewed as part of the problem of urban gang violence.

Eventually Afrika Bambaataa got turned on to peace and gave up violence. What followed was the organization of a collective of hip-hop artists, many of whom were former gang members. This historical narrative was the impetus for Celso and MV Bill starting CUFA in Rio. Drug traffic as an informal economic alternative intensely fueled gang membership in U.S. cities, and in the favelas of Brazil. It was fast money, no schooling necessary. Policing in the hood and the favela was severe and presumptuous even when gangs and drugs were not a threat, but with the presence of drugs, the police amped up their approach. Males in particular, complain of undue harassment by police officers daily.

This theme is frequently the content of rap lyrics by young black and brown males from the margins. When hip-hop began eroding into gangster expression in the 1980s its earliest raps were violent responses to police harassment and brutality in the hood. The

rap lyrics were almost as brutal as the brutality because males were criminalized before the facts, due to poverty and its stigmatization. The gangsta' rap coming out of the west coast U.S. was some of the harshest and youth in Rio were struck by the similarities. MV Bill talked to me about rappers Ice Cube's "Fuck Tha Police," and Ice-T's *Cop Killer*, hearing those raps as a youngster and how much he could relate to the lyrical stories. His perception of cops was based on that same abuse and brutality he saw all his life growing on in the favela.

Ice-T's *Cop Killer* (1990) is about a man who is so enraged by police corruption and violence that he decides to take the law into his own hands, killing as many corrupt cops as he could. The song caused such public controversy that the entire album was recalled and later re-released without *Cop Killer* in the line-up. But gangster rap did not desist and was hugely popularized in response to persistent police harassment of males of color in cities. It was 1988 when west coast rap group NWA released their *Straight Outta Compton* CD which featured rapper Ice Cube's lyrical "Fuck Tha Police." The album hit a nerve and went gold within weeks. Ice Cube said he was rapping "black man truth," the reality of being black, male, suspect, and unwarrantedly harassed by the police.

Fuck tha police. Comin straight from the underground  
 Young nigga got it bad cuz I'm brown. And not the other color so police think  
 They have the authority to kill a minority. Fuck that shit, cuz I ain't tha one. For a  
 punk muthafucka with a badge and a gun. To be beatin on, and thrown in jail. We  
 could go toe to toe in the middle of a cell. To the police I'm sayin fuck you punk.  
 Readin my rights and shit, it's all junk. Pullin out a silly club, so you stand with a  
 fake assed badge and a gun in your hand. (NWA, 1988)

August 1, 1988 in South Central Los Angeles, NWA's neighborhood, experienced a similar invasion to the one that happened in Rio's Pavão-Pavãozinho favela. Eighty-eight LAPD officers on foot, in conjunction with several helicopters overhead turned

their guns toward two apartment buildings at the corner of 39th Street and Dalton Avenue in South Central Los Angeles. Newspapers called it a drug raid:

Cops stormed through the two buildings, taking axes to furniture and walls, overturning washing machines and stoves, smashing mirrors, toilets and stereos, rounding up residents and beating dozens of them. They spray painted 'LAPD rules' and 'Rollin 305 Die' on apartment walls. One resident was forced wet and naked out of the shower and forced to watch her two toddlers taken away while cops destroyed her apartment with sledgehammers. 'We weren't just searching for drugs. We were delivering a message that there was a price to pay for selling drugs and being a gang member,' said one policeman who participated in the raid. (Chang 2005a; Garcia 1989; Mitchell 2001a)

Four days later the Los Angeles Times reported that the LAPD drug raid on those apartment buildings was "a total disaster, a shocking disaster" (Oswald 1988). None of the drug dealers lived in the two buildings that were raided and only small amounts of crack cocaine and marijuana were recovered. Nearly two dozen of the buildings residents were rendered homeless because of a raid that produced essentially nothing (Chang 2005; Oswald 1988). Raids, harassment and violence by police were justified in order to restrain and contain some communities and protect others. Three years later Ice Cube was inspired to write other raps that dealt with police violence and the racial tensions between the black community and Korean store owners in his neighborhood.

The album, *Death Certificate* featured the cut, "Black Korea" which was in response to ongoing conflict between the two groups, but two very specific events compelled Ice Cube to write. The March 16, 1991 killing of 15-year-old Latasha Harlins by Korean-American storekeeper Soon Ja Du at the Empire Liquor market and deli in South Central Los Angeles. Harlins was black and from the community. And two weeks earlier, March 3rd Rodney King had been beaten by five L.A. police officers soon after being released from a short stint in prison for trying to rob a Korean-American store in

the neighborhood. By October 31, 1991 *NWA's Death Certificate* was released and six months later, April 29, 1992 Rodney King's case against the police officers use of excessive force would find those five police officers acquitted of charges. So many negative racial events within a one-year time span created a boiling cauldron that was soon to blow. Upon the release of the Rodney King verdict, the city of Los Angeles exploded (Chang 2005). Los Angeles and the favelas of Rio had a great deal in common.

Source magazine editor, James Bernard, defended Ice Cube when national police departments, record retailers and advertisers called for a boycott of the *Death Certificate* album. Bernard wrote, "yes, Ice Cube is very angry, and he expresses that anger in harsh, blunt and unmistakable terms. But the source of his rage is very real. Many in the black community, particularly Los Angeles, Cube's home, feel as if it's open season on Blacks with the Rodney King assault and the recent murder of a young Black girl by a Korean merchant" (Bernard 1991; Chang 2005a). In his *Fight the Power* manifesto, Chuck D wrote:

Gangsta rhymes do have a legitimate reflection. They talk about certain realities of street life. One of the best writers of our time, Ice Cube, was very clear in explaining aspects of that life early on... Should Gangsta Rap be scrutinized by society, scapegoated, picked on, and censored? I don't believe a story shouldn't be told. I believe every story should be told. As a matter of fact, I see Gangsta Rap as potentially being a plea for help, expressing a viewpoint that doesn't get represented by the mainstream. Certain aspects of it should be commended for being informative and, until the problems in the poorer communities get fixed, certain elements of what's termed 'Gangsta Rap' will not disappear. [1998]

Ice Cube and millions of young urbanites from west coast to east coast knew what favela residents in Rio knew all too well, that the police were not objective enforcers of the law and public safety; that economics, race, gender and space, were integral parts of who was policed, why and how. Conditions in Rio's favelas were too similar to

conditions in Compton. Ice Cube was a product of hip-hop culture when it was going through its adolescence during the 1980s era of neoliberal Reaganomics, increased poverty, and economic alienation. Post World War II U.S. cities, “once magnets of economic wealth and opportunity had become desolate, jobless reservations for the poor in America’s own version of Apartheid” (Massey 1993; Sugrue 1994). Urban dwellers were forced to seek out unconventional ways to survive. The informal underground economies offered options and fostered creativity. U.S. cities had become the favelas of the so-called first world. Chang writes:

Hip-Hop was close to the underground economy because, more often than not, it was being made by youths who were not exploitable, but expendable. The flatland ghettos of South Central had more in common with the distant hill-side favelas of Rio de Janeiro, ‘hoods switched off from the global network, than with the walled estates of Beverly Hills just miles away. The main difference, though, was the proximity of the L.A. ‘hoods to the heart of the most advanced culture in the world.” [2005:317]

In his rap of rage, Ice Cube posed the same rational questions that favela resident Moura posed in her letter to *O Globo* newspaper in Rio. Why was his community policed so harshly and judged without knowing. Didn’t their lives matter? Solomon Comissiong considers the intersection of being black, male, and poor in a racist society that does not value black existence and does not think twice about deleting black males from society. He writes:

Year by year, nothing tangibly changes in America regarding the deadly issue of rampant police brutality within myriad communities of color. Unarmed black and brown people continue to be systematically brutalized by rogue state sponsored police officers. This issue is far from anything new to the fabric of American society. The so-called multi-colored “tapestry” of America is stained with blood and tears. Unfortunately as each year passes more and more unnecessary blood spills onto the already tainted cloth. Police officers, for generations, and before them gangs of white men (is there a difference?), have systematically hunted down black men as if they were wild game. There needed to be no “real crime”;

the color of their skin was crime enough. Black men in American have always been persona non grata. This is justification to treat black men as if they were canines. In several instances, killing a black man will get you less time than if you were to take the life of a dog. This sadistic and inhumane culture is a part of the contradictory culture of the U.S.—accepted by everything from the corporate media to government itself. [2010]

From the U.S. to other international ghetto zones acrimonious unjust policing of urban areas is widespread. But the situation in Brazil is even more extreme. Amnesty International's reports have called the police "death squads" and "extermination squads" groups of rogue military police accused of the mass murder of people living in favelas. The term "militarization" is frequently used to refer to the style of policing in Brazil. One woman said the term is used to refer to the ways police clampdown on drug trafficking gangs, which they view as a "war" in which local communities and residents are considered "enemies." Mega police operations are frequently carried out in the favelas of Rio in which large numbers of heavily-armed police swoop down on neighborhoods causing many deaths, including those of children and elderly persons (Frayssinet 2007; Goodwin 2005). The swoop down we witnessed in Pavão-Pavãozinho was an example of that policing style. Amnesty International reported:

Despite government proposals for reform including a number of initiatives by the federal government's Special Secretariat of Human Rights, levels of human rights violations in Brazil continued to be extremely high. There were consistent reports from around the country of corrupt, violent and discriminatory policing. In shanty towns policing operations were usually seen as invasive and repressive. Military and civil police often contributed to violence and crime in poor and marginalized areas, which remained focal points for extreme levels of armed violence, often related to drug trafficking. Across the country, "death squads" continued to participate in the extra judicial executions of criminal suspects in situations sometimes described as "social cleansing" as well as in the context of organized crime, often with the direct involvement of former and active police officers." [www.amnestyusa.org 2005]



Brazil has a relatively small national police force, especially in comparison to its size. It is a large country, occupying almost half the landmass of South America. Security is a function of state government. Police are organized on a statewide rather than a national or municipal basis, which is different from the U.S. Cities are policed by state forces. States split the police functionally between the military police (PM) who do the work of patrol and order keeping, performing service functions, making summary arrests, and stopping persons for questioning, and the civil police, who run the station houses and investigate crimes. The PM is under civilian control, although there has been a military impulse in their organization. A *Polícia Civil* (the Civil Police) are the group who appear most often in favelas (Chevigny 1995; Perlman 2010) also militaristic in style, a remnant from the country's years of military control.

Jorge Zaverucha (2000) suggests that police brutality persists in Brazil because Brazil is not yet a true democracy, and that fact shows itself most evidently in how the policing apparatus operates. He calls Brazil a "semi-democracy" pretending to be a democracy. According to Zaverucha the police force is really a military structure acting as a police force. They continue to use coercive methods and concepts exposing their true military character. Something as mundane as car accidents in Rio result in police on the scene quickly drawing rifles, pointed at the drivers of the vehicles. I witnessed this myself on several occasions. Dressed in tan military fatigues, they look like soldiers of war. It is a frightening scene. Paul Chevigny offers supporting material for this observation. "During the military dictatorship that began in 1964 and lasted, with a gradual easing of repression toward the end, almost twenty years, the state police bodies were taken over by the armed forces. The civil police and the military police, which was

formed out of earlier proto-military units, were reshaped by the magnet of the military dictatorship, fighting both crime and subversion through torture and deadly force (1995:145).

Robinson and Scaglione (1987) examined the origins of police tracing back to Europe. Their study of social control in primitive societies and the eventual organization of professional social control groups in industrial societies, points to the professionalization of police evolving as classes evolved. From its inception, the function of organized policing was for the purpose of protecting the dominant classes. Their study also highlights policing as having a double and contradictory function, since most of the police were usually co-equals with the people they were policing. In other words, the police were not members of the dominant classes themselves, and yet they were defenders of the dominant class protecting them from members of the cop's own class. A cognitive dissonance must result.

The police in Rio are often favela residents themselves. Their salaries are meager. In a casual conversation with a cop in Rio in 2006, he willingly offered information about his monthly salary saying he earned R300 (US \$150) per month. "We are poor too, just like the people on the hillside." Perlman (2010) writes that many police grew up on the hill and still live there, it's the only place they can afford to live. She reports policeman earnings averaging 400 reais per month (US \$200). They are underpaid which is fertile ground for corruption, and serve the contradictory function of co-equal of the people they police, and defender of the elites who fear the poor. According to Captain Pimentel, former Rio SWAT instructor interviewed in the film *Bus 174* police in Rio are underprepared and lack skill, only SWAT teams are the trained professionals.

Today, in Rio, those who become police officers are people who couldn't get a regular job. They've usually been unemployed for a long time and had no choice but to become a police officer. It's a job, Rio's police force is poorly armed, poorly trained, and lack self-esteem. The police officer has no idea what he's being trained for. He thinks his duty is to arrest and kill criminals. [Lacerda 2002]

CUFA's social worker Renata (26) told me that besides living there themselves, one of the only reasons police may enter the favela is to purchase their own drugs from the boy soldiers who are also dealers. "This happens every day." So there is dissonance regarding the police. "They are your enemies, but some may also be your customers." She added that many of these boy soldiers take the protection of their drugs more seriously than they take their own lives. "They know they will die from the life of drug trafficking one day, but they do not care." Renata had the dangerous role of mediating between CUFA's youth and drug traffickers. She knew who the dealers were and was known to go to them and ask them to ease up on particular youth or their families, or even to help out the community in some way. Celso called Renata "a rainha das ruas" (the queen of the streets) because she had the respect of youth, their families, and drug dealers. They listened to her. The relationship between CUFA and drug traffic was respectable and cordial. The relationship with the police was not always as respectable. Expectations were minimal between the two groups, police and favelados.

