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Sabotaging Logics: How Brazil's Hip-Hop Culture Looks to  
Redefine Race

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Spanish

by

Maria Teresa Moulin

June 2010

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2010

The Dissertation of Maria Teresa Moulin is approved:

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*To my father who instilled  
in me a love for learning.  
And to my mother,  
for it is because of her courage  
and love that I have been able  
to come this far.*

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Sabotaging Logics: How Brazil's Hip-Hop Culture Looks to  
Redefine Race

by

Maria Teresa Moulin

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Spanish  
University of California, Riverside, June 2010  
Dr. Freya Schiwy, Chairperson

My dissertation examines the representation of Afro-Brazilians within the contemporary culture production of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, specifically in three novels, rap music, and the hip-hop community. The novels form a diverse corpus of works. Two were published during the 1990s by middle-class canonical writers, *Subúrbio* (1994) by Fernando Bonassi and *Cidade de Deus* (1997) by Paulo Lins. Bonassi offers a homogenous vision of the margins while Lins presents them as diverse. Yet, both draw on a materialist approach that leads the protagonists toward an apocalyptic conclusion. The third novel was published by a resident of a *favela* in the outskirts of São Paulo, *Graduado em Marginalidade* (2004) by Sacolinha. This novel



presents a complex and at times contradicting view of *favela* life. *Graduado* offers the possibility for social advancement as the novel seeks to redefine race within Brazil. Rap music and the hip-hop community present a critical view of Brazilian culture and history. Through lyrics, musical form, and activism hip-hoppers look to contest, question, and alter established ideas of race in Brazil. Much like Sacolinha's novel, hip-hoppers redefine race in order to rewrite their future and in the process break from the cycle of violence and drugs that threatens the well-being of Brazil's most marginalized. Utilizing materialist and postcolonial theories this study explores how these cultural forms contribute toward understanding representations of race within Brazilian urban culture.

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## Introduction

### Sabotaging Logics: How Brazil's Hip-Hop Culture Looks to Redefine Race

*A periferia gritou  
e a sua voz venho em forma de rap.*<sup>1</sup>

Defiant lyrics; young Afro-Brazilians taking over the street corners of downtown São Paulo in order to hold break-dancing parties; angry lyrics questioning history and criticizing the state and capitalism; young writers from the suburbs of São Paulo selling their books in subway stations and book fairs; rappers founding NGOs. Images that highly contrast with those typically assigned to the *suburbanos* and *favelados* of Brazil.

Since the late 1980s, the Hip-Hop movement in Brazil has presented young Afro-Brazilians as critical, confrontational, artistic, and socio-politically active.

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<sup>1</sup> In Casseano, Patricia, Mirella Domenich and Janina Rocha. *Hip Hop: A periferia grita*. São Paulo, Brasil: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001.

Rap music criticizes and questions grand narratives of harmonious race relations and economic progress. This representation sharply contrasts to that of complaisance found in traditional literature and of violence within contemporary literature. In addition, the presence of young Afro-Brazilians heading writing workshops, producing documentaries, and promoting their literary works in book fairs contrasts with images of them in *favelas* leading shootouts and drug deals. Through culture hip-hoppers resignify colonial tropes historically employed to subalternize and marginalized them<sup>2</sup>. In the process Hip-Hop seeks to decolonize knowledge by adopting a philosophy of negotiation, inclusion, and dialogue.

The original objective of hip-hoppers in the early days (and one still important today) lied in changing who recounts history and how it is told. Rap music began with the purpose of becoming the voice of the suburbs and

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<sup>2</sup> Hip-Hop traces its roots to the ghettos of Jamaica and New York. While the sounds of hip-hop started in the late 1960s in New York, it was a Jamaican DJ, Kool Herc, who introduced the "sound system" technique of sampling. The term *hip-hop*, which literally refers to the movement of the hips and to jumping, was created by the DJ Afrika Bambaataa. He used this term in order to define the dance encounters that occurred in the Bronx and that brought together break dancers, DJs, and MCs. Hip-hop in Brazil is defined as a cultural movement composed of five elements: sampling (DJ), poetics (MC), visual arts (graffiti), dance (break), and knowledge (Afro-diasporic history, politics, literature).

*favelas* as the main concern became that of deconstructing established knowledges related to race, aesthetics, history, democracy, and economic progress. Today, music along with literature and film share this goal. Unconsciously, rappers allude to Ranajit Guha's definition of subalternity as a discourse based on relationships of power.

Hip-Hop views power as a historical discourse the ruling class, the elite that came to power after independence, has used to obtain and maintain its hegemony. Therefore hip-hoppers believe that Western views of civilization, knowledge, and economic advancement embraced by the ruling class in order to subjugate Blacks shape Brazilian national historiography. In other words, even after independence hip-hoppers believe Brazil continues to narrate its history through a colonial lens.

Today Hip-Hop not only seeks to change who writes literature and history but also who reads it. The Movement strongly believes that in order for the people of the suburbs and *favelas* to mobilize on behalf of their communities they need to make educated choices. As such, hip-hoppers stress the importance of education/learning as a tool for reflection and evaluation, rather than as a tool to serve the state and/or corporations. Learning points

more towards a decolonization of knowledge in which the *comunidades* contribute with their own ideas, perspectives, and solutions. Song writing and writing workshops, concerts, open-mic nights, and festivals promoted by hip-hoppers are venues in which artists share information and ideas. The internet has now become a critical tool for exchanging information and has helped the Movement spread nationwide. Media becomes an educational tool and a network of communication rather than just pure entertainment.

In studying this cultural movement, the dissertation explores a series of questions: How have other cultural movements- such as *Negritude*, Urban Literature, Soul, and Samba among others- tried to speak for Afro-Brazilians? How is Hip-Hop different? How do hip-hoppers adapt the culture of the *letrado* in writing their works? How does Hip-Hop negotiate its beliefs of cooperation within a market economy guided by individualism but yet one in which they operate?

In spite of the reach the Movement has obtained, its concerns remain the same: raise Afro-Brazilian consciousness and self-esteem; question and contest hegemonic narratives with relation to slavery, race, and economic progress; counter the violent imagery that mass

media often assigns to the suburbs and *favelas* of Brazil's urban centers; and promote socio-economic autonomy.

Previous cultural movements have tried to give agency to Afro-Brazilians but differ from Hip-Hop's approach. *Modernismo* of the 30s and 40s is characterized by the *romance regionalista* (e.g. Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Rachel de Queiroz) and its debate regarding Brazil's socio-economic reality rather than with issues of race and coloniality. *Negritude* in Brazil lacks a tone of revolt and calls for the synthesis of races rather than confronting the subjectification of Afro-Brazilians through the discourses of race, power, and knowledge. And although Soul for the first time contested certain images and stereotypes, it stressed the physical and lacked a specific political ideology. Hip-Hop on the other hand, not only questions hegemonic narratives and promotes Afro-Brazilian pride. It also brings into dialogue Afro-Brazilian diverse perspectives on history, race, and socio-economic advancement. By so doing hip-hoppers looks to decolonize the set of principles and beliefs on which coloniality is founded.

Early characterizations of Brazil's black population within literature have transcended time and continue to

impact the construction of Afro-Brazilians' subjectivity. Hip-hoppers' response relies on representations of Brazilian society that are at times highly controversial and strongly criticized by the mainly white middle class and elite. For the first time, a group of artists and activists from the city outskirts and *favelas* blatantly scrutinize national myths related to race and the socio-political condition of Afro-Brazilians.

Throughout the nineteenth century Brazilian literature subjectified the black population under four archetypes: a beast only useful for physical labor, a savage that can't be trusted, a faithful servant who loves his master, and an exotic figure that arouses lust. On rare occasions the black character appears as a hero who fights against oppression (Rabassa 15). As the twentieth century approached, Brazilian literature of that period, and the novel in particular, reveal an inability to reconcile the rhetoric of modernity with that of a state in social and economic stagnation. As a result, the tension between Eurocentric social and biological evolutionism and nationalism characterizes much of these works (*Os sertões*, *Canaã*, *O Cortiço*). Their objective lies in explaining Brazil's "backwardness" with relation to Europe by looking at



Brazil's racial make-up. In the process, Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinos* are defined as intellectually inferior and valuable only for their physical strength.

Gilberto Freyre's theory of "racial democracy", along with his belief that miscegenation among all the races would produce a unified and robust race, changed Brazil's view of race relations dramatically<sup>3</sup>. Freyre's theories influenced the writing of the late *Modernistas* and remained influential until the 1980s as Brazilians downplayed the racist and violent history of Brazil. The country's dictatorship (1964-1982) brought large socio-economic changes as Brazil entered the global economy, its centers became highly urbanized and industrialized, and political repression intensified the use of violence exercised by the state. Artists of this period moved their attention to the suburbs and *favelas* with the purpose of exposing the detrimental effects these changes were having on the poor.

Urban literature and mass media of the 1990s continued with this tradition and made the most marginalized their subject of study. Their objective was to expose the lives

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<sup>3</sup> Freyre argued that poverty, not race, degenerated men by creating social inequalities. Freyre's writings did not promote the idea of racial egalitarianism. Rather, Freyre reinforced the elite's well-established goal of "whitening" by showing that the (primarily white) elite had gained valuable cultural traits from their intimate contact with the African and Indian.

of those most affected by the violence and negligence born out of drug trafficking and neo-liberalism. The intensification of violent images in literature and more importantly within mass media, however, became the new tool with which to define Afro-Brazilians. Violence and drugs therefore became the way to assign subjectivity to the young and poor living in the outskirts and *favelas* of Brazil's urban centers.

Hip-hoppers reacted to the violent images by first writing music that exposed Brazil's long history of racist and violent policies and discourses. Artists and activists are now exploring literature and film in order to contest established imaginaries but also to offer their own perspectives. The objective is to change a discourse based on violence and race to one based on social and economic systems and institutions.

Hip-hoppers also understand the formation of stereotypes as a strategy of social and political control. Homi Bhabha views such strategy as one that proposes a teleology which under certain conditions of colonial domination and control progressively reforms itself (33). Therefore, and unlike previous cultural and political movements, hip-hoppers have no interest in creating a

homogenous subjectivity but rather to paint a heterogeneous, complex, and at times contradictory picture.

With relation to the ontological categories, Denise Ferreira da Silva claims that keeping the subject "fully within a scientific (anthropological) terrain of signification reinforces the effects of signification of the racial: the exterior determination" (xxxv). With relation to epistemological categories, decolonization studies argue that different interpretations of histories possess limitations as long as different perspectives remain outside the discussion. As Mignolo explains "different interpretations presuppose a common and shared principle of knowledge and of the rules of the game, while different perspectives presuppose that the principles of knowledges and the rules of the game are geo-historically located in the structure of power of the modern colonial world" (Mignolo, *Idea* 13).

Taking into consideration these two arguments, "otherness" offers a limited definition of subalternity. Therefore, in order to gain a broader understanding of how hip-hoppers seek to undo the effects of colonialism and modernity (social and economic exclusion being the focus of Brazil's hip-hoppers) this dissertation looks at

subalternity beyond the scope of agency and representation. While rap music affords agency to the "Other" by providing a medium to voice demands and denounce racist socio-economic policies, hip-hop culture as a whole presents itself as a tool for decolonization.

Hip-hoppers merge traditions they claim to have inherited from the *quilombos* with the realities of urban and capitalistic Brazil. By making use of systems located both within and outside the *status quo* hip-hoppers create systems of signifying that exceed the binary tropes of colonialism. In so doing, they seek to counter the established *modus vivendi* by offering other ways of looking and thinking the world.

Chapter 1, "Urban Literature of the 1990s," analyzes two novels, *Subúrbio* (1994) and *Cidade de Deus* (1997). These novels were written during a period of resurgence of interest in the lives of the people living at the margins of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. I argue that in Fernando Bonassi's *Súurbio* violence and neglect appear as the main themes in order to portray the suburbs as places full of despair and hopelessness. The second work, *Cidade de Deus* by Paulo Lins, looks to dismantle the notion of racial democracy by exposing the racial tensions within Brazilian

society. Paulo Lins goes beyond the mere criticism and *denuncia* approach as it illustrates the systematic marginalization imposed on Afro-Brazilians through techniques of displacement and relocation. This position allows for a broader understanding of race by portraying color based discrimination as a tool the elite and government used to marginalize Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinos* socially and economically. In analyzing these texts I employ the concept of deconstructing history that subaltern studies calls for as necessary to obtain agency. I argue that since *Subúrbio* focuses on criticizing neo-liberalism, from a materialistic approach the relevance of history and discourse is overlooked in explaining the socio-economic condition of those the novel seeks to speak for. *Cidade de Deus* on the other hand, considers the role of history and racism. It, however, looks at the hegemonic system for answers and therefore cannot offer any solutions. As a result the residents of *Cidade de Deus* are assigned a destiny of violence, poverty, and silence.

Chapter 2, "The Margins Answer Back: Hip-Hopper's Response to Urban Literature and Mass Media of the 1990s," analyzes how literature and most importantly mass media uses violence as a discourse with the purpose of defining

the marginalized. This chapter analyzes the novel *Graduado em Marginalidade* (2004) by Sacolinha in order to demonstrate how hip-hoppers avoid constructing a homogenous image of the *favelado* and instead present a complex and contradictory one. Sacolinha focuses on systems and institutions as the root of the problems afflicting the margins therefore alluding to Roberto Schwarz's theory of *clientelismo*. Sacolinha, however, complicates Schwarz's theory by introducing race and the memory of slavery. As a result, the novel's portrayal of social and economic relationships attempt to redefine center/periphery, inside/out, and us/them binaries. *Graduado* does not try to recreate neat binarisms, instead it tries to break from the logic that places European (white culture) at the center.