Harassment of the poor by police in Brazil has a long history. Thomas Holloway (1993) examines this dynamic offering historical analysis from extensive documentation from the state archive of Santa Catarina which traced police activity in the area from 1840 to 1889. The 19th century police department kept large detailed records of their daily activities ranging from patrols, investigations and their results, the prison population and various aspects of city life. Holloway's work reveals the police

department's primary role as preservers of the status quo, maintaining social order, protecting persons, property and resources of the political and economic elite, and suppression, repression of black slaves and other poor classes. His study reveals sharp class and race divisions, which remains a reality in Brazil today. The police are still protecting the properties of the wealthy from the poor with no apparent consideration of protecting the poor from each other, or from the elite. The poor are left to fend for themselves which could be why up until Governor Cabral's 2009 drug clearance program, police rarely entered favela territories for the sake of protection. From the state's point of view, there was nothing or no one to protect there. Not lives or property. Their lives didn't matter, and they possessed nothing worthy of protection.

Reminiscent of a carefully crafted system of "divide and conquer" once used to keep African slaves in check during slavery years in the Americas. The system works against similar people and class groups organizing to revolt. If you are able to develop ways to divide your enemies you can divert their focus away from a higher critique indicating the real enemy, thereby controlling and maintaining them. Impoverished police and boy soldiers in the favelas are unlikely to come together in a truce that would permit them to locate a common enemy. Paul Chevigny (1995) cites the military police (PM) in Brazil as being preceded by the militias and organized during the years of slavery to keep order in the streets. "They always tried to control the poor by violence" he writes "insupportable in a civilized country...the old tradition of beating the slave has unfortunately not disappeared" (1995:151). Citizens should expect to be protected by the police, after all that is the job of police. But in Brazil favelas are treated like occupied

territories, and its residents like suspicious foreign objects. Residents have no choice but to create ways to police their own communities, protect themselves and their properties. KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions rapped, “you were put here to protect us, but who protects us from you?”

Who Protects Us from You?  
 “You were put here to protect us  
 But who protects us from you?  
 Every time you say “That’s illegal”  
 Doesn’t mean that that’s true (Uh-huh)  
 Your authority’s never questioned  
 No-one questions you...  
 Lookin’ through my history book  
 I’ve watched you as you grew  
 Killin’ blacks and callin’ it the law  
 (Bo! Bo! Bo!) And worshipping Jesus too  
 There was a time when a black man  
 Couldn’t be down wit’ your crew  
 Now you want all the help you can get  
 Scared? Well ain’t that true  
 You were put here to protect us  
 But who protects us from you?  
 Or should I say, who are you protecting?  
 The rich? the poor? Who?” (KRS-One, BDP, 1989)

When citizens are stigmatized, under surveillance, not protected in their own country, contempt fosters between those residents and the state, in this case favelados and the police. The police show up as the face of the state; the state is intolerant of their existence, systemically and physically violent. The people on the front lines are those who spend the most time on the streets, male youth. The police “are the most visible government presence in these communities, and they contribute to the problem by their unwarranted use of lethal force, technically referred to as extrajudicial violence. Community residents consider the police worse than the traffic because police enter favelas prepared to kill anything that moves and leave once they are finished” (Perlman

2010). The cyclical reality is systemically and interpersonally violent. MV Bill's "Traficando Informação" (Information Trafficking) tells the story:

Welcome to my sinister world; make sure you know how to get in  
 Drugs, police, revolver, not allowed, make sure you know how to avoid it  
 If you don't believe what I say  
 Come here and check out death from close up  
 You will see that justice, here, is done by the bullet  
 Your life in the slum is not worth anything...  
 And when the police arrives, everyone is scared  
 The description of the culprit is: from the slum, poor, black!  
 In the slum, every black guy who shaves his head  
 is confused with a drug dealer, bicycle-thief... (MV Bill)

The rest of the story from chapter two regarding MV Bill receiving sharp criticism from the public after his first single was released, *Soldado do morro* (soldier on the hillside) because the video featured Bill standing alongside well-known real life drug dealers. People said Bill was condoning drugs and violence. In response, while in concert MV Bill pulled out a handgun on stage and showed it to the audience. Then he laid it down on a table and covered it with a towel. He said he did it to represent the fact that people inside the favelas want an end to violence as much as those outside of them. He later admitted it was just a toy gun, but he made his point.

Favela families had to contend with the realities of violence in young lives daily. It was amazing the way kids coolly negotiated danger. They were quick and adept at knowing when to move, when to run, when to duck and when to stay indoors, but no one liked having to live with violence every single day.

One afternoon I was sitting inside the neighborhood association building talking with one the social worker. Renata was explaining her work to me. In the middle of the conversation we heard gunshots outside. I looked at her startled, and asked "is everything ok?" She was calm. Suddenly a little black boy wearing a backpack briskly entered the

room where were sitting and quickly shut the door behind him. He just stood there a few minutes. Renata got up and peeked outside. Within five minutes things got quiet outside, the little boy nodded and left. He was en route from school to home and ducked inside the building when he heard the gunshots and then exited, and continued on his way home after the shots ceased. It was as if he was accustomed to doing this. No one yelled or screamed in the streets. Folks would just scatter and reconvene after things returned to normal.

Another afternoon I was sitting outside the neighborhood association building talking with some of the kids about rap and MV Bill. They were all crowding around me giggling and trying to speak into the microphone of my tape recorder. Suddenly we heard gunshots but couldn't decipher where they were coming from and which direction they were headed. The kids scattered or dropped down to the ground. I followed their lead. It was just a minute or so but felt painfully long, and then things resumed as if nothing had happened. On another occasion I was leaving the community after dark, a theater production had just ended. I rarely left so late, preferring to depart CDD before nightfall. But the streets were filled with people and my walk to the bus was only a few blocks to the *praça* (plaza). I walked past a small group of black teenage boys standing in a huddle near the corner, and noticed them twirling two pearl handled handguns, as if practicing how to do tricks with the weapons. The possibility and reality of violence was always near.

In his work on two meanings of violence, Dustin Howes (2008) explores two contrasting types of violence, the first is associated with the manipulation and destruction of the body. The second type is associated with “profound fissures in our expectations as

to how we ought to interact with one another.” He calls this “intersubjective violence” “which can consist of a word, a gesture or a look, either between individuals or as supported by institutions. Such violence can inspire fear, strike a core of one’s identity, or make a way of living and being impossible even without physical limitation or destruction.” (2008:3). Simply stated, violence is institutional. In ‘The Force of Law’ Derrida draws on Socrates and Benjamin suggesting that the law itself, and the police as an embodiment of the law, are indicative of violence. Yes, physical violence is an issue, but Derrida suggests that the simple existence of a particular set of government strictures can be violent. Law can be violent simply by embodying a way of being as opposed to physically punishing or harming citizens.