Chapter 3, "Sabotaging Brazil's Hegemonic Discourse on Race and History, One Rap Song at a Time," offers a look at the musical production of three rap artists. Racionais MC are the pioneers of rap music in Brazil and are still active within the hip-hop community. MV Bill of Rio de Janeiro and Rappin Hood of São Paulo represent two of the most popular rappers today. In analyzing their music I argue that rappers look to question history and talk about histories that are purposely silenced. Through a

recuperative process that emphasizes the use of Word, rappers hope to give agency to those who have been systematically marginalized and silenced in support of coloniality/modernity. In this context, *coloniality* refers to the "embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, and modernization..." (Mignolo *Idea* 5). In so doing, rappers deconstruct history in an attempt at exposing the racist policies the government and elite have used to marginalized Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinos*. Rap music also strongly criticizes *o sistema's* depiction of capitalism as the answer to poverty and inequality.

Chapter 4, "Decolonization through Hip-Hop Culture," looks at how the Hip-Hop movement attempts to undo the ideologies that dictate how participants of the market economy should behave (individualism and profit making). The examples in this chapter illustrate how hip-hoppers try to merge *quilombo's* philosophy of negotiation with a global capitalistic order. Thus, in order to reorganize, transform, and redefine the universe in which they live hip-hoppers function at the border of two systems. Hip-hopper's use of the market alludes to the concept of *border thinking*; a call to epistemological rights achieved by putting into

dialogue two different logics. *Border thinking* places side by side different logics allowing the group to choose what is useful from each and thus apply it for the benefit of the group. *Border thinking* indicates "the emergence of new loci of enunciation... subaltern reason striving to bring to the foreground the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized in long process of colonization of the planet (Mignolo, *Local* 13). As Hip-Hop offers a proposal that is far removed from the dominant ideology of hegemony and exclusion, hip-hoppers move toward a process of decolonization of knowledge.



## Chapter 1

### Brazil's Urban Literature of the 1990s

Starting in the 1960s the project of Brazil's urban literature looked to move the focus of attention from the impoverished and folklorized Northeast to the socio-economic disparities of Brazil's urban centers. As a result, the image of Brazil's marginalized transformed from that of a poor peasant of the *sertão*, to a violent criminal from the sprawling urban suburbs and *favelas* of Brazil. In the 1990s a reemergence of the urban literature of the 60s and 70s came about due to the violence surrounding the drug wars of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and as a criticism of Brazil's neo-liberal policies. During this time the term *cidade partida* (divided city) reemerges in order to describe Brazil's urban centers<sup>4</sup>. The term became synonymous with the notion of two Brazils: one infested with violence, poverty, and hopelessness and another characterized by wealth, beaches, and exuberance. The belief was that these

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<sup>4</sup>The term was coined in the 60s by Zuenir Ventura, a journalist from Rio de Janeiro.

two very different worlds existed separate and independent of one other.

The novels discussed in this first chapter illustrate these concepts, an industrialized and urban Brazil in which opposite but parallel worlds exist. In order to present these worlds, of the have and have-nots, the novels focus on the lives of the most marginalized. Lives plagued with violence, crime, and desperation. The first novel, *Subúrbio* (1994), takes place in the outskirts of São Paulo and looks at the suburbs as a homogenous collective. The second novel, *Cidade de Deus* (1997) unfolds in a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro and incorporates race into the discussion. Both represent the project of Brazil's urban literature: to expose the lives of those most affected by the violence and negligence born out of drug trafficking and neo-liberalism.

### ***Subúrbio* - Loneliness, Frustration, Hopelessness, Violence**

Written in 1994, *Subúrbio* reintroduces the urban literature that permeated the 1960s and 70s; characterized by what Alfredo Bosi calls "brutalism" due to its prevalent and graphic depictions of violence. These

narratives also make the "unofficial city" their backdrop and the life of the marginalized their theme of preference. The violence, a constant in these marginal spaces, and the difficult task of representing it becomes a challenge for these new authors of the 60s and 70s. Not only do authors, such as, João Antonio, Rubem Fonseca, Manuel Lobato, Roberto Drummond, and Flávio Moreira de Costa, try to portray the complexities of these new cities, but they also try to capture the new reality. This new reality is a divided one, not between city and country but between the marginal city and the "official" city. Thus, representation of the violence generated by an authoritarian government appears as a form of *denúncia*, as well as the social conflicts between the rich and the poor (Messeder 242).

In the 1990s, writers such as Fernando Bonassi, Patricia Melo, Paulo Lins and Rubem Fonseca (who continues to write in the 1990s) employ some of "brutalism's" techniques in their attempt to reintroduce and transform the discussion of national identity during a period of economic and political *abertura*. Some critics, however, believe that "brutalism's" only purpose is to create a feeling of shock while failing to generate any political agency. The following analysis looks at whether both

readings are conflicting or complimentary when assessing *Subúrbio*'s ability to at once contribute and hinder the quest for emancipation of Brazil's most marginalized.

In her book, *O choque do real: estética, mídia e cultura*, Beatriz Jaguaribe studies how cultural production in contemporary Brazil along with mass media affects our perception of "o real". Through an analysis of nineteenth century Realism and urban literature of the 1990s, Jaguaribe explains their points of contact and their differences in order to conclude that urban literature of the 90s is in fact a new form of Realism. According to her analysis, some of the characteristics that Realism and urban literature of the 1990s share relate to Realism's original desire to portray the world through the eyes of a "scientific observer". This writing technique reflects the belief that the use of imaginary and/or fantastic worlds and experiences limit the possibility to demonstrate society's harsh realities (21)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Given its recent inception, the term New Realism has no clear definition. Although several critics have written about it (Luz Horne, Daniel Noemí, Andrea Fanta, Beatriz Jaguaribe, Idelber Avelar, and Bruce Robins among others) New Realism is a definition in progress and one that is being debated. What most agree on, however, is that New Realists in Latin America reject both the literature of the Boom and Magic Realism while recovering the socio-political involvement of traditional Realism. At the same time, however, New Realism rejects the subjectivity constructed by 19th century Realism; dictated by middle-

In the case of *Subúrbio*, the novel tells the story of a place through the lives of an old couple whose marriage has gone astray. Although the old man, *o velho*, is the main character, he is in fact a portrayal of the effects that modernity has had on Brazil's suburbs: automatism, loneliness, degradation, hopelessness, anonymity, poverty, violence. In *Subúrbio*, a desire to portray the world "as is" becomes evident not only in the opening lines of the novel, but in the epigraph of the first chapter:

Primeiras informações.  
Primeiras impressões dessa história,  
antes e depois.  
Paisagem vista a olho nu: (13)

First report.  
First impressions of this story,  
before and after.  
Landscape viewed through the naked eye:

The narrator then opens the novel with a detailed description of the street where the main characters live:

A placa menor - "Emérito Cientista Italiano" - já se perdeu, ficando só mesmo a mancha correspondente. A maior, quase morta de ferrugem, está pendurada por um parafuso mal espetado na parede. Até hoje ela range. Ferrugem. A água das chuvas foi espalhando a calda da ferrugem. É o que mais chama atenção na esquina. O

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class' notions of culture, psychology, gender, emotions, etc. New Realism is strongly influenced by mass media (specifically television and cinema), globalization, and sees violence and/or sexuality as a visceral experience. What Jaguaribe calls a "cathartic triggering that is purposefully ambiguous" (The Shock 70).

vigor das sombras escorridas. O bolor impresso no cimento. Fóssil. (13)

The smaller sign - "Emérito Cientista Italiano" - is lost, leaving behind only its corresponding stain. The largest one, almost dead from rustiness, is hanging from one badly-hammered nail. Until today, it screeches. Rustiness. Rain water spreads the thick rusty sap. It's what calls the most attention at the street corner. The energy of the dripping shadows. The stench pressed on the cement. Fossil.

Although the novel illustrates an interest in material things, the detailed descriptions focus on the physical condition of these making it the focus of the first part of this novel. In addition psychological and emotional commentary accompanies observation. This in turn is coupled with lyrical and elliptical style through the use of repetition of words, sounds, and images. Throughout the work, language and prose are used to portray indirectly the state of mind of the protagonist, and the emotional impact the events have on the main characters' lives.

Jaguaribe believes that the reason why new forms of Realism incorporate psychological and emotional characteristics is due to the clear understanding contemporary authors have of the role mass media and commercialization play in the construction of the social imaginary (35). Therefore, their goal is not only to show

the world "as is", but also to demonstrate how the characters' relationship with mass media and commercialization adversely affects their lives. In the case of *Subúrbio*, one issue that comes into play are the effects mainstream media and commercialization have over the characters' perceptions of themselves. For example, in chapter 31 the wife of the main character, a *velha*, is looking at an ad in a magazine. The ad is for jewelry and the product is being sold as the panacea for the perfect marriage. Given that neither the *velha* nor her husband can afford the diamond ring, the only thing she can do is dream of happiness, "No tempo dessa história a velha era capaz de passar a tarde olhando nessa fotografia fina, nesse anúncio de jóias na contracapa de um número antigo de revista de mulher" 'During the time of this story the old woman could spend the entire afternoon staring at that picture, in that jewelry ad on the cover of an old issue of a woman's magazine' (119). Since happiness can only be measured in material terms, a *velha* can't think of herself or her marriage as happy. The criticism, however, is based on a materialist approach. As such, Bonassi's negative view of mainstream media and commercialization does not reflect a

deeper understanding of the issues that constitute social and economic marginalization.

Mass media's influence also becomes apparent in the aesthetics employed to construct the novel. Bonassi employs techniques such as the absence of names usually found in sensationalist media. As a result, the characters lack identity and appear as an anonymous and homogenous collective contributing to the mischaracterization of São Paulo's margins. The novel also inserts indiscriminately advertisement clippings with no story line attached. Both techniques blur the lines between novelistic and journalistic text, which allows the reader to forget at times that the text he/she is reading is fiction.

*Subúrbio* focuses on the present and as a result avoids the topics of history and race, leaving these unaddressed. Bonassi's criticism aims to show how neo-liberalism has socially marginalized the poorest sectors of São Paulo. The novel, however, does not incorporate the role power relations and historical discourses have played in constructing the subjectivity of the marginalized; constituting them as subalternized groups that have little influence on the way they have been represented. Critics of New Realism believe this type of literature also falls



short of making any real social criticism. Their reasons, however, do not relate to the concerns of subaltern studies, such as the importance relationships of power and epistemic violence have in the construction of subalternity.

Critics of New Realism, such as Luz Horne, Bruce Robins, and Daniel Noemí, also believe that although critical realism of the nineteenth century shows disenchantment with the world, it shows a desire and aspirations for a better future. New Realism, on the other hand, receives blame for lacking any political ideology and for not offering any political or social alternatives. For the critics of New Realism this ideological vacuum results from the need New Realist literature has to introduce new "efeitos do real"<sup>6</sup> in a society already saturated with images, narratives, and information. Therefore, the effects of these narratives are different than those of the nineteenth century not only because they distance themselves from scientific objectivity but also because of the role mass media plays in the construction of "reality".

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<sup>6</sup> Jaguaribe's definition of "efeitos do real" is taken from Roland Barthes' essay "L'effet de reel". In this essay, Barthes writes that the "effect of reality" is a textual device which establishes reality through the use of rhetorical devices. As such, reality in literature is a constructed discourse and verisimilitude is measured not in relation to what is real, but in relation to the discursive system to which it belongs.

As a result, Jaguaribe claims that New Realism looks to rescue the feeling of "experience" through the intensification and valorization of fictionalized occurrences (Jaguaribe 31, 35). It is in its desire to increase the sense of "experience" that New Realism employs "*o choque*", that is, a cathartic feel of fear and shock. Its purpose lies on discharging an intense emotional force without shattering the notion of what is real (Jaguaribe 101).

Although narratives like *Subúrbio* contain shocking episodes, the rape scene being the most poignant, it is not because of this characteristic that their social and political purpose becomes limited or non-existent. It is rather their inability to move beyond a criticism of neo-liberalism, towards a more encompassing view of Brazil's socio-economic problems. *Subúrbio's* definition of "marginalized" limits criticism to a purely economic one. For Marxist critics, such as Antonio Cândido, this focus already characterized the urban literature of the 1960s as being highly critical of society. Near the end of Antonio Cândido's essay "Literatura y subdesarrollo" of 1972, Cândido briefly talks about the "realismo feroz" that

emerged during the late 1960s. For Candido, this 1960s form of Realism constitutes a protest or "counter-literature":

... estamos ante una literatura del contra. Contra la escritura elegante; antiguo ideal castizo del país; contra la convención realista, basada en la verosimilitud y su presupuesto de una selección dirigida por la convención cultural; contra la lógica narrativa, es decir, la concatenación graduada de las partes por la técnica de la dosificación de los efectos; y finalmente contra el orden social sin que con eso los textos manifiesten una posición política determinada...:la negación implícita sin afirmación explícita de una ideología. (Ensayos 312)

... we face a counter literature. Against elegant writing; the old chastise ideal of the nation; against the realist convention, based on likeliness and a selection guided by cultural convention; against the logic of narrative, meaning, the gradual linking of parts through the dosage of effects; and finally, against social order without the texts expressing any determined political ideology...: the implicit negation without explicit affirmation of an ideology.

In these essays of the 1970s, Antonio Candido makes reference to the literature that dared to speak against the establishment. This literature contested the feeling of security and of socio-economic progress and equality that the military government presented (with the help of mass media) to Brazilians and foreigners alike. Storylines that dehumanized urban life and appropriated colloquial language and slang typical of the margins, characterized the works of writers such as Rubem Fonseca, João Antonio, Roberto

Drummond, and Ignácio Loyola Brandão, among others. In the 1990s, the *literatura do contra* speaks against the government's neo-liberal policies. These policies promised to close the gap between the rich and the poor but instead brought about more poverty and marginalization. Fernando Bonassi's *Subúrbio* thus reinvents *o contra* and the *realismo feroz* in order to speak up against current social and political contradictions.

In the first part of the book a third person narrator describes and introduces the lives of *o velho* and *a velha*. The chapters stand alone and do not connect with each other. This lack of unity reflects the type of relationship that *o velho* and *a velha* have; one without communication and in which their individual lives are independent of each other. This also reflects the idea of *o contra*, of going against the Realist conventions of cause and effect. Not only is Bonassi's narrative not linear, it does not employ the use of flashbacks nor does he jump forward in time. Instead, the randomly placed events/chapters offer no cues as to how to link them and provide no information regarding the amount of time that passes between each event. In fact, the reader never knows how much time has lapsed from the beginning to the end of the novel, turning time into a

completely irrelevant factor of the narrative. As time becomes immaterial, the reader is forced to pay close attention to each individual event/chapter, and to understand its significance with relation to the character's development and not with relation to the plot. The novel aims to expose the life of the old couple as well as the social and psychological effects it has on them.

Another reason why time is suspended in the narrative relates to Bonassi's desire to expose two of the many negative effects modernity has caused. For the authors of urban literature of the 1960s, 70s, and 90s, modernity referred to the rapid and aggressive industrialization that started in the 1960s and continued through the 1990s. In the case of *Subúrbio*, the irrelevancy of time illustrates automatism and the factory's inability to offer opportunities for economic advancement. By portraying every workday as a replication of the previous one, Bonassi demonstrates that jobs in assembly-lines lead to the automatism of its workers. In addition, the *subúrbio's* reliance on factory jobs signals to the marginalized dependency on dead-end, low paying jobs.

In order to demonstrate the old man's feelings of entrapment and monotony, the narrator describes the old

man's job at a car factory. The description entails a list of things and mechanical actions that fill up one page. After the narrator finishes one day's description, the entire list is repeated again and again. As the repetitions advance, the list is condensed and it becomes difficult to find where it begins and where it ends. Consequently the reader loses track of the number of repetitions (time) as one day gets confused with the next while falling into a mode of senseless repetition and boredom that reproduces the sense of labor in the factory's assembly line:

... descer a rua - esperar - subir no ônibus Mercedes Benz - dormir - acordar - descer do ônibus Mercedes Benz - entrar pela portaria3 - picar o cartão - subir para o vestiário...- descer para linha de produção - ferramentaria - prensas - fundição - caldeiras - carrinhos de mão -...rodar rodar macio no seu carro ônibus caminhão trator e demais veículos automatores...- vestir a roupa de casa - descer para portaria 3 - picar o cartão - sair pela portaria 3 - subir no ônibus Mercedes Benz - dormir ser acordado...(29-30)

... go down the street - wait - get on the Mercedes Benz bus - sleep - wake up - get off the Mercedes Benz bus - enter through door 3 - clock in - go up to the locker room... - go down to the assembly line - tools - hydraulic presses - welding boilers - dollies - ... go go softly in his car bus trailer tractor and other automated vehicles - ... put on house clothes - go down to door 3 - clock in - leave through door 3 - get on the Mercedes Benz bus - sleep be awaken...

Authors of the 1960s and 1970s tend to focus on the social and economic disparities created by accelerated growth and on the high levels of criminal activity. These authors use violence as an attempt to understand the social reality of the marginalized and of the middle class' reaction to the collateral effects of this exclusion: burglaries, kidnappings, and assassinations. Therefore, urban authors of the 1960s, 70s, and 90s prefer sordid storylines which usually take place in the margins where the excluded live, *os mundos suburbanos*. Not only do they give priority to traditionally excluded subject, but they also give away with the cultural stigmas associated with *locura*, sex, misery, and death. The purpose is to create the effect of reality through the most violent emotions rather than search for "prazeres ilusorios" (Messeder 244-245)<sup>7</sup>.

In order to further advance the idea of the socio-economic limitations of the factory jobs, the novel presents the old man's place of work as his point of reference to the world as he knows it. Not only is his life an extension of his job, so is the place he lives in. The

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<sup>7</sup> Critics of New Realism claim that although traditional Realism to a certain extent attempts to look within the character, this consciousness is nevertheless limited and determined by the "rational" as defined by society. New Realists, however, break from these parameters as they push the limits of what would be considered right, wrong, of gender, of sanity, etc.

day he retires and leaves the factory for good, *o velho* sees in the factory his city:

Aquela fábrica tinha mesmo um aspecto de cidade, com alamedas e barrancos e ruelas e becos e até favelas, que eram as montanhas cinzentas onde as empreiteiras de lixo encostavam o refugio. Tinha o aspecto de uma cidade dele. (97)

That factory did have the look of a city, with avenues and ravines and narrow streets and corners and even *favelas*, which were the gray mountains made of accumulated waste. It had the appearance of a city of his.

The old man's inability to imagine anything else outside the factory and outside his neighborhood reflects the social marginalization that he lives in. From the beginning and throughout the novel the narrator informs the reader that the narrative takes place in São Caetano, a suburb of São Paulo and a region known as the *ABCD paulista*<sup>8</sup>. These suburbs became well known because it was there that manufacturers from around the world built their factories. This prompted an economic boom and massive migration from the Northeastern region of Brazil. The narrator's description of São Caetano characterizes the suburbs as "unofficial cities". An example of how this is achieved is by speaking of the "the city" as a place that is physically

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<sup>8</sup> ABCD refers to the suburbs of Santo Amaro, São Bernardo, São Caetano, and Diadema.



far removed from the *subúrbio* as it takes several bus lines to reach downtown (not to mention that "downtown" is only associated with São Paulo, even though São Caetano itself has a commercial center).

The feeling of disconnect is also illustrated through the lack of contact or exchange between the two places. Chapter 18 illustrates this disconnect. It is midnight and the old man hears the sound of a train arriving in his neighborhood of São Caetano. The train incites him to try to imagine what lies outside his neighborhood, what is happening in the "outside world". His attempt fails and *o velho* can only manage to visualize the street blocks surrounding his house,

- O que acontece no mundo agora?  
O velho usava todas as forças. Se concentrou nessa idéia. Mas tudo que ele viu foram os quarteirões em torno... O velho em pé em seu quarto deserto à procura de um eco de ferros no meio da sua noite. A noite deserta... O trem chegando a São Caetano no meio da noite. O trem de carga. (66-68)
- What is happening in the world right now?  
The old man used all his strength. He concentrated on that idea. But the only thing he saw were the street blocks that surrounded him ... The old man standing in his deserted bedroom in search of an echo of steel in the middle of the night. The deserted night ... The train arriving to São Caetano in the middle of the night. The freight train.

The numerous repetitions of the word *deserto* employed in the chapter to describe the streets, the house, or the

neighborhood, emphasize a sense of loneliness, of being uninhabited. Ironically, the train is not a passenger train but a freight train which further illustrates the disconnect between "the city" and the margins. No exchange of people, of ideas, or of services exists as commercial interests alone dictate the relationship "the city" establishes with the suburbs.

The feelings of hopelessness, impossibility, and immobility that echo throughout the first section serve to criticize the effects "modernity" has had on the lower socio-economic classes of Brazil's major cities. Chapter after chapter the images of desperation and frustration repeat themselves. These offer a grim picture of the characters' past, present, and future situation in which opportunities for economic advancement are non-existent. Lives are limited to mechanical or menial jobs and to the corner *buteco* (bar). In order to illustrate this entrapment the novel emphasizes motionlessness through the use of specific examples such as stating the characters' desire to perform basic daily activities but never fulfilling these desires. It also uses simile to transmit a feeling of physical immobility. These include allusions to quicksand or describing the characters' movements in slow motion. In

addition, descriptions of objects and places help transmit a sense of being motionless and of being trapped in a particular place and situation.

The sense of decay, neglect, and darkness that permeates the first part of the novel represents a particular characteristic of *Subúrbio*. Darkness or the words *em penumbra* always describe the couple's house along with shadows and shapeless bodies or *vultos*. Although the novel portrays the *suburbio* as colorless, descriptions of the physical state of objects that emphasize "rust" and "mildew" fill the first part of the narrative. In general, emphasis lies on describing things and their state of decay and abandonment. Objects and their condition serve as analogies to the lives of the *subúrbio*'s residents: broken, non(dis)functional, old, dilapidated, abandoned, forgotten, and neglected. These portrayals of poverty, neglect, and hopelessness that make up the *subúrbio* allude to the unattained promises of prosperity that capitalistic policies promised.

Thus, the novel aims to criticize the economic system and its effects on the marginalized by presenting the lives of the *subúrbio*'s residents as located outside of the socially established paradigms. These other lives belong to

corrupt and violent police officers, *bicheros*<sup>9</sup>, people immobilized by disease, and criminals, and offer an even grimmer picture of what it is like to live in the margins. The picture of desperation and frustration turns darker and disturbing during the second part of the novel.

In the beginning of the second part the old man meets a little girl, and with her "arrival" his entire world transforms. The day he sees her for the first time it is raining. Like many other rainy days in the novel the humidity and dampness impregnate everything and mildew is everywhere, "A chuva cobriu aquela parte da cidade como um lençol póido e nessa orgia de umidade as lesmas se multiplicavam ... As manchas negras e veludosos cresciam ao longo do rodapé da cozinha do fogão dos velhos" 'The rain covered that part of the city like a rotten bed sheet and in that orgy of humidity the slugs multiplied... The black velvety-like stains grew along the kitchen's baseboard of the old couple's kitchen' (142). In order to alleviate his boredom, the old man decides to go to the door to take a peek at the street; it is then that he sees the girl. The

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<sup>9</sup> People involved in illegal gambling schemes. *Bicheros* are blamed for starting the drug trafficking and arm dealing businesses of the *favelas*. It is said that as politicians and law enforcement officials started asking for larger bribes, *bicheros* started looking for alternative sources of income.

description of the encounter and the language employed drastically contrast with the narrative of the first part of the novel, "Naquele dia, conforme a menina andava, a chuva em torno do seu corpo desaparecia... ele [o velho] percebia que o que ela fazia mesmo era tirar a chuva, a umidade de dentro dele próprio" 'That day, as the little girl walked, the rain that surrounded her body disappeared... he perceived that what she was actually doing was removing the rain, the humidity from inside of himself' (143). From that moment onward, sun, conversation, light, color, and activity replace the darkness, dampness, immobility, and silence that saturated his life.

The friendship between the old man and the little girl brings moments of happiness by breaking his routine and by introducing someone that talks and listens to him. The already inappropriate relationship turns even more uncomfortable as the narrator describes the old man's sexual feelings towards the little girl (her age is never revealed but she is always described in diminutives such as little hands, little feet, little dress, etc.). In the end, the old man takes her to a park a train ride away from their neighborhood, he rapes her, and leaves her behind. The old man is then lynched and killed with a rock by the

neighbors once they learn of his crime. The last scene of the novel describes the lynching of the old man and the rock about to fall on his head as the old man utters, "Agora eu encontro descanso" 'I now find peace' (292). making these the last words of the novel. Can the last two scenes be considered gratuitous violence? Or are they part of the novel's socio-political argument?

There is no doubt that the park scene is strong and indeed quite shocking and disturbing. It is not only what takes place that shocks, it is also the fact that this character who the reader has come to know throughout this novel decides to act this way. The question then becomes, "Why?" There is, of course, no justification for his actions. But there exists a need to understand this person and in the process analyze his and the *subúrbio's* social and psychological condition. In the end, Bonassi does not offer any glimpse of hope for the old man or for any of the *subúrbio's* residents. Death appears to be the only way out of a life that offers no alternatives or opportunities. Interestingly, a mob of concerned and infuriated neighbors brings the old man to justice. The system, it seems, has abandoned them even on this grave occasion. Ending on this note, Bonassi underscores that the lack of a welfare state

and the rise of a neo-liberal economic system can have terrible social repercussions.

Even though *Subúrbio* offers a criticism of neo-liberalism and exposes the social condition of Brazil's marginalized, the novel does not offer a clear political ideology. As Candido stated above about the literature *do contra*, "[...] contra el orden social sin que con eso los textos manifiesten una posición política determinada...: la negación implícita sin afirmación explícita de una ideología." The text alludes to the disbelief that other possibilities exist due to the inability to find them outside the established paradigms. Therefore, the novel's *estética do choque* is not the text's real limitation. It is rather the inability to understand and therefore define marginality as a construction of the ruling class by way of political, social, economic, and epistemic subordination. Beatriz Jaguaribe describes the limitations of the "estética do choque" by stating that "it is questionable whether these images and narratives of urban violence do not ultimately congeal typologies that become codified and offer a simplified view of the popular, reality, and the real. The blinding headlights of the shock register may well be eclipsing the nuanced existences, the bizarre

imaginations, and the contradictions of cities and people that are still to be narrated" (The Shock 80).