Put another way, Alice McIntyre (2000) in her work with inner-city youth, highlights the multidimensionality of violence, naming four types: interpersonal, educational, structural, and environmental. Interpersonal is the one youth are consciously aware of and experience most immediately. Young people see and talk about physical fights, knives and guns daily. The other systemic violence result from direct or indirect decisions made by elite groups of people working within and through economic, political, and other societal systems. These could be through underfunded schools, under resourced communities, environmentally polluted and contaminated neighborhoods, causing major health issues and other social maladies. Violence is broader than just physical or interpersonal it is also structural, multidimensional, and complex. Often the systemic effects of violence have more far reaching effects than the physical. Physical wounds may heal; structural wounds are recycled and endemic.



One way structural violence shows itself is in the fact that Brazil has a higher per capita GNP than any other Latin American country (except Uruguay) but its distribution of wealth is highly skewed. The wealthiest 20 percent of the population earned 65 percent of the country's total income, leaving only 12 percent for the poorest half. The wealthiest 10 percent of the population earned 30 times more than the average income of the most impoverished 40 percent. Forty-three percent of the total land area is owned by 1 percent of the population (*Latinamerica* 1996). The economic disparity that exists between different segments of Brazilian society has its roots in regional inequalities and racial discrimination. The effects of colonization and oppression linger. During Brazil's "Economic Miracle" of the 1970s, government funds and foreign loans flowed into the industries of the south, resulting in improved standards of living and employment opportunities in the area of the country where Rio is located. The aim of the Brazilian government to achieve economic growth at all costs led to a decrease in spending for health care, social programs, and education initiatives (Inciardi 1998). This is state retreat and systemic violence revealing itself in the way citizens were alienated by the state in favor of economic growth.

Structural violence is displayed in the lived realities of millions of children who reside on hillside favelas in homes made of wattle-and-daub, a mixture of sand and clay, or pieces of cardboard, aluminum, wood and cinder blocks. Homes are often swept away by hillside mudslides or other natural disasters. Public schooling is often inadequate and parental wages well below poverty level, most adults working as house cleaners, garbage men, street vendors, cooks or drivers. Many are beggars. The violence of structural disadvantage and social disorganization lead many children down into the streets of the

city looking for work, food and money to help their families. They are young, unsupervised and unprotected. Few places have reported as many children on the street than Brazil. In 1997 less exaggerated estimates ranged around 8 million between the ages of 5 and 18 (Inciardi 1998). In 2003 Oxfam approximated 7 million street children in Brazil. The numbers are alarming. This army of unsupervised children surge the rates of theft, drug trafficking and child prostitution in the city.

It is often the male teenagers who become the guardians and protectors in the favelas. Many fathers are absent leaving the ubiquitous female-headed homes, lack of protective services, and petty street thugs, teenage boys fill in the gaps, making money by selling drugs and patrolling favela streets. They also watch out for single mothers and young children. In one edition of the 2002 film *City of God*, real documentary footage at the end showed a young mother and her pre-teen son from the Titular favela talking about who they trust and why. “We trust the drug dealers, we don’t trust the police. Police are corrupt but drug dealers put food on our tables, get medicine for sick children, repair our houses, and pay for burials when people die without insurance” (Meirelles 2002). The drug dealers in the documentary were wearing ski masks because of the cameras, but they gave their ages which ranged between 13 and 19. They positioned themselves as providers, performing services for their communities, doing the work the state didn’t do. They view the police as opponents; the enemies from whom they had to protect themselves.

Salita (35) was from Rio but living in the U.S. due to marriage with an American man. She was visiting her family in Rio so we got together for drinks and chat. I wondered about her views on the hill soldiers, violence and favelas. “Favela gangs are

not heroes the way some people like to make them out to be, they are thugs who force people to live in fear and under harsh conditions. They claim to help people but what they really do is oppress people. If honest decent folks don't want to help the drug dealers they are punished. They don't have a choice in the matter and therefore it is oppression. If a drug dealer tells a family to hide drugs in their home they must do it even if they don't want to. How is this liberatory? How is this helping out?" Salita was angry at the way drug traffickers are often portrayed as heroes and helpers vs. oppressors. But I asked her about structures of violence and mentioned that many of these soldiers had limited options and that was what was making them choose crime over honest work. She disagreed saying everybody had options, and they needed to learn to choose the right ones.

But clearly, one result of structural violence was that these teenagers had most likely been working in one form or another since they were 5 and 6 years old. As children they had worked in the streets begging from tourists, shining shoes or running errands for business people. I frequently stepped over thin black boys sleeping on Copacabana sidewalks in the mornings that I was there. They were sleeping where they worked. When daylight arose they would awake and begin begging, robbing, hustling businesses, tourists, and people walking the busy streets. I had many brief chats with these young street hustlers. They were smart, very cute, and cunning. These kids would run barefoot across the huge six lane highway that is Avenida Atlantica in the South Zone. I was in a taxi one evening when the driver almost hit a tiny boy who was zipping in between the fast moving cars trying to get across the six lanes. The kid was quick but we barely

missed hitting him. They always made me nervous zipping in, out, and in between fast moving cars on multilane highways.

One night I met Jorge as I was walking on the avenue looking at the arts and wares of street vendors. He was brown, about nine years old with bare feet and sweet face. Jorge was meandering amongst the vendors then quietly he slipped up beside me and started talking. I couldn't understand his fast paced Portuguese so I just looked at him. He spoke again assuming perhaps I didn't hear him. When I finally spoke he looked stunned. I was obviously a foreigner, not Brazilian. So Jorge asked me for money to buy some food. I asked where he lived and where his parents were. He said he had no parents and he lived on the street. Well Jorge, I said, "there's a church I know that might be able to help you and it's right around the corner" and I pointed him toward the nearest refuge I knew, that was the Leme Catholic church where a Friar there fed and worked with street kids. As these kids grow older and their childhood charm slips away, they search for other options to make money; the most viable option being drug trafficking.

With the governor's new plan, things may be a little better, but drugs are still prevalent in Rio. And violence is still a daily reality. With former unwillingness of the government to put forth serious efforts to stop the importation of illegal drugs into the community, and with police ineffectiveness evidenced by fear, inactivity and corruption, favelas become marketplaces for the sale of drugs inside and outside of the community. A stroll through a favela places one face to face with drug use, drug sales and weapons possession, all in broad daylight, hidden from no one. Drug distribution becomes employment and self-determination for youth who are willing to work hard.