By not recognizing the importance of history and discourse the novel loses the ability to portray the world through a different lens and thus, to find solutions. Although the novel aims to speak for and on behalf of the marginalized, the novel does not capture the relevance of coloniality and slavery with relation to today's problems. It is true that policies implemented under the military government and intensified under democracy increased socio-economic inequality. It is also true, however, that systems inherited from the time of the colony and from slavery have resulted in unresolved problems that help intensify the current ones. And in a time in which identity politics play a crucial role in defining today's social problems, race relations do not enter *Subúrbio's* discussion on inequality. By contrast, the next novel begins to explore issues of coloniality and race in its quest to understanding Brazil's socio-economic inequalities.



### ***Cidade de Deus: Beyond Drugs and Violence***

Like Fernando Bonassi, Paulo Lins has also taken on the challenge of representing what it means to live in the margins. Although his account shares some similarities with Bonassi's style and critique, Lins goes beyond the theme and techniques of *o contra* and *o choque* in order to offer a more complex view of Brazil's society.

The depiction of "Otherness" in *Cidade de Deus* (1997) reassesses the *favela* not only as a place of economic and social exclusion, but also as a place of complex racial relationships. While *Subúrbio*'s focus lies on contesting the idea that neo-liberalism brings social and economic equality, *Cidade de Deus* principally challenges Brazil's concept of racial democracy. In the process, Paulo Lins manages to open up the discussion of race to include voices that had historically been excluded, paving the way for the emergence of *periférica*.

Established in the early 1930s and based on Gilberto Freyre's social theories, the concept of racial democracy sets out to explain that social and economic inequalities prevalent among races resulted from economic policy alone. This idea, embraced by intellectuals and politicians alike,

has managed to survive up to this day through direct and indirect support. Although the socialist movement of the 1960s, spearheaded by middle class white intellectuals, did not support Freyre, they presented themselves as followers of an economist world view. As such, they believed race was a secondary issue and that an attack on capitalism would bring social justice. This in turn would benefit nonwhites automatically in the form of egalitarian policies (Skidmore, Fact 13). This belief characterizes Cinema Novo, as it "[Moved] the theme from backwardness to underdevelopment, from neocolonialism to revolution, [demonstrating] a 'sociological profile of concerns'. It drew up an inventory of social questions, discussed collective solutions and thematised national identity and conscience" (Leite 150).

Before *Cinema Novo* the representation of the *favela* as a place of musical, lyrical, vital, and mythical poverty had been consecrated by government and mass media. This image had its start in the proclamation of *samba* as the national rhythm in the late 1930s and in the intense debates on nationalism of the *Estado Novo* era during which *mestizaje*, carnival, and *samba* were adopted as integral parts of Brazil's national patrimony (Jaguaribe 131). This image was further promoted with the aid of popular films

like *Rio 40 Graus* (1954), *Rio Zona Norte* (1957), *Orfeu Negro* (1959) and *Cinco Vezes Favela* (1962). Although the producers of these films demonstrate a desire to use cinema as a social weapon, the images of carnival and the festive samba-based soundtracks predominate (Fitzgibbon 102). As for the "sociological profile concerns" of *Cinema Novo*, Robert Stam shares Thomas Skidmore's view, "For white leftists, class is the answer to the race question. For blacks [...] race remains both a wound in itself and the salt ground into the wounds of class (192). Civil rights leader and artist, Abdias do Nascimento, had already voiced this concern in the 1960s when he said that, "African Brazilians were always treated as outsiders. At best, we were the left's 'folklore.' At worst, we were the 'divisionists' potentially responsible for the pulverization of working class unity" (46). Like *Cinema Novo*, much of the culture produced after the publication of Gilberto Freyre's social theories presents the problems afflicting Brazil's black population as socially not racially based and for which revolution provides the only answer. Therefore, as the culturally African and autochthonous contributions to the development of the country's identity were widely celebrated, race and "difference" were not. Through the use

of highly violent imagery, Paulo Lins attacks this contradiction by placing race at the center of the discussion regarding social and economic inequalities.

### **Shattering the Constructed Image of Brazil's *Favelas*:**

In the opening pages of the novel, Lins sets out to describe the origins of the *favela* and the creation of the "neofavela de cimento". This narrative contests the image of the *favela* as a mythical and lyrical place where the black population lives in happiness and contentment. Lins accomplishes this by describing the process of modernization as one that employs the use of violence, indifference, and negligence in support of its advancement:

Busca-Pé observava com olhar ligeiramente triste o desempenho dos tratores e pás mecânicas numa área desabitada [...] Ali fora o lugar onde mais brincara. A chuva voltara e chorava por Busca-Pé [...] Era muito jovem para perceber o quanto de sua infância ia embora levado por pás mecânicas. (176)

Busca-Pé observed with a slightly sadden gaze the work of the tractors and diggers in an uninhabited area [...] That was the place where he used to play the most. The rain returned and cried for Busca-Pé [...] He was too young to realize how much of his childhood was being taken away by the mechanical shovels.

The narrator also mentions the names given to the different areas within City of God to comment on the *favela's* identity, "Cidade de Deus deu a sua voz para as assombrações dos casarões abandonados, escasseou a fauna e a flora, remapeou Portugal Pequeno e renomeou o charco: *Lá em Cima, Lá na Frente, Lá Embaixo, Lá do Outro Lado do Rio e Os Apês*" 'City of God gave way to the ghosts of the abandoned houses, the fauna and flora became scarce, Little Portugal was remapped and the swamp renamed: Over There on Top, Over There In Front, Over There At the Bottom, Over There on the Other Side of the River, and The Apartments' (16). These contrast with the names given to Rio de Janeiro's neighborhoods which usually carry a historical meaning and are therefore a symbol of pride and identity. The simplicity of City of God's names reflects a lack of interest and/or value from the "official city" towards the *favela*.

Focusing on the process of unplanned urbanization also has the purpose of historicizing the high levels of neglect and marginalization that Brazil's black population has suffered since the time of the colony. To obtain this effect, Lins mentions current events as allusions to past ones:

Por dia, durante uma semana, chegavam de trinta a cinquenta mudanças, do pessoal que trazia no rosto e nos móveis as marcas das enchentes. Estiveram alojados no estádio de futebol Mario Filho e vinham em caminhões estaduais cantando:

*Cidade Maravilhosa  
cheia de encantos mil...* (18)

Each day, for a week, from thirty to fifty moves occurred, by people who brought with them faces and furniture marked by the floods. They had been sheltered at the Mario Filho Stadium and came on government buses singing:

*Cidade Maravilhosa  
cheia de encantos mil...* (18)

Talking about the "accidental" flood caused by the construction of a dam in the interior of Rio de Janeiro, the narrator alludes to the "accidental" fires that occurred in the early days of the Republic. During this time, freed slaves and rural migrants were displaced to the city's peripheries in order to replace tenements with luxury apartments. The manner in which Lins incorporates history into the narrative is the key difference between his and Bonassi's argument regarding inequality in Brazil's metropolis. While economic policies provide the basis for Bonassi's criticism, Lins understands the role hegemonic discourses play in the construction of subjectivity. Therefore, Lins tries to deconstruct the image popular media has created of Rio's *favelas* by incorporating

histories usually excluded from the discussion on marginality. This connection between the past and the present deepens as the *favelados* constantly refer to their ancestors as slaves.

Another example of this bridge between the past and present is the story of the death of Cabeleira's grandmother. The reader is informed early on that Cabeleira's grandmother died in a house fire. It is also noted that the criminal shows sadness but mainly anger when he remembers this day. It is later revealed why:

Um dia após o incêndio, Cabeleira foi levado para casa da patrona de sua tia. [...] Cabeleira ficou morando com a irmã da mãe até o pai construir outro barraco no morro. Ficava entre o tanque e a pia o tempo todo e foi dali que viu, pela porta entreaberta, o homem do televisor dizer que o incêndio fora acidental. Sentiu vontade de matar toda aquela gente branca, que tinha telefone, carro, geladeira, comia boa comida, não morava em barraco sem água e sem privada. (26)

One day after the fire, Cabeleira was taken to the house of his aunt's boss. [...] Cabeleira lived there with the sister of his mother until his dad finished building another shack on the hill. He always stayed in between the water tank and the sink and it was from there that he saw, through the door crack, the man on the television say that the fire had been accidental. He felt like killing all the white people that had telephone, car, refrigerator, ate good food, didn't live in a shack without water and without toilet.

An increasing demand for housing by the middle and upper classes in the 1960s prompted the government to regress to

its old habits. *Favelas* and tenements located in desirable areas were "accidentally" burned and destroyed and people were forced to move to the peripheries, where the state built low income housing. This placed physical and mental distance between the elite and the poor sectors, which allowed authorities to forget about their needs until deemed convenient, "[as crianças] defecavam numa folha de jornal e varejavam longe, ou então, embalavam numa lata de leite e largavam na rua. Dois anos depois da inauguração do conjunto, a rede sanitaria ficou pronta" 'The children defecated on the page of a newspaper and threw it far, or, they would put it inside a milk can which they would leave in the street. Two years after the inauguration of the housing projects, the drainpipe was completed' (33).

Unplanned urbanization in City of God also translates into an absence of government and law. This vacuum denies citizenship to its people while it causes concepts of order and justice to eventually acquire a relative and individualistic nature. Lins sums up the end result of years of neglect as he describes the *neofavela* of the 1990s, "Aqui agora uma favela, a neofavela de cimento, armada de becos-bocas, sinistros-silêncios, com gritos-desesperos no correr das vielas e na indecisão das encruzilhadas" 'Here



now, a *favela*, the *neofavela* of concrete, armed with dead-end streets-drug houses, sinister-silences, with screams-desperation running through the alleyways and through the indecision of the crossroads' (17). This quote, which reflects the lyrical style of Lins, offers a grim picture of the *favela* as a place of criminality ("bocas"), violence ("sinistros"; "gritos"), and desperation ("desesperos"). Lins also presents the *neofavela* as the result of urbanization policies that looked to privilege the elite as *favleas* rejected and segregated the poorest sectors of the population<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, it can be said that the *favela* appears as a criticism of modernity as it is presented as the counter image of progress, and as such offers a narrative that defies that of prosperity and democracy that accompany neo-liberal rhetoric. Paulo Lins' *Cidade de Deus* is a reminder that Brazil's reality is far from being an example of economic progress and equality.

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<sup>10</sup> Spatial configurations in Rio de Janeiro today are a legacy of an early Republican state policy grounded in social authoritarianism, practiced at the same time the state proclaimed liberal ideals for modernization of the city. During the early part of the twentieth century subaltern classes were forcibly removed from their homes in the centre of the city. This formed part of a brutally executed urbanization project that sought to eliminate the conditions that had enabled the popular classes to organize themselves into significant revolts against policies enforced by the state government, such as the infamous Vaccine Revolt of 1904 (Leu 345).

## **Racial un-democracy**

Like *Subúrbio*, bringing to the forefront the more realistic image of the margins has the objective of criticizing the supposed link between economic progress and social equality. However, *Cidade de Deus* has a second objective, exposing race relations. Unlike most urban authors of the 90s, including Bonassi, Lins assigns race to his characters in order to expose the complex and racially diverse social fabric of Brazil. Not only does he incorporate the black subject into the narrative, but also the *nordestino*<sup>11</sup>. In addition, Lins moves blackness outside of its customary cultural referentiality which tends to portray black characters as complacent towards the white elite and/or as subjects of folklore.

Although *Cidade de Deus* does not explicitly invoke earlier representations, it counters the hegemonic imaginary of Blacks that canonical literature has produced

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<sup>11</sup> *Nordestino* refers to people original to the rural Northeastern states of Piauí, Ceara, Paraíba, Sergipe, Alagoas, Maranhão, Bahia, and Pernambuco. Because the Northeast is the poorest region in Brazil, many people from this region migrate to Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and other major cities in the South in search of employment. Although *nordestinos* are ethnically very diverse, they are usually stereotyped as people of the countryside and as having indigenous and European ancestry. This characterization is in part due to the fact that most of the *nordestino* migrants come from the interior, rather than the coast. This is evident in the novel as they are described as having light skin but are called *nordestinos* rather than *brancos*. The distinction also alludes to the fact that the culture of the *nordestino* differs from that of other Brazilians.

and it diverges from earlier traditions of critique. According to the studies of Gregory Rabassa, which focus on the presence of the black figure within Brazilian literature, the theme of abolition prevails within literature produced up until 1888. Rabassa found that the portrayal of black Brazilians falls under four characterizations: as a beast that is only useful for physical labor, a savage that can't be trusted and can revolt any time if given the opportunity, a faithful servant who loves his master, and an exotic figure that incites lust (15). Although Aluísio Azevedo's Naturalist works in the nineteenth century depict the oppressing effects of rural and urban deprivation and attack racial prejudice the subtexts differ greatly: the danger of educating mulattoes and allowing them to rise in society; fear of interracial marriages; and African descendants as catalysts for violence and immorality (Haberly 149). As the new century approached, representations of blacks within literature remained unchanged as literary and cultural activities continued to be the prerogatives of elites.

Portrayals of Brazil's black population changed under regional and *modernista* literature, which was heavily influenced by Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-Grande e Senzala* of

the 1930s. Thus, the negative subversive image was transformed into that of the *malandro*, a figure who functions outside the law but who does not challenge the status quo. The freed slave also turned into a figure admired for his/her musicality and sexuality but was presented as incapable of contributing towards the nation's economic and intellectual development. These images are common in Jorge Amado's literature (Brookshaw 8). In stark contrast, *Cidade de Deus* offers a diverse cast of characters and a look into their psyche. At the same time, violence appears not only as the thread that links past and present but also as the agent of racist sentiments. All these factors add complexity and depth to the characters in order to illustrate how Brazil's construction of race and national identity has deeply scarred young *favelados*.

*Cidade de Deus* tells the story of the *favela* from the 1960s to the 1990s through the lives of three of its most famous criminals. The novel is divided into three parts, each named after one of the criminals and each demonstrating a gradual increase in crime and violence. The first chapter, "A História de Cabeleira" is dedicated to this character's criminal life as a *malandro* (a Robin Hood type criminal). Cabeleira and his gang (the *Trio*

*Ternura*) use petty crime to help their community and their families. The second part, "A História de Bené" elevates the type of criminal activity as drug trafficking enters the narrative. Crimes become much more brutal but are always committed against a traitor (those who report traffickers to the police) or the "enemy" (other drug traffickers). Criminals only steal outside the *favela* and they make an effort to avoid killing or hurting their victims. In part three of the novel, "A História de Zé Pequeno" crime escalates to its most violent form as the plot focuses on the drug wars of the *favela*. Treason no longer justifies killings, and victims of crime who are now located both inside and outside the *favela* are not spared from being killed or violently beaten. As the novel takes the reader through three decades of history, it becomes apparent that the nature of the *favela* transforms from community oriented and cordial to extremely individualistic. In addition to an increase in violence, the desire for revenge against the white elite also increases in frequency and tone as the novel advances. According to Vanessa Fitzgibbon, the racism that the black criminals of the *favela* express towards the white elite reflects the resentment that has developed within the black community as

a result of centuries of social and economic marginalization (275). Therefore, contrary to what racial democracy suggests, Paulo Lins argues that racism exists in Brazil and that it has and continues to affect the lives of Afro-Brazilians.

Besides showing the negative relationship between race and urbanization, the novel focuses on race and police brutality. This not only has the objective of exposing the racism found within the judiciary system, but also to demonstrate its social and psychological implications. History, again, becomes the novel's powerful tool. Unlike the scenes that describe the construction of the *favela*, however, the past does not manifest itself through loose allusions; it is instead referred to in a clear and direct manner. The first part of the novel juxtaposes images of slaves tortured for poor behavior against contemporary beatings of criminals by police. This creates a direct bridge between today's black *favelado* and his ancestors. The scenes of torture are also indirectly linked to today's youngsters since they comment on their blood relationship to Brazil's slaves. The scenes involving torture take place in big houses (*casarões*) said to have belonged to slave owners and that were and are still located on the site of

what is today the *favela*. In addition, the remains of these *casarões* (reminiscent of Gilberto Freyre's *casa-grande*)<sup>12</sup> are referred to as "haunted houses", alluding to the dark past that they represent. The presence of these *casarões* stimulate Busca Pé and his friend to imagine life in the time of slavery:

[...] os outros casarões tomaram a aparência de novos, o rio tornou-se mais largo, com água pura e jacarés nas margens. Os dois ficaram com um grito estrangulado na garganta que não se permitia explodir. Viam os negros trabalhando nos engenhos de açúcar, nas fazendas de café. O chicote repenicava no lombo [...] Sem querer, chegaram à sala de torturas, onde se preparava a amputação da perna de um negro fujão. (177-178)

[...] the other haunted houses took the appearance of being new, the river became wider, with clean water and alligators at its banks. A scream was strangulated in their throats and was prevented from exploding. They saw the black men and women working in the coffee and sugar cane plantations. The whip clashed on their backs [...] By chance, they arrived at the torture chambers, where the amputation of a slave's leg who had tried to escape was being prepared.

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<sup>12</sup> In his book, Freyre portrays the *casa-grande* as a place where harmonious miscegenation took place. According to Freyre, this miscegenation resulted in a robust race which he believed possessed the ability to attain opportunities within society. By bringing the *casarões* into the narrative, Lins again connects the past to the present. The connection, as it did before, has the purpose of contesting established imaginaries. Therefore, by describing the *casarões* as haunted places that invoke fear and uneasiness, Lins is strongly criticizing Freyre's harmonious vision of the *casa-grande*. Also, the novel's constant references to the *casarões* throughout the narrative, aims to illustrate that the policies based on Freyre's ideas have had detrimental effects still evident in present day Brazil.

In addition to bridging the past to the present through violence, the unequal application of the law between white and black citizens surfaces as another recurring theme:

A polícia tinha o costume de agir assim com os viciados brancos. Até mesmo na favela, os brancos, quando não fossem nordestinos, tinham certa regalia se flagrados fumando maconha. Na maioria das vezes, os policiaes nem os prendiam, davam somente alguns conselhos, os libertando em seguida. (328)

The police used to act that way with the white addicts. Even inside the *favela*, white people, if they were not from the Northeast, had certain privileges if caught smoking pot. Most of the time, the police wouldn't even arrest them, they would only give them a piece of advice, releasing them immediately.

The novel explains that criminals of petty theft who end up in jail are forced to sign confessions for violent crimes they did not commit. The double standard that exists between blacks and whites is clear throughout the novel. Another example is the story of how three white criminals from City of God are able to commit crimes outside the *favela* simply because of their physical appearance. The trio, disguised as doctors by wearing white coats and briefcases, enters luxurious condominiums in order to ransack them. The story mentions that they walk past the reception desks without problem. At one point, as the trio



is leaving the building it just robbed, the police arrive and one of the policemen asks one of the criminals if he has seen the thieves, “- O prédio tá sendo assaltado, doutor! O senhor tá vindo daonde? - Daqui do segundo andar ... Eu não vi nada de estranho não” \- Doctor, the building is being robbed! Sir, where are you coming from? - I come from the second floor... I didn't see anything unusual' (337); the trio walks free.

As previously mentioned, the process of deconstructing the concept of racial democracy involves exposing a system of exclusion based on race and enforced with violence. By interweaving images of slavery and physical punishment with those of police repression, the novel connects the past to the present, making history an important component of the narrative. In addition, racism presents itself as systematic and institutionalized. Although ignored within literary tradition, *Cidade de Deus* materializes the psychological effects of racism. The nature of the crimes and the violence increases as the novel moves in time. This demonstrates a strong resentment on the part of the marginalized towards the white elite. Resentment, however, not only manifests itself through violence (although this is a very important aspect of the novel), but also through

racist sentiments and acts of auto-marginalization; Cabaleira offers an example these sentiments. Cabaleira is portrayed as someone whose intense hatred towards "os brancos" and his desire to live a life of crime, result from the government's destruction of his house by an intentional fire:

Cabeleira resolveu que não andaria mais duro, trabalhar que nem escravo, jamais; sem essa de ficar comendo de marmitta, receber ordens dos branquelos, ficar sempre como o serviço pesado sem chance de subir na vida [...] seguiria o caminho que para ele não significava escravidão. (51)

Cabeleira decided he was not going to be broke anymore, work like a slave, never; eating homemade lunch, receiving orders from the whites, always stuck with the manual jobs without any opportunity for advancement in life [...] he would take the road that meant no slavery.

Not wanting to work for the white elite, Cabeleira turns to crime as the only way he sees to survive. Most other criminals in the novel share this feeling and see manual labor (the single type of job available to them) as a continuation of slavery.

Quotes such as the one above, however, do not seek to justify crime or violence. They intend to paint a much more complex image of race relations in Brazil. Social and psychological complexity within race relations reveals the falseness of racial democracy, but more importantly, it

demonstrates that decades of neglect and denial towards the existence of racism has resulted in grave social problems. The following quote sums up the result and cause of decades of indifference and systematic marginalization:

[...] o Grande que matava policiais por achar a raça mais filha-da-puta de todas, essa raça que serve aos brancos, essa raça de pobre que defende o direito dos ricos. Tinha prazer em matar brancos, porque o branco tinha roubado seus antepassados da África para trabalhar de graça, o branco criou a favela e botou o negro para habitá-la, o branco criou a polícia para bater, prender e matar o negro. Tudo, tudo que era bom era de brancos [...] (175-176)

[...] Grande, who killed police officers because he believed them to be the most piece-of-shit race, that race that works for the white people, that race made of poor people that defends the rights of the rich. He felt pleasure in killing white people, because the white man had robbed his ancestors from Africa in order to work for free, the white man created the *favela* and threw the black people to live there, the white man created police in order to beat up the black people. Everything that was good was of the white men [...]

In line with subaltern studies, which seeks to revise national histories, *Cidade de Deus* employs historical discourse in order to deconstruct established concepts and perceptions affecting the subjectivity of Afro-Brazilians living in *favelas*. The epigraph of the novel, taken from one of Paulo Leminski's poems, also alludes to history's importance:

Vim pelo caminho difícil,  
a linha que nunca termina  
a linha bate na pedra,  
a palavra quebra uma esquina,  
mínima linha vazia,  
a linha, uma vida inteira,  
palavra, palavra minha.

I came through the difficult path,  
the line that never ends  
the line that hits the rock,  
the word turns the corner,  
minimum empty line,  
a line, one entire life,  
word, word of mine.

The selection of Paulo Leminski, a poet of Brazil's Concrete movement of the 1950s, underlines the importance of both language and history. While Paulo Lins' preference for poetry comes through in the narrative in several instances when the narrator interrupts the plot in favor of poetic interludes, history also emerges as a key factor. This is because the *concretistas* emphasize the objectification of the word through recognition of its specificity concerning its value in *time* and space<sup>13</sup> (Barros 187, my emphasis). Therefore, language serves as the tool that can best represent the importance of experience and

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<sup>13</sup> This becomes evident in the *manifesto concretista* which states that: "concrete poetry begins by assuming a total responsibility before language: accepting the premise of the historical idiom as the indispensable nucleus of communication, it refuses to absorb words as mere indifferent vehicles, without life, without personality, without history in which convention insists on burying the idea" ([www.uol.com.br/augustocampos/concretipoet.htm](http://www.uol.com.br/augustocampos/concretipoet.htm)).

history. This is particularly important since the novel experiences an increase in violence and a decrease in communication. In this way, the narrative demonstrates that because the possibility for dialogue is nonexistent, so is the possibility for understanding the past and therefore, for resolving the current problems.

While the violence that permeates the first and second parts of the novel represents the thread that links the past to the present, this is not true of the last chapter. Part Three, which tells the story of Zé Pequeno and the drug wars, characterizes the complete degradation of the *favela*. The need to justify a violent act has vanished and people kill for no reason at all. Critics have called this the "banalization of violence" and add that its only value is that of creating shock (Jaguaribe, Soares)<sup>14</sup>. Others believe that violence represents the force behind the *favelados'* resistance against the elite's theories of

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<sup>14</sup> Other critics of Latin American culture have stated that the increase in the use of violence in literature and films has had the effect of creating a "citizenship of fear" (Rotker, Reguillo). Its supporters believe that cultural production that relies on this technique is generated by the urban middle classes and aims at constructing a particular imaginary of the marginalized. This "imaginaries" seek to turn the actors into enemies of modernity and into the "potential carriers of the dangers of return" (Sanchez-Prado 39, 52). While this analysis is relevant to the cinematic adaptation of *Cidade de Deus*, and one I will return to later in the dissertation, this can't be said of the novel. This is because Lins' use of violence has the purpose of criticizing its economic, social and political roots.

*embranquecimento* (Fitzgibbon). Some critics in alignment with Candido's concept of *o contra* interpret the trafficker's violence as an act of resistance to the status quo. Alba Zaluar, someone who has witnessed City of God's violence first-hand<sup>15</sup>, has heavily criticized this stance and believes instead that violence represents capitalism's most perverse and savage side:

Os que ainda insistem em apresentar os traficantes como heróis de seu povo e símbolo da resistência à ordem neste país, nunca se indignaram como são montadas essas quadrilhas, como são repartidos esses bens e os lucros nessas empresas, como é usada a mão-de-obra local. Não querem ver a ordem capitalista mais selvagem e perversa nessa 'desordem' romantizada em resistência social. (Fitzgibbon 284)

Those who insist in representing drug traffickers as the heroes of their society, and as symbol of resistance to the order of this country, will never try to understand how these gangs are put together, how the goods and the profits of these enterprises are divided, how local labor is used. They don't want to see the most perverse and savage face of capitalism within the "chaos" romanticized as social resistance.

The novel itself tries to illustrate how drug trafficking is not part of a "social" or "political" movement, but rather a capitalistic enterprise. The narrator explains

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<sup>15</sup>Alba Zaluar is a renowned sociologist. Her most famous work, *A máquina e a revolta: As organizações populares e o significado da pobreza*, of 1985 studied the social impact drug trafficking had on the *favela* of City of God. Zaluar recruited four university students as research assistants and help with the field work, Paulo Lins was one of them. Zaluar was particularly interested in Lins because he lived in City of God (Fitzgibbon).

that profit was the only reason for starting the drug business, "A coisa já estava ruim para os bicheiros e ficou muito pior quando surgiu a loteria esportiva [...] fazendo com que os bicheiros entrassem no ramo das drogas, que se mostrava promissor" (208). The novel also goes into a detailed explanation of the drug business's "organizational chart", creating a clear parallel between trafficking and legitimate businesses. Therefore, when considering the negative effects neo-liberalism has had on the poorest sectors of Brazilian society (unemployment, lower wages, economic and political powerlessness) along with the emphasis the novel places on language and history, I believe that the intensification of violence does not seek to shock or show revolt. Instead, the use of violence in conjunction with the absence of speech demonstrates the impossibility of dialogue caused by the economic policies of the last three decades. Thus, the marginalized have no voice and therefore no agency.