Of poor urban youth Leith Mullings (2001) writes, “young people don’t have an anti-work ethic... Those kids are out doing the crack thing, that’s work... They have a sophisticated understanding of management, organization, distribution, marketing, and competition. But it’s all geared to the wrong thing.” She also argues that these are desperate people born into unfortunate situations, at the mercy of national and global processes they did not create. When governing authorities neglect the poor, the poor respond in desperate ways that usually mean trouble for authorities. If they aren’t selling drugs, policing their communities, or going to school, favela youth roam the streets. Joseph Page (1995) breaks down the street youth population into at least two categories, “those who actually live on the streets and sleep on the sidewalks, under viaducts or in other sheltered locations, and those who sleep at home but roam the streets during the day. Some work, some play, some beg, some sniff glue, and some engage in criminal activity that range from petty theft to armed assault to an occasional murder” (260). The children’s lives are constantly at risk and the factors of that risk are multiple and various.

Alongside street hustling, theft and drug sales, prostitution is another way children make money for themselves or their families. Many young prostitutes ultimately turn to drug use, seeking ways to mask pain and escape reality. Inhalants, coca paste, marijuana, and crack cocaine offer temporary relief from the brutal conditions of everyday life. One young female observed “when I was prostituting at the boarding house, my father would go there and want to pay me to have sex with him. I would never do it and every time he would leave, I would smoke a lot of marijuana to try and forget the things he would say.” In cases of abuse and dysfunction like this one, many children leave home for good. But these runaways and street children were not picked up on the

streets by authorities or social services. They were left to fend for themselves; which exposed them to the mercy of pimps, drugs dealers, and corrupt police officers who beat and rape them. Rather than support the young, the system further abused them. They are forced to make bad choices in the face of real and perceived minimal options.

In the touristy areas I used to stand on Avenida Atlantica's sidewalk at night and watch the scene. Young girls scantily clad in tight clothing jumping in and out of cars. It was obvious what was going on. Some of them appeared to be young boys dressed as girls, making money to support themselves, their families, or drug habits. One humid night even I myself was approached. A black male who looked to be in his early twenties hiding behind a palm tree in the darkness noticed me sitting alone and beckoned me to come to him. I looked at him. He whispered loudly, said "pssss, vem aqui" (come here). I shook my head no. He finally slithered away but kept looking back, perhaps hoping I'd change my mind. And the discotech on the Avenue called *Help* I learned was really a cover for prostitution. I sat across the street from *Help* at night and watched men, many of them tourists, come, go and linger. Young girls appearing no older than 16 also came and went during the wee hours of the night, as I sat and thought about the roots of why this type of violence was happening.

The very first time I entered a favela, the glare of structural violence struck me in the face. It was 2005, my first time in Rio and Celso Athayde took my friends and I on a mini-tour of the marvelous city. We stopped by three of the favelas where CUFA was active, Pedro do Sapo, Acari, and Cidade de Dues. As we were getting closer to Acari, Celso turned to the backseat and said, "roll down your windows." The car windows were tinted and he said if someone drives through with tinted windows rolled up they look

suspicious. The “soldiers” like to see the people in the vehicles. So we followed instructions. When we pulled up to the entrance we were met by two teenage boys waving rifles. They stopped the car and looked in. When they saw Celso they smiled and said “oi, tudo bem” (hi, how you doing?) he chatted with them for a few minutes. I heard Celso ask one of the boys if he was staying away from drugs. The boy grinned and hunched his shoulders, as if to say he wasn’t sure. When Celso told them he wanted to take his American friends around, the boys peeked inside the car window to look us over, smiled and said “oi, oi, oi” (hi, hi, hi) to each of us. These boys looked to be about 17 or 18 years old. I was nervous. They let us enter, we drove inside slowly and I noticed another boy, about 15 years old tucking a handgun into the back of his pants. One of the boys holding a rifle started talking to a girl who had a baby in her arms. The baby’s head was near the nose of the gun, as if danger was not eminent. She rocked her baby and talked to the boy soldier. Half way up the block sat another boy on the ground shooting up with a needle. It was as if the movie *City of God* was playing out before my very eyes. And all these young people were black and brown. I asked Celso, “these boys have guns but they look like nice boys, would they really shoot us?” He responded, “you better believe it!”

The final stop on our mini-tour was cidade de dues. It was Sunday afternoon and the neighborhood association building was closed but Celso had keys so he let go in to use the bathroom. While in the bathroom, I heard about five gunshots so rushed off of the toilet and ran out to see Celso standing in the foyer talking with a cop. I asked Renata what was going on, I heard gunshots. She said “yea, but it’s ok, no need to worry.” I’m still uncertain what happened or why the cop was suddenly inside the building. But Celso

appeared to know the cop, they chatted casually before the cop went on his way. We hung out a little while before Celso drove us back to our hotel between Copacabana and Ipanema.

Once in my room I called my local friend Mariana and told her what I'd seen, and having lived in Rio all her life she said, "I can understand your face when you saw the boys in the favela but really we are living with fear. The war is declared and these boys are soldiers paid for by us to fight one against another. The reality is terrible. We are in the middle of war." War waged between the police force, the militias (vigilante street justice fighters), and the boy soldiers policing their own communities, the places where police do not enter or protect. Militias are problematic because residents often live in fear of them as well. They take law and order into their own hands; many are retired and off-duty cops who charge residents a fee to clean up their communities of drug traffic. Militias shoot users and dealers and anyone else they deem a nuisance. Residents are forever indebted to them and these "agreements" are not without abuses. It was Marianna who told me, "we are living with fear" either at the hands of the boy soldiers, the hands of the police, or the hands of militias.

#### Rewind, 1993

Vigilante militias were the perpetrators of the Candelária massacre in Rio. On the eve of July 23, 1993 about 60 children were asleep on cardboard mats on the ground outside of the large, baroque façade, eighteenth-century edifice of Our Lady of Candelária Catholic church in downtown Rio. These were the kids that many called street urchins; considered useless throw-aways. They slept there in front of the church every night after the priests served food and taught them bible lessons. On this particular night



two unmarked cars passed by the sleeping horde of youth and six men emerged from the cars to question the kids. An argument ensued which ended with the men drawing their guns and shooting several of the boys in their heads. Five boys were killed there in front of the church while the others ran away scattering into the streets. Three more were killed a mile away from the church which implied the men ran after the children to continue their shooting spree. Eight boys were killed that evening and it turned out that rogue and retired police officers were the bandits. This was not a unique event in Rio. Millions of children live on the streets and many were executed daily, like an overpopulation of deer, shot to minimize their numbers. Some city residents supported the work of vigilantes and rogue police officers in ridding the streets of the nuisance. Their objective was population control of the street kids which was apparently too difficult to manage. Residents viewed street kids as the problem, unaware or unwilling to look deeper at the structural violence which caused the abundance of street kids. Without parents or supervision, without formal education or job skills, street kids are left to their own devices, that of petty crime, begging and harassment of tourists, an annoyance to law abiding citizens. Violently removing them from society was the answer for many.

But even with the brutal activity of militias, the official violence uniformed police perpetrate on street children pales in comparison to the handiwork of these off-duty-retired policemen and their 'extermination industry' (Page 1995). Official state police had the militias beat. The Candelária massacre was not a first of its kind, but it did help raise awareness to a global level. "In 1992, 424 children in the state of Rio de Janeiro had been murdered, and during the first six months of 1993, 320 met the same fate. At the time of the incident in downtown Rio, it was estimated that every day 4 Brazilian children were

homicide victims. In 1991 the Institute of Legal Medicine in the state of Pernambuco autopsied the remains of 79 youngsters, ages 10–17 that had been shot to death on the streets of Recife. About 80 percent of the bodies had been mutilated” (Page 260).

Fast forward 16 years: 2009 I met Andres one afternoon while strolling through City of God. He was near the CUFA building sitting on the crumbling dusty curbside, a young man of brown hue or mulatto, in his early 20s and smartly outfitted in dress slacks, shirt and shiny shoes. Gospel music blasted from the single large speaker of his portable audio system as he sat there on the curb, unsmiling and pensive, in deep meditative thought, holding a huge black bible in his hands. I said hello. He introduced himself as a street evangelist saying he spent his life traveling around the streets of Brazil sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the young people who lived on those rough streets. His manner, style of dress and the way in which he carried himself clearly signified that he was not a street thug or gang member. He was part of another team, “God’s team.”

Andres told me that 16 years earlier he survived the 1993 massacre at Candelária. He was just a kid back then, no more than eight or nine years old living on the street and sleeping outside of that church each night. Andres asked if I knew the story or was aware of the film *Bus 174*, I nodded yes. He told me that Sandro do Nascimento, the young man who held up Bus 174 was his friend. Sandro was also one of the kids who survived the night of the 1993 massacre at Candelária. He and Sandro survived that and other violent tragedies as street kids but now Sandro was dead too; most of the other guys from that night were dead from violence. Sandro had held bus 174 hostage with a gun for hours on June 12, 2000. The end result was the death of a 20 year old girl on the bus, and Sandro’s own death at the hands of police officers who suffocated him once they got him into the

police van that night. Andres didn't go into detail when I asked him questions. He said only what he wanted to say, and appeared removed from it, not wanting to relive too much. But he said he was probably the only one from that group who chose Christianity and street evangelism as his path in life and he wanted to share that message with the same population whence he had come. Andres had acquired a new social identity which made him stand out in the favela. These themes of belonging and identity came up when talking with youth on the streets. They often talked about being a part of a "family" even the little "street urchins" traveled and terrorized the beaches in packs. They were support to one another. The church youth I met talked at length about their church "family" and their particular positions within the church. They were evangelists, or preachers, teachers, or singers.

John Burdick (1998a) whose research on women, race, and popular Christianity in Brazil writes that religion allows society's outcasts to create new social identities and cultivate a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves. Donna M. Goldstein (2003) whose research was grounded in Rio adds that "religious belonging has become not only an indicator of faith but also a protective symbol of neutrality and nonparticipation in the escalating violence occurring among police, bandits, and police-bandits." The church offers safety, belonging, and a counter social identity. Church also offers a sense of personal power within otherwise powerless realities.

Gang membership offers those same safety nets. Andres chose the church and everything about his comportment said something contrary to how his social condition would frame him. For him, his faith offered a sense of dignity, hope, and belonging. It was Andres' purpose in survival. Religion worked for some young people. I ran into

Peter, another evangelical youth who lived in City of God. He was a student in CUFA's graffiti arts class and each time I met with him to talk he ended our conversations by giving me a gospel track and asking me if I knew Jesus. Peter was black, 22, dressed very neatly wearing dress slacks, shiny shoes and a button down shirt. Peter, like Andres, stood out amongst young males who usually went shirtless, wearing only *chinelos* (flip flops) and shorts. Peter had a plan to learn graffiti and graphic arts through CUFA's programming and then make use of his skills in a ministry of some sort. He said he was glad CUFA was in the community so that he could learn some things.

Many NGOs like CUFA which started in the 1990s have carved out a counter space of identity or "identity resistance" (Castells 2000) meaning the socially excluded defensively create religious, ethnic, or racialized identities to protect their personality and community against uncertainties and injustices. Prior to organizations like CUFA, the young had limited options, i.e. gang membership or religious affiliation. Today they have options of belonging to artistic organizations that offer space for self-expression and artistic release. Olodum and Timbalada in Salvador, Afro Reggae, Nós do Morro, Luta Pela Paz, of Rio, and Cia. Ètnica de Dança are others of Brazil's new mediators. Like gangs and religion, CUFA et al offer alternative belonging, another space, based in hip-hop justice. The young people I talked with in CUFA called themselves rappers, DJ's, dancers, artists, filmmakers and basketball players. They lived for those specific performances. They were not "street urchins" "soldados" or "traffic," they were producers of another culture of youth. Transformation of youth and their communities via the arts and the creation of new stereotypes disassociating them from violence and

images of criminality are the objectives. These new images are of youth who are passionately artistic and working collaboratively with honest cops to create public safety.

CUFA's education program includes teaching youth about race and racism, incorporating neo-négritude, the elevation of black pride were central. Bill's raps were educative in nature. He rapped about self-love for black people, injustice, violence and poverty. His raps told stories of life in the favelas but also offered options in each story line. Violence and injustice were systemic but youth had to learn to make the right choices in personal ways as well.

Renata and other social workers employed with CUFA mediated conflict between neighbors, drug traffic, and youth. Renata had presence, relationship and voice with various community factions, positive and negative. I watched her on the streets talking and doing "business" with the people there. She was charismatic and well-trusted. Other CUFA staff functioned as bridges between youth and the police, between youth and the state, between youth and their own real and imagined obstacles. Celso and MV Bill had the president's ear. On occasion President Lula called Celso or Bill to get their advice about ways to clean up the favelas. He also flew the two of them to his office in Brasilia to have face-to-face conferences with him. Preta told me that President Lula expected CUFA to get drugs and violence out of the favelas and he offered resources to help CUFA in its work.