For the young men of the *favela* (the real focus of the novel) help from the government does not present itself as an option. Drugs offer the only possibility of a future. Stories of schoolboys entering the life of drug trafficking due to the opportunities for "advancement" it offers

illustrate this belief, "Otávio é que gostava dessa onda de avião. Ele mesmo disse que queria ser traficante quando crescesse, mas até pegar consideração para ser vapor e depois segurança, até chegar a gerente, demora muito tempo" 'Otávio liked the airplane gig. He used to say that he wanted to be a drug trafficker when he grows-up, but until someone gains enough respect to become a *vapor* and then security guard, until becoming manager, takes a long time' (298). In addition to specific stories of young boys trading school for crime or of criminals who leave crime and start an honest life but are later killed, the prosaic use of violence presents young black men as abandoned by the government and society.

Brazilian cultural critic Karl E. Schollhammer believes that this impossibility for dialogue is *Cidade de Deus*'s limitation:

...the narratives fail to leave the thematic segregation through communication or dialogue with the world that surrounds them. Just like the characters don't manage to escape the perverse logic of violence and crime, the reader, after recuperating from the initial shock, also feels trapped within a language that ends up being almost folkloric and that lacks any depth (Messeder 258, my translation).

Schollhammer, however, does not see the powerful relationship that exists between the characters' inability



to speak out and a world governed by violence. As the novel's epigraph notes, language (*a palavra*) represents an important tool for communicating the present and the past and the relationship between them. At the end of *Cidade de Deus*, however, violence replaces this powerful tool. In other words, history has managed to silence the *favelado* and by so doing, has taken away any agency. As a result, the *favelado* has been pushed to the margins, making this the gravest crime of all.

In the opening pages of the novel, the first person enters the narrative in order to make an announcement. The third person narrator tells the story of the early days of the *favela* before overpopulation and crime took their toll on its residents. Suddenly, the first-person enters the narrative in order to interrupt the idyllic picture by saying, "Mas o assunto aqui é o *crime*, eu vim aqui por isso..." 'But the issue here is *the crime*, I came here for that...' (22, my emphasis). The crime, the reader thinks, is that related to the drug wars. The next page, however, describes a crime related to someone's inability to speak out. The following page, which only contains one paragraph talks about how poetry, words, phonemes, and verbs cannot be uttered in the *favela*:

[...] É o verbo, aquele que é maior que o seu tamanho, que diz, faz e acontece. Aqui ele cambaleia baleado... A palavra nasce no pensamento, desprende-se dos lábios adquirindo alma nos ouvidos, e às vezes essa magia sonora não salta à boca porque é engolida a seco. Massacrada no estomago com arroz e feijão a quase palavra é defecada ao invés de falada. (23)

[...] The verb, that which is larger than its size, which says, does, and occurs. Here it wobbles due to fire shots... Thought gives birth to the word, it comes off from the lips acquiring soul in the ears, and at times that audible magic does not jump to the mouth because it is swallowed in dryness. Massacred in the stomach with rice and beans the almost word is defecated instead of being spoken.

In *Concretista* fashion Paulo Lins utilizes words, "beans" and "rice", to symbolize a particular sector of the population, the poor Afro-Brazilian. He also provides an image that screams immobility/impossibility by employing words such as, *cambaleia* (wobbles), *não salta* (doesn't jump), *engolida* (swallowed) and *massacrada* (massacred). In the end, dialogue, *denuncia*, and action (verb) prove impossible, "Falha a fala. Fala a bala" 'Speech fails. The bullet speaks' (23). The narrative then moves to the third person where it will remain for the rest of the novel. Since the reader is informed from the very beginning that the characters of the novel lack any agency, the novel's task is to demonstrate why and how this happened.

In the end, the impossibility for words mentioned in the beginning of the novel extends to all aspects of the *favelado's* life as communication among criminals becomes wordless. At the end of the novel Zé Pequeno's gang, which has inflicted terror into the lives of the *favelados*, is exterminated, thus sending a signal of hope. However, another gang, made up of Zé Pequeno's young admirers, replaces it. The last scene shows Tigrinho, the new drug lord, sending a young boy to fly a kite and the novel closes with the following words, "Era tempo de pipa na Cidade de Deus" 'It was time for kites in City of God' (548). Again, in *Concretista* fashion, Lins utilizes words and the meaning they have acquired through time to speak of the *favela's* future.

Through time, *pipa* (kite) in the *favela* has come to symbolize drug trafficking. This is because, and as the novel explains, young boys are paid by drug traffickers to fly kites in order to use them as codes. When the *favela* is clear of police, the kites fly, when police enter the *favela*, the kites come down. Therefore, by ending with these simple words, the narrator informs the reader that the cycle of violence and terror will continue. In other words, the lack of agency of City of God's residents will

not allow for change and life as it is known to them will remain the same.

Much in line with *Subúrbio*, hopelessness, entrapment, and death appear as the only option for the marginalized. Although *Cidade de Deus* tackles issues of race as never before done, the new approach does not offer any alternatives. It can be said that this is because Paulo Lins searches for a solution within the same system that he criticizes. Even though Lins, as a person that grew up and lived in City of God, offers a look from within, the *locus* of enunciation has not changed completely. Lins' privileged position has certainly allowed him to see that racial democracy is a purposely constructed concept of the white elite. Still, Lins does not divorce himself entirely from the elite and is therefore incapable of finding other alternatives. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that Paulo Lins seeks approval and acceptance into the *letrado* world. The epigraph is the first sign.

From the very beginning and throughout the novel there exists a strong insistence on showing and proving his knowledge of the literary canon. Lins himself has said famous authors have influenced his writing, "[...] se alguém disser que meu romance está ruim, digo que é

Dostoiévki, e não eu que escrevi [risos]" (Lins, Cinema 187). More importantly, Lins acts as the editor of a *testimonio*, and not as former resident of City of God. At the end of the novel in the "Acknowledgements" section, Lins talks about himself as an ethnographer as he mentions his work for Alba Zaluar. In fact, the novel never brings up the fact that Lins is from City of God. Interviews of Lins and Zaluar later revealed this fact. In addition, the title of the novel makes it clear by inserting the word "romance" (novel) that the text is fictional. It appears that Paulo Lins wants to place distance between himself and the people he represents.

As George Gugelberger explains in his introduction to *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, critics have become disillusioned with *testimonio* as its institutionalization has caused the weakening of *testimonio's* counter-discourse characteristic (3). Alberto Moreiras adds that, "in the hands of *testimonio* criticism, *testimonio* loses its extraliterary force, which now becomes merely the empowering mechanism for a reCanonized reading strategy" (204). Even though the *testimonio* qualities of the novel do not allow for a reading against the grain, *Cidade de Deus* has been instrumental in the process of

bringing diversity into a world previously dominated by the *letrados*. Although some authors, such as Paulo Jorge Ribeiro, claim that the democratization brought about by Paulo Lins also extended into the realms of politics and music (130), I will later challenge this statement by demonstrating how Hip-Hop was already contesting hegemony before the publication of *Cidade de Deus*.

#### **Closing Thoughts:**

This chapter looked at two novels written during the decade of the 1990s, *Subúrbio* (1994) by Fernando Bonassi and *Cidade de Deus* (1997) by Paulo Lins. Bonassi's work inaugurates the "new literature" of the 90s by bringing up to date the style and themes of his predecessors, Rubem Fonseca and João Antonio. On the other hand, Paulo Lins offers a look from within *favela* life and is therefore a forerunner of the new kind of literature that is emerging from the margins of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Although both novels share important characteristics, they also differ greatly. Their commonalities reflect a desire to incorporate the marginalized into Brazil's social imaginary by making them

the focus of their works. Their differences lie in how these two authors choose to represent the *Other*.

Like most of Brazil's urban literature of the 1990s, *Subúrbio* aims to expose the economic and social marginalization experienced by the poorest sectors of Brazil's urban centers, the *cidade partidas*. These texts focus on criticizing the negative socio-economic effects of neo-liberalism and globalization (mainly criminality, isolation, and poverty) and overlook a critical analysis of Brazil's history. As a result, these works ignore issues of race and oversimplify marginality as economic policy alone is used to explain the condition of the socially excluded. *Cidade de Deus* on the other hand, introduces history and race relations into the discussion of social and economic marginality. Although Paulo Lins' novel creates a much more complex view of Brazil's socio-economic makeup, it doesn't offer Afro-Brazilians the possibility for emancipation. *Cidade de Deus* concludes, as does *Subúrbio*, that there is no solution to today's social and economic problems afflicting the marginalized since the factors that caused them can't be altered or counteracted.

It is important to note, however, that the works of Fernando Bonassi along with those of other New Realists,

Paulo Lins' novel, and Fernando Meirelles' cinematic adaptation of *Cidade de Deus*, were essential to the process of democratizing the literary world. Chapter Two will further explain how these works along with mass media's depictions of *favela* life intensified the desire of hip-hop community to bring into the discussion of inequality their own perspectives on race and violence. Their work illustrates hip-hoppers' attempt at undoing colonial tropes that have for years been used to marginalize and define Afro-Brazilian subjectivity.



## Chapter 2

### The Margins Answer Back: Hip-Hopper's Response to Urban Literature and Mass Media of the 1990s

*O segredo da Verdade é o  
seguinte: não existem fatos, só  
existem histórias  
- João Ubaldo Ribeiro*

A two month stay in the city of São Paulo granted me the opportunity to visit a wide range of community-based organizations, open-mic sessions, book signings, community libraries, and independent bookstores all in the outskirts of the city. During my visits the images media and literature portray of Sao Paulo's and Rio's suburbs as places permeated with violence and desperation constantly came to mind. I asked almost every rapper and writer I met about their feelings toward films such as *City of God* and the representations they present to Brazil and the world of the marginalized. To my surprise, few spoke strongly against such depictions since they agree that violence and drug trafficking make up a real part of their lives. Most, however, felt that unfortunately the dark side of the story

tends to be exploited by mass media, while positive images, such as the ones I witnessed, hardly ever make it to TV or film. Thus, anger and frustration do not result from the content within mainstream media and culture. It stems rather from literature's, film's, and TV's insistence on portraying violence, drugs, and degradation as the only reality found within the suburbs and *favelas* of urban Brazil. Frustration also results from the lack of interest mainstream media and culture demonstrate in trying to explore and expose the causes behind that reality.

In the late 80s and early 90s rap music presented itself as a medium for *periféricos* to dwell deeper into and uncover the effects of racism, colonialism, and modernity. During this time, some rappers and their followers also began to write literature. The result was an organic literary movement born out of the suburbs of São Paulo that quickly began to spread across Brazil. What does this literary movement look like? What does it try to achieve and how? How do these writers reconcile the cultural baggage of the *letrado* with their own socio-political agendas? This chapter looks to gain a better understanding of what rappers in Brazil call the "Fifth Element" of Hip-Hop.

## **Violence and Its Meaning**

There have been different studies done on the use of violence in contemporary literature and film. Some of the analyses focus on violence as a tool used to criticize neo-liberal policies and modernity. For Marxists such as Roberto Schwarz, the *favela* of *Cidade de Deus* works as a counter image to mainstream beliefs of progress and modernity. Rather, the *favela* represents the true face of capitalism in its most advanced form, "In accordance to a good formula, today's society is creating more and more 'monetary subjects without money'. Their world [that of drug traffickers] is ours and far from representing backwardness, this world is presented as the result of progress" (Seqüências 171, my translation). Many of the socio-economically based analyses explain the uses of violence as manifestations of symbolic acts of desires or impulses. These being either desires to speak up against the inequalities brought about by the new socio-economic order (globalization) or symbolic of this economic order (savage capitalism) (Messeder 21). Thus, as the analyses in Chapter One demonstrated, violence serves as the main tool

to criticize economic and political models within Brazil's urban literature of the 1990s. While these studies offer useful and provoking insights of Brazilian literature and mass media, I believe they have certain limitations, one of these being an underlying discourse based on fear.

The use of violence as a social critique in the case of the literary production of the 1990s, as well as the violence prevalent in film and television of that period, tends to portray the "Other" as something to be fearful of. According to Ignacio Sánchez-Prado's study of contemporary Mexican culture, productions such as *Amores Perros* reflect the fear and insecurities middle-class readers have as they see their class interests affected by the new urban configurations. In the case of Mexico, the middle-class perceives neo-liberalism and the fall of the State as a threat to the elite's control over Mexico's social and economic conservative values. As a result, cultural productions create myths about the marginalized sectors as a means of conveying the anxieties of the middle-class (39). While in Mexico fear arises from the fall of the paternalistic State and the ideas attached to revolutionary nationalism, in Brazil fear stems from a direct attack by

subaltern groups on national identity and to the established social contract.