Governor Cabral's newest favela clean-up program had phases. The military police flooded in, cleared the streets in gun battles against drug lords that could last for weeks. After the drugs lords desist, are killed, or driven underground, the state sends in "peace police" who partake in half traditional policing and half social work. The

objective was to win over residents by building relationships with them. Some “peace officers” taught karate classes, others played with kids in the streets, visited day cares, and engaged neighbors. The governor hoped to win trust after decades of suspicion due to corrupt policing, harassment and violence. Under the governor’s leadership, the police forces are learning to develop civil policing skills so that residents feel they are being protected by their government, not watched, abused, or murdered. Brazil recently elected its first woman president Dilma Rousseff, groomed by former president Lulu Da Silva whose administration is generally considered successful. Lula’s and expectantly Dilma’s administrations will bring about change in this area. The world is watching and has big expectations for this country. The approaching 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics are impetus for various new programs in Brazil aimed at renewing favelas and making the country safe. This along with the combination of young media activists and CUFA’s new mediators working alongside residents, the state, and the presence of the “peace police,” perhaps the future of Rio’s youth will include safer community havens, greater opportunities, and longevity on the planet. Improving the lives of the poor in Brazil will take focused sustained effort coming from above and from below.

## CHAPTER 7

### DOING CITIZENSHIP

Youth activism has always played a central role in the democratic process and continues to forge new ground for social change. Young people's participation in movements in South Africa to end apartheid, in China's infamous Tiananmen Square, and in the hills of Chiapas, Mexico to bring greater sovereignty to indigenous people all remind us how young people struggle for justice against all odds. One lesson we draw from these movements is that young people are agents of social change. It is precisely this notion of agency that gives rise to important democratic movements throughout our history. [Ginwright and Cammarota 2006:xiii]

Western society's media driven ideological global focus is the cultivation of a sizeable, wealthy, impulsive generation of young people groomed to be blind uncritical consumers from cradle to the grave (Staub 2007). Even the poor find themselves distracted and frustrated by their lack of ability to consume. However masses of impoverished youth lacking in opportunity and justice realize the glaring holes in that ideology. Middle and upper class young people are also increasingly concerned about the ramifications of a consumption oriented world, pointing out global problems like the destruction of natural resources, racism, economic rationalism, and the artificial values espoused by consumerism (Engebretson 2003). Consumer oriented societies promote multiple injustices and distract citizens from deeper, more meaningful functions of citizenship, that of addressing social inequities, and power imbalances. Doing citizenship is not about consumption; it is about producing and sharing a level playing field based on need not greed. In that light, many conscious young people take part in participatory

citizenship by setting things right and forging equal access for themselves and others in society.

One way of setting things right is to relay public messages about injustice. Young people use their music and other unique forms of agency in the unraveling and undoing of the systemic violence(s) that impact their daily lives. The violence is not just physical or interpersonal; it is also systemic affecting the educational, structural, and environmental arenas of their lives. Young people construct deep meaning around the violence(s) impacting them (McIntyre 2000). The meaning is definitive of a broad narrative that consistently relays to them their lack of human and social worth. Echoes of worthlessness are pervasive and when left unanalyzed everything around them screams “you are useless, you don’t matter, and you are invisible.” The people most devastated by systemic violence in Rio are the young, black, brown, and poor. Males are most touched by interpersonal violence as they disproportionately lose their lives daily due to firearms even at the hand of state police. In Rio, race or skin color, and gender, determine where one will live, how one will live, and how long one will live.

I suggest that youth agency in Rio is ultimately about visibility and including self in the national narrative in authentic ways, therefore making and doing citizenship. My primary finding indicated that young people assert and insert themselves in the national narrative as grassroots participatory citizens around music and on their own terms. Similarly, Stephanie Scherpf (2001) understands rap in particular, as a “globalized counter hegemonic narrative of resistance and hip-hop as a political grassroots movement with potential for student involvement and participation as a means to participatory democracy and active citizenship” (2001:78). Progressive rap’s democratic narrative



insists on subjectivity, on being seen and heard, amplifying marginal voices in the process of speaking truth to the center. From margin to center, from powerless to powerful, rap and hip-hop enable favela youth to participate in the national narrative by telling their stories, shaping their own identities, and conceptualizing their own social spaces.

As long ago as Alex de Tocqueville's classic work *Democracy in America* (1969) the pivotal question was how entrenched social inequality became reconciled with the hope of democracy and who actually gets to fully participate in that democracy. The hopes, ideals, and practice of democracy and inclusion remain embattled today in many parts of the world as current global youth uprisings demonstrate. Youth are not satisfied with the "doing" or execution of democracy charging that something is incredibly wrong in its enactment. In response, John Markoff (1996) considers the questions of how democracy functions, who interprets, and who makes the rules. Markoff examines a dynamic interrelationship between the state as the holder of legitimate power, the governing elite, and social movements. Much of this activity never makes serious sustainable impact in the poorest sectors of society.

For Julia Paley (2002) "more often than not, anthropological observations on democracy are couched in other frameworks and embedded in other discussions. These have included social movements, human rights, law, citizenship, bureaucracy, violence, militaries, post colonialism, the state, globalization, power, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society, just to name a few." Paley frames ideas "toward an anthropology of democracy" highlighting the anthropological advantage as that of building relationships with people outside of formal and elite political institutions, thus

giving attention to alternative worldviews, local meanings, circulating discourses, multiple contestations, and changing forms of power. She considers how democracy is understood from below, who determines what democracy is and whether or not there is just one legitimized model of democracy. As a result, Western political ideologies and institutions must be interrogated especially since they are usually positioned as the unexamined standard for the rest of the world.

Paley's response to how democracy is understood from below argues that there is more than one way to comprehend and engage democracy. Indeed the simple resistant activities by and among youth are democratic in nature in that they are a response to a broad state narrative about power deriving from the people. From above, democracy has been defined as government by the whole population of a country, not by just a select few. This definition is problematic in its practical workings. How does a "whole population" govern the life of a whole people? My findings align with Paley's query regarding democracy as it is understood from below by building relationships of solidarity with people on the ground, particularly in the poorest communities.

Favelados and youth possess alternative worldviews and discourses that most aptly reflect their day to day realities. They must have a say in the governing of their local world, and act as grassroots participatory citizens where they are. No one can tell their story but them. This activity is democracy in action through music and the arts facilitating the undoing of racism, poverty and violence in favela communities. This structured inequality and fragile democratic identity has been Brazil's major obstacle since its inception as a nation. Brazil has struggled with what it means to be and act like a democracy. Reluctant politicians continue to clumsily trip around the issue while young

people on the periphery push forward challenging systems and creating alternative safe spaces for themselves as citizens in the land of their birth.

Another important finding is that the genre of hip-hop in particular, creates an alternative value system, a universal black aesthetic, a separate space, a global quilombo, constructed in blackness, disassociated from the white gaze, but open to anyone. This is what I call hip-hop's neo-négritude. Making new meaning is what rap discourse does exceptionally well. Challenging totalizing national discourses rappers use language to break it all down and reconstruct a new thing. Music and the arts are used to resist the imposing center making citizenship on the people's own terms.

The strength of hip-hop's ideology of neo-négritude is that the community as a whole functions as if the "so-called" center does not exist. As a movement it is not oppositional in the sense of being over and against, or even exclusive. Hip-hop simply *is* as it speaks for itself about itself. The white gaze is disengaged, as is a class gaze. The nuanced distinction between négritude and neo-négritude is that "black talk" about existence occurs outside of contrasts and discourses with whiteness. James Haile (2008) wrote to this effect in a philosophical essay critiquing Lewis Gordon's affirmation of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophizing about négritude and existentialism:

Gordon's usage of Sartre, and the excesses that outstrip the usage, leaves the *impression* that black philosophizing about existence only occurs in discourse with, or against, white folks and whiteness, making blackness, or black philosophizing, ontologically derivative in that they must find themselves in or over and against already established white norms of discourse. Moreover, what is problematic about Gordon and Sartre's inability to account for these moments is the possible consequence of saying, even if inadvertently, that blackness is not in conversation with whiteness, but is in a top down referential debate over whose point of view is going to be taken as truth. To this extent the implications of

Gordon and Sartre make it difficult to imagine whiteness as de-centered, epistemologically unimportant, or ontologically indebted to blackness.

Furthermore, “it can and should be wondered, and worried, about the possibilities of a race discourse that de-centers whiteness, one in which whiteness is not present (even passively), or one in which whiteness is shown to be in conversation *with* blackness (as ontologically dependent or derivative). It is at this jointure that black philosophy of existence gains its analytic strength to speak truth to power—that is, to speak for itself about itself.” [Haile 2008:21]

Rappers speak for themselves and their communities about themselves and their communities, to themselves and to their communities. This entails an intertextual relationship between youth, their stories, music, and agency, all of which interact to shape identities and create change. The change which came through Brazil’s formal black movement 50 years ago was important but limited. The formal black movement created a polemic by talking too much to white folk, focused too much on class, and worried too much about white acceptance. Blackness was defined in response to whiteness. Within hip-hop young people had the ability to step outside of social constructions of race, class, and space, some of the time, as if whiteness did not exist at all. While much of the movement’s narrative speaks of countering and opposing impositions, it also simultaneously speaks of transcending them. Here hip-hop defines itself as concurrently resisting and existing, de-centering, and ignoring. Brazil’s street poets of neo-négritude, like MV Bill, speak, write, rap, for and about the people they represent seeking to also emancipate and decolonize the Afro Brazilian mind, not just his body, by fostering a lavish black self-love. Imposed identities related to color, class and place, are rejected and new identities constructed. When re-imagined and retold, the favela becomes enshrouded with new meaning; a place of urban beauty, black pride, agency, hope, and fortitude.

Class co-mingles here because when Celso called hip-hop “o voz da periferia” (the voice of the periphery) he was referring to all poor people, not only the black poor. But paradoxically, blackness as it is assumed belongs on the periphery. The favela is imagined as black terrain, but everyone knows its inhabitants are not only black, they are multicolored. Hip-hop embraces the oppressed of all colors but the narrative of that embrace is decidedly black. Blackness is the rallying point, not the exclusive people group, or the totalizing discourse. Blackness is only the lens through which the rest of life is interpreted. This bottom-up inclusive approach to reality arguably makes hip-hop “the real black movement” in Rio, or as MV Bill would say, “blacks in movement” in Brazil.

The Negro... creates an anti-racism. He does not at all wish to dominate the world: He wishes the abolition of racial privileges wherever they are found; he affirms his solidarity with the oppressed of all colors. At a blow the subjective, existential, ethnic notion of Négritude ‘passes’ as Hegel would say, into the objective, positive, exact notion of the proletariat... It is not by hazard that the most ardent of the apostles of Négritude are at the same time militant Marxists. (Sartre 1976)

#### A Final Word from Celso Athayde

Early 2009, ten years after the birth of CUFA, Celso Athayde received a public email from CUFA northeast, a group of grassroots activists and youth in the northeast section of the country representing Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe. Celso and Bill had successfully spread their community vision of activism and self-help to other parts of the country. CUFA northeast had a request which came at the instigation of well-known Brazilian bossa nova singer Caetano Veloso who said that MV Bill must run for political office in 2010. Veloso thought MV Bill was well situated to become the next Senator of Rio de Janeiro and now was the time. At that leading, CUFA northeast performed preliminary

research and found that the Brazilian people were ready for Bill to step forward. The researchers reported that the people would indeed vote for Bill and his chance of winning political office was strong should he agree to run. Caetano Veloso and CUFA northeast told Bill and Celso that now was the hour since young people of the country were supporting Bill. The fact that Bill was “the fruit” of CDD, a carioca from a non-privileged background who worked hard and committed his life to helping young people gave Bill favor in the public polls. The email was long, filled with accolades, highlighting Bill’s music, books, and films. Bill’s response was polite and thankful, but he declined the offer to run for formal political office in Brazil. Celso affirmed Bill’s decision with these brief paraphrased words in his email response:

Friends, I am against Bill running for political office. But I am thrilled to see the clarity and growth of our organization, one that began in Madureira 11 years ago with only the two of us. And we did it off of the grid, outside of the political arena, outside of revolution. For me the great revolution today is seeing the reality of balanced and whole people, aware of their roles in society. Celso Athayde

Celso never wavered from his course of vision and action. Just as wealth never trickles down, change never trickles down. He has never agreed that the mainstream political arena was the place where real change occurred. It occurs at the bottom. The historical and political roots of Brazil are corrupt, lined with one self-serving politician after another. Real social change occurred when local people took care of local people, off the grid. Celso said he could best serve the community outside of formal politics and that he and Bill had more power and leverage as non-politicians on the ground. Bill has thus far maintained his conviction about not running for public office even in the face of relentless public pressure to do so. I maintain that the formal political arena is limited and flawed. The scholarship on political corruption, racism and violence in Brazil is ample

and well documented. The life and bloodline of its most vulnerable citizens, the black poor call out for justice (Amnesty International 2009; Beato 2004; Beghin 2008; Butler 1998; Caldeira 2002; Caldwell 2007; De Jesus 1962; Fry 2000; Gay 1994; 2005; Goldstein 2003; Hecht 2000; Holston 1999b; Holston 2006b; Oliveira 2000; Padilha 2002, 2007; Perlman 2010; Pinheiro 2002; Robb 2004; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Skidmore 2010; Soares 2005, 2006; Twine 1998; Vargas 2008).

Justice is most poignantly realized by the pushing up of dust from young people on the margins in dialogue with each other and with the powers that be, blazing roads of sustainable change that must be felt in the poorest sectors of society. This grassroots activity is informal, decentralized, and often leaderless, but it is nonetheless a movement of simple acts forward. Sustainable, trustworthy change occurs when local citizens partake in small acts that are joined together in the making of a movement.

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