Although there have been counter arguments throughout Brazil's history, the idea of a racial democracy and of a *país cordial* have always dominated the discussion on national identity.<sup>16</sup> The Black Movement of the 1970s along with a movement toward political democratization truly brought about change in the way Brazilians viewed race relations. The Black social movement began the process of bringing to light the prevalent racism that exists within Brazilian society. This change in perception benefited from Brazil's political *abertura* of the early 1980s. In 1984 Brazil held democratic elections after twenty years of living under a military regime. As a result the 1980s and 1990s not only saw a continuation of an Afro-Brazilian

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<sup>16</sup> In Brazil, Eurocentrist science was appropriated in a selective fashion. While in Europe African heritage and behavior was categorized as noise, degenerated, and overtly sexual, Brazilian intellectuals, politicians, and scientists transformed their behavior into fragments of the African 'spirit'. The effect was to define the Other in "affectability by transforming miscegenation into an ambiguous historical signifier. This political-symbolic gesture silenced the racial underclass not by placing the racial "other" outside the place of the national subject, but by how the eschatological meanings of miscegenation produced a mode of racial subjection premised on the obliteration of the always-already affectable bodies and minds of the 'others'" (da Silva 225). At the same time, the "residuals of African culture" found in Brazilian society demonstrated that miscegenation produced instability at the point of 'contact' as it constitutes irreconcilable and unsustainable 'difference' (da Silva 231).

grassroots movement, but also a much more aggressive one with the rise of Hip-Hop. In addition to social mobilization by subaltern groups and to democratization, a new generation of scholars emerged supporting the idea that racism was prevalent throughout Brazilian society (Telles; Davis). All these events helped push the issue of race in Brazil to the center of the policy agenda. For the first time in Brazilian history, social policies of the mid 1990s began to explicitly promote social integration of blacks and mulattos, such as the implementation of affirmative action policies in many of Brazil's institutions (Telles 16).

As identity politics entered the Brazilian scene, the long-lived idea of Brazil's racial democracy began to be dismantled creating uncertainty and uneasiness. Not only was *brasilidade* being redefined, but along with that came fundamental changes to Brazil's social and political institutions. In the midst of these changes, the production of culture witnessed transformations of its own. In keeping with the social atmosphere of redefining and questioning, in 1984 João Ubaldo Ribeiro publishes the first contemporary novel to counter the myth of racial democracy and of the *homem cordial*. Through a rewriting of Brazilian

history, *Viva o Povo Brasileiro* becomes the first literary attempt at showing how the elite by way of force, violence and segregation advanced its modernizing ideology (Afolabi 68-9). As such, Ribeiro avoids the socialist ideology that characterized the *romance regionalista* of the 30s and 40s and instead privileges Brazil's colonial history, proposing a post-colonial view.

Although *cronistas* of the 1950s and 60s also talked about the government's plan to segregate the poor and the non-whites by way of urbanization in the name of modernization, they rely on folkloric images to describe the *favela*, "A favela é perigosa mas também é solidária. A população de mulheres anêmicas e fracas, e de crianças mal alimentadas e em trapos, cria porcos, bebe cachaça, toca cavaquinho e canta!" "The *favela* is dangerous but also shows solidarity. The population of weak anemic women and of malnourished children in rags, raises pigs, drinks *cachaça*, plays the *cavaquinho* and sings!" (in Resende 52-55). Even though the *cronistas* of the 50s and 60s do not criminalize the residents of *favelas*, their "colonial gaze" provides a paternalistic picture of them<sup>17</sup>. Much like urban

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<sup>17</sup> Colonial gaze refers to a form of hegemony and control in which "Others" are categorized by the white colonizer along taxonomic-

literature of the 1990s, these narratives do not empower, nor present the *favelado* as a thinking, productive individual but rather as a curiosity.

In the 1990s, a very specific image took over the production of literature and TV as depictions of the margins as places governed by violence, drugs, and degradation exploded. In a way, violence became the tool the middle-class used against an ever growing threat from the mobilizing efforts of the marginalized. As a result, much like Sánchez-Prado suggests about Mexican culture, Brazilian culture looked to define the "Other" as something to be fearful of and as a group not ready to reap the benefits of democratization. Since the time of colonial Brazil, the construction of the "Other" sought to justify political, economic, and ethnic hierarchies. Unlike the past, however, the effects were amplified in the 1990s due to the reach and influence of mass media, which also chose violence as a powerful tool to construct the marginalized.<sup>18</sup>

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zoological lines based on a Manichean divide. The white gaze constructs an image of the Other through the use of myths, codes, ritual, stereotypification, and ontologization (Yancy 6).

<sup>18</sup> Although about 89% of Brazil's adult population is literate, the average number of school years completed for people older than 15 is six (numbers are slightly lower for blacks). Thus, educational level limits the type of reading material most of the population can access. In addition, about 90% of the population owns television sets (Inst. Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/>)



Since the beginning of the Republic in 1889 an implicit social contract has existed that entails for Rio's *asfalto* (paved streets of the city) to stay clear of the *morro* (the hillsides where the poor were displaced during the Republic urbanization project). The relative lack of conflict between the poor and affluent neighborhoods has been described as a testimony to an enduring consensus on social and racial hierarchies supported by national myths of racial democracy and social harmony (Leu 345). During the Republic (1889-1930) the geographic segregation allowed for the construction of the poor as alien to the nation. In the 1930s, however, under Getulio Vargas' *Estado Novo* a new approach toward the *morro* was adopted which called for the cultural appropriation of the popular classes into the construction of *brasilidade*. As such, Afro-Brazilian heritage became exalted in an effort to culturally integrate the poor without providing them with full citizenship rights. And so, while *samba*, *capoeira*, and *carnival* became integral parts of Brazil's identity, blacks continued to have the highest illiteracy rates, the lowest

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while the high level of piracy in Brazil allows for fast and cheap access to movies.

paying jobs, and inadequate housing. Thus, the *morro* was tolerated but never fully integrated into Brazilian society.

The social contract, however, was violated in 1992 by hundreds of young *favelados* and followers of the Funk movement, who to the dismay of Ipanema and Copacabana beachgoers descended to the beaches. Bus loads of young *funkeiros* from the *favelas* of Baixada Fluminense conducted coordinated, lightning sweeps of the beaches allegedly taking bathers' possessions before running back to the buses and leaving the area (Hershmann). What was unprecedented about the *arrastões* was the rupture of the social contract that had traditionally helped reconcile class and racial conflicts in public spaces. Although social movements organized by the popular classes had been part of Brazilian political life since the 1940s, they had not presented any direct threat to the status-quo. What followed was an attack on the marginalized through the use of visual images on TV, newspapers, and film (Leu 345).

Even though violence between police and drug traffickers in Rio erupted in the immediate post-dictatorship period of the mid-1980s, this activity was not covered with as much frequency and sensationalism as in the 1990s. During this period violence dominated news, film,

and literature (Leu 348, 343). Moreover, the *arrastões* were a direct attack on the lifestyle of Rio's middle and upper classes and a powerful demand for visibility and voice. While on the one hand the marginalized are demonized through these images, on the other hand this new visibility also corresponds to a desire to be seen on the part of the young *favelados*. Andreelino Campos asked *favelados* about this contradiction while conducting research for his book, *Do quilombo a favela: A produção do "espaço criminalizado" no Rio de Janeiro*. Young *funkeiros* interviewed understood the contradiction but stated that "at least people are now actually talking about the problems, where as before indifference and ignorance was the norm" (196, my translation). Thus, most scholars characterize the *arrastões* of 1992 as the turning point in the Brazilian elite's perception of the marginalized.

The event of the *arrastões* provided the perfect excuse for those in power to portray the residents of the *favelas* and suburbs as violent and dangerous subjects incapable of handling the new freedoms and opportunities created by the opening of Brazil's economic and political systems. Much like scientific approaches of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the discourses of the 1990s looked to install a hegemonic

view by appropriating the urban periphery and redeploying it from a unified perspective. As Homi Bhabha explains with relation to the formation of stereotypes, a strategy of social and political control gives rise to a chain of mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse stereotypical signification (savage/obedient, sexual/childish, primitive/wordly liar). This strategy proposes a teleology which under certain conditions of colonial domination and control progressively reforms itself (33). In the Brazil of the 1990s, the imaginary of the folkloric good savage transforms into that of a violent young black *favelado* -a bad savage- who can't be reformed and thus must be exterminated. While the literature of the 1800s (*Iracema, O Cortiço, Bom-Crioulo, Canaã*) described locals as primitive and backward in order to justify their capitalistic goals (Pratt 152), literature of the 1990s utilizes degradation and violence to characterize the margins. As such, the narratives portray the subjects as having no economic value and in turn justified the actual often arbitrary killings of the poor which marked the early 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> During the early 1990s, cold arbitrary killings of the marginalized became common. They ranged from blaming bystanders for crimes they didn't commit, taking them to jail, torturing and sometimes killing them. To military invasions of *favelas* with the purpose of killing drug

As a response to police brutality, to their portrayal as violent subjects, and to the social and economic conditions of poverty and drugs hip-hoppers turned to the power of word in all of its forms: spoken, written, and visual to counterattack the images flooding mainstream media. Most importantly, however, the Movement looked to empower and educate the popular classes. As a result the Hip-Hop movement begins mobilizing the youth of the margins into a concerted effort at destabilizing the status-quo.

***Speaking From the Margins***

*Os representados escolheram seus  
representantes.*

*MV Bill*

*O Preto Em Movimento*

The transgression against the long established social contract introduced a moment of crisis within media's representation of Brazil's urban poor. The marginalized became criminalized and the image of a poor and black young male became synonymous with the word *marginal*. Hip-Hop

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traffickers but during which innocent people almost always died. The 1993 invasion of the *favela* of Vigario Geral during which 21 residents died - they were not linked to drug trafficking- prompted the creation of the cultural group *Afro Reggae*. The *chacina* of Candelaria of 1993 offers another example of the kind of brutal events that took place during this time. In Candelaria, police killed nine homeless children sleeping on the steps of a church in downtown Rio.

responded to mainstream media's objective of stereotyping the poor people of the margins in different ways. First, the Movement adopted the term *periférico* and *suburbano* to refer to those living in the *favelas* and suburbs of Brazil's urban centers. They call their place of residence *periferia* in order to avoid using the term *margens* and its association with *marginal* (Sá 128). Such an approach began with rapper GOG's famous song "Dia a Dia da Periféria" from his album of the same name of 1994 and continuous to this day. Hip-hoppers record the first Brazilian rap album in 1987 and begin a national effort at mobilizing the young people of the peripheries. Along with rap music, books and films (*Meninos do Tráfico; Larguei os Livros; Circular Periférico*) written by *suburbanos* begin to emerge with the purpose of contesting the images propagated by mainstream media and to redefine what it means to be black and poor in Brazil.

As early as 1993, residents of São Paulo's suburbs and *favelas* were writing poetry and educating their communities about the importance of reading and of writing their own stories. While in the past, traditional Brazilian authors such as, Alencar, Jorge Amado, and Mario de Andrade, looked to create a homogenous vision of *brasilidade, literatura*

*periférica* embraces a pluralistic approach. In addition, *periféricos* write from and for the marginalized rather than for the middle class. *Periféricos* publish their own books and sell them on commuter trains, subway stations, and street corners in an effort to change the way their lives are being told by middle class writers, such as Fernando Bonassi and Rubem Fonseca. As mentioned in Chapter 1, although Paulo Lins writes from the point of view of someone who lived in City of God, his audience is the white middle class rather than the *favelados*; the same can be said about Bonassi. When considering the target audience, the issue does not become whether these authors produce quality work or not, rather, how their mode of production alters their work.

The works of Bonassi and Lins focus on a "referent whose socio-cultural identity ostensibly differs from the system that produces the literary work" (Polar 106). Like the work of *indigenista* writers elsewhere in Latin America, the production, the text, and its consumption correspond to one universe and its referent corresponds to a distinct and even opposing one. They generate what Cornejo Polar has called a "heterogeneous literature". In relation to this idea, one can also add that as Bahktin argues, "human

consciousness and artistic practice do not come into contact with the 'real' directly but rather through the medium of the surrounding ideological world" (in Shohat 180). It follows that works produced by middle class urban writers of the 1990s which attempt to show the realities of the "unofficial city" have been influenced by the violent imagery flooding mass media. Thus, "art is incontrovertibly social, not because it represents the real but because it constitutes a historically situated 'utterance' -a complex of signs addressed by one socially constituted subject or subjects to other socially constituted subjects, all of whom are deeply immersed in historical circumstances and social contingency" (Shohat 180).

In their attempt at bringing a sense of the "real", these authors claim their works replicate the speech of the marginalized through the use of slang and profanity. In contrast, although authors of the margins do employ profanity (just as rap music does), fowl language and sexual imagery rarely appear within the pages of their novels, short stories or poems. In addition, authors of urban literature, such as Lins and Bonassi, employ cinematographic techniques which create fast pace and at times superficial accounts of the life of an entire



community. Paulo Lins' 500 page novel contains over 200 characters and dozens of short stories driven by violent acts. Sexually explicit and profane language along with the speed of the narrative gives these stories a sensationalistic tone that alludes to that of the yellow press found in Brazil's newspaper stands. Beatriz Resende has noted that the impact of mass media on Brazilian literature became palpable in the late 1970s. With the emergence of Globo mass communication penetrates literature, "A less intimate tone in the narrative of stories and circumstances of the metropolis make TV's influence apparent; its fashion, slang, lifestyle, and view of the world permeate literature" (70, my translation). This trend epitomizes within the literature of the 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike heterogeneous literature, the producers of *literatura periférica* live within the communities they are representing and write for these communities. Although *periféricos* always state that the margins represent their target audience, they are also conscious that people from outside the margins buy and read their books due to the low

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<sup>20</sup> "Se você leu nos jornais sobre algum crime e acreditou na história, pode parar por aqui...*Pânico-Horror & Morte* reúne contos impossíveis de serem publicados nos jornais porque estão próximos demais da realidade..." on the jacket of Bonassi's book of short stories, *O Amor em Chamas: pânico, horro & morte*, of 1989. The book's commentary was written by João Wady Cury, a crime reporter.

level of interest in literature and problems of access that exist among the marginalized:

Queria que minha literatura chegasse a todos, principalmente à periferia. Hoje quem mais lê nossos livros são quem tem poder aquisitivo pra isso, fui num dos maiores colégios particulares de SP fazer uma palestra, onde a mensalidade não sai por menos de R\$ 800 e vendi os 30 livros que levei, vou num sarau na periferia onde bem mais da metade dos presentes gostariam de ler meus livros e saio sem vender nenhum. Questão de não ter a grana disponível, eu mesmo namoro alguns livros nas livrarias mas não compro todos que eu gostaria. (Alessandro Buzo, email exchange, 2009)

At the same time, these authors believe that making literature available to the marginalized will help promote reading, "no Brasil infelizmente ainda, a maioria do povo não lê. Ai vem a Literatura Periférica, que é onde muitos não leitores, começam a ter interesse, porque falamos a linguagem do povão" (ibd.). This interest and concern for including the most marginalized into the literary process highly contrasts with *Cidade de Deus* (both movie and novel) and other works produced by middle and upper class urban writers.

Fortunately, things are changing for *literatura periférica*. Currently several government and non-governmental incentives fund writing workshops in the suburbs, administer grants for writers to publish and

market their books, and organize and finance lectures by authors from the suburbs at private and public schools all in an effort to spread the word and the works of these artists. In addition, the internet has created opportunities for writers to disseminate their work and to discuss it with readers located beyond city, state, and national boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Literatura Periférica/Suburbana***

Given its very recent beginnings, not much has been written about the works of Brazil's *periféricos*. "Dangerous Minds: Brazil's Escritura da exclusão and Testimonio" by Rebecca J. Atencio (2006) conducts an analysis of this kind of literature based on *testimonio* theory. Although Atencio labels "literatura da exclusão" as *testimonio* due to the plurality of the speaking subject, its inherent oral characteristics, and its confrontational stance toward the

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that even though I employ the term "literature", the works emerging from the margins that look to contest mainstream media and culture have many different forms. Besides literature and music (which will be discussed in the following chapter) *suburbanos* have produced cybercommunities and film (short and full length) which together look to inform and influence people inside and outside the periphery.

institution of literature, I strongly disagree with this position.

First and foremost, *literatura periférica* (as the authors themselves refer to it) does not rely solely on a first-person narrator nor does it speak for an entire community. While some may have a first-person narrator who speaks for a collective (*O Trem: Contestando a Versão Oficial*), others are narrated in third-person and contain characteristics found in other contemporary novels (*Manual Prático do Ódio*). Others may read as personal diaries which may contain accounts of specific events accompanied with reflection and social commentary (*Cabeça de Porco*). Poetry, for example, covers diverse topics such as love, humor, family, poverty, literature, history, and race among others (*Colecionador de Pedras*). In addition, mediators do not write *literatura periférica*. Instead, the colonized subject constructs the narrative. As a result, one can find poetry, short stories, *crônicas*, novels, diaries, and essays written by people who live in suburbs, *favelas*, and prisons of Brazil's major urban centers.

Like *testimonio*, however, authors of *literatura periférica* do not consider literature a threat and thus do not act in a confrontational manner toward the literary

institution. These authors value literature and believe in the power of text. This becomes evident as constant references to literary texts and to their importance appear within the works. In addition, *periféricos* manifest their support for the written word by practicing all its different forms, but also by making their main characters avid readers. *Periféricos* direct their criticism toward the power structures that have determined the parameters under which the periphery has entered the discussion and construction of a national literature. For these writers, national literature should be inclusive and representative of all Brazilians. As a result, violence is scaled down in order to create "inclusiveness" rather than Othering. *Literatura periférica* creates more complex characters and narratives than those possible in the novels and films driven by the spectacularization of violence.

**São Paulo's Periphery through the Eyes of Sacolinha:**

*Para se saber dum local  
é preciso ter vivido  
e passado grandes momentos nele...  
(Graduado 130).*

Ademiro Alves (25), better known as Sacolinha, resides in Suzano, a city located at the margins of greater São Paulo. Like most periphery writers, Sacolinha began his writing career in the streets and public transportation system of greater São Paulo. Also, like many of his fellow writers, his passion for literature encouraged him to start a project called *Projeto Cultural Literatura no Brasil*, a grassroots effort at introducing residents of his community to literature. Sacolinha has now become somewhat of a "famous" writer. His works (*85 Letras e um Disparou* and *Graduado em Marginalidade*) have won first place at several literary competitions, he recently signed a publishing contract with Editora Global (not a subsidiary of Globo Communications) and has gained recognition from mainstream writers such as Moacyr Scliar, Paulo Lins, Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, and Fernando Bonassi. Yet his works, which tend to talk about life in the margins, differ greatly from those of Brazil's famous urban writers. The following is a look at his first novel, *Graduado em Marginalidade* (2004) which Sacolinha first sold in buses, at coffee shops, and street corners throughout São Paulo.

*Graduado em Marginalidade* tells the story of Vander, a resident of Vila Clementina, a *favela* in Suzano. The

narrative portrays Vander as a caring and loving person who prefers books and *capoeira* over drugs and alcohol. Although he succeeded at staying clear of drug trafficking throughout his teenage years, the most powerful drug lord of the area forces him to enter the drug business and consequently Vander gets killed. On the surface, Vander's story sounds like another episode of *Cidade de Deus* or *Subúrbio* in which violence and death offer the only alternatives to poverty. Yet, a closer look presents a distinct discourse and perception of Brazil's *favelados*. Through a complex and at times contradicting view of life in a *favela Graduado* provides a different approach to the binary and fatalistic worlds Bonassi and Lins present.

Unlike the characters within urban literature of the 1990s, *Graduado* does not portray Vander as irrational, impulse driven, and overly sexual. Vander's relationship with his girlfriend - one of love, respect, and admiration - contrasts to the male characters within *Cidade de Deus*. Young men in *Cidade* never reveal any feelings toward their girlfriends except for sexual desire; as a result women are treated as sexual objects. The way traffickers do business also demonstrates contrasting views. While Vander spends months reading books on urban guerillas and studying how he

will execute his plan of invading the enemy's house, *Cidade's* traffickers lack any thought process. Invasions occur as immediate reactions to someone stealing someone else's girlfriend or clients. Thus, to portray the characters' intrinsic characteristics most urban literature focuses on the external and/or the psyche in order to convey a sense of degradation, automatism, indifference, and negligence or uses violence.

By contrast, *Graduado* focuses on exposing the social, political, and economic institutions of São Paulo that have helped create the problems that afflict the marginalized. In addition the protagonist in *Graduado* possesses the intellectual ability to understand his situation which is reflected by the social commentary he provides. This approach suggests a much broader perspective of São Paulo's social problems as *Graduado* underscores the importance outside forces (government, judicial system, and elite) have over the lives of *periféricos*. By so doing, the novel looks to undo the dominating discourse found within mainstream media and culture of the 1990s which tend to portray the margins as self-contained places.

*Graduado* presents a pervasive view of Brazilian society in which corruption, not violence, represents one



of its most serious problems; much like Schwarz argues in "As idéias fora de lugar":

[...] the practice of using favors in exchange for services ran through and affected national existence in its entirety, always protecting the productive base [slavery] through the use of force. The use of favors was present everywhere, infiltrating the most diverse of activities ... it is our almost universal mediation. (Schwarz, *Vencedor* 16; my translation)<sup>22</sup>

Sacolinha approaches the problem from the perspective of the *favelado* and the detrimental effects these practices have on the lives of the marginalized. I argue that by focusing on the collateral effects of corruption the novel looks to emphasize the modern day consequences of one of Brazil's most palpable colonial legacies. As Schwarz states in the same essay, "...this imbalance is unavoidable and one colonialism condemned us to" (ibid. 22; my translation).

Schwarz focuses on Brazil's means of production in order to explain the role discourse played in building the ruling class' hegemony. At the beginning of his essay Schwarz acknowledges that Europe's liberal ideas of equality, freedom, and free markets were discourses used to disguise the real system behind capitalism: exploitation of

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<sup>22</sup> "... el favor atravesó y afectó en el conjunto la existencia nacional, resguardando siempre la relación productiva de base [slavery] esta asegurada por la fuerza. Estuvo presente en todas partes, combinándose a las más variadas actividades... El favor es nuestra mediación casi universal."

labor. Yet, these ideologies were imported and embraced by Brazil's elite, even when Brazil continued to have an economy based on slavery. Schwarz does not base his criticism on the fact that the ideologies of equality and freedom did not morally fit within Brazil's society, or that these ideas were imposed on behalf of the elite. The problem results from Brazil lacking a fully developed capitalist system (which is essential in order to reach socialism) and these ideas hindering its development. Schwarz also argues that slavery did not delay the full application of the new liberal ideologies, since *latifundios* were in fact capitalistic systems with profit making as their only concern. What hindered the full implementation of Europe's liberal ideas was a system of favors that developed within Brazil, a system characterized by corruption and inefficiencies.

*Graduado* portrays the pervasiveness of *clientelismo* and corruption as the novel clearly describes how money and power lure all the different parties involved in drug trafficking (police, customs and border officers, politicians, judges, and *favelados* themselves). The novel also illustrates how this system perpetuates poverty and socio-political marginality -making social and economic

equality an impossible task. The prospects for a promising future diminish as these relationships build and expand, causing the gradual destruction of solidarity and sense of community that result from the increase of drugs and drug related activity.

Schwarz also argues that although *clientelismo* hindered the full implementation of Europe's liberal ideas, slavery did not necessarily play a role in this decision. I believe that the system of favors that Schwarz describes served as a way for the elite to "deal" with the issue of incorporating into a hybrid society (capitalistic and slave based) the increasing number of freed blacks. As Fredrick Cooper argues, "free" markets and "free" voice in polity presented powerful rhetorical devices. "But the very rhetoric posed the question of whether power of a more particularistic sort could be legitimately deployed -by men of power and reason- so as to bring the unenlightened into the world of market economies, good government, and cultural progress" (12). Therefore, in the Brazilian case, *clientelismo* became part of the elite's solution to dealing

with the incorporation of blacks into society as it allowed for delaying the implementation of any real policies<sup>23</sup>.

In *Graduado*, drug trafficking and the corruption surrounding it represent the present day solution to dealing with poor mainly Afro-Brazilian males. As the drug business allows them the possibility to make money and to move up the chain of command, marginalized youth gain a false sense of power which in turn eliminates the potential for social and civil unrest<sup>24</sup>.

Although money represents a powerful tool of *clientelismo*, so do social hierarchies. As Schwarz explains, this system established a social hierarchy based on the complicit relationship between the oligarchy and the "free man" that lives to this day "...within the Brazilian context the use of favors assured both parties [oligarchy and free man], specially the weakest one, that neither one was

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<sup>23</sup> In 1888, Brazil became the last country to abolish slavery. Studies show that at the time of abolition slaves represented only 5% of the black population. Even after abolition, free blacks were denied access to all basic services (education, adequate housing, and health care services) (Butler). And thus, abolition did not translate into any real change in policy.

<sup>24</sup> In the documentary *Falcão: Meninos do Tráfico* produced by rapper MV Bill, all the young drug traffickers interviewed appear resigned to their lives. Although they all hope for an opportunity that allows them to leave drug trafficking, they also state that at least this activity gives them enough money to live; where as other jobs do not pay enough to support themselves and their families. As a result, these young men and women demonstrate no desire and see no real need to fight for and demand real change.

enslaved... this transformed the use of favors into a ceremony of social superiority (ibid. 18). Although Schwarz does not incorporate race into his theory, I argue that these social hierarchies implicitly engage with the ideologies of racial hierarchy prevalent during colonial Brazil. As such, entering into a relationship with the white oligarchy through the system of favors served as a way to separate further from the black slave. Moving upward within the social hierarchy alludes to the concept of *branqueamento* (whitening) that exists in Brazil even to this day. This social hierarchy served as the first step toward whitening.

It is precisely this complicity that hid the true nature of slavery behind a curtain made strictly of socio-economic relationships, doing away with the issue of race<sup>25</sup>. The oligarchy's fear of losing its status not only within Brazil but within the world system, made them downplay the violent nature of the slave system that continued in their country. Thus, implementing foreign ideas which were "out of place", resulted in a society of dualisms,

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<sup>25</sup> These hierarchies manage to hide issues of race under the concept of racial democracy as it reduces them to or places them within the notion of social classes. As such, these hierarchies further support the foundational myth based on Brazil's harmonious incorporation of races and non-violent abolition process.

contradictions, artificiality, and anachronisms which in turn affected the production of culture (19).

Schwarz believes that rather than being molded, literature/culture must inform while capturing the social process that brought it to life. In other words, Brazil's intellectuals must expose Brazil's own history and experiences in order to create a national culture that will also reflect the necessities and realities of the country and its people. *Graduado* takes on this task by demonstrating how the corrupt system of *clientelismo* directly and indirectly affects *favela* life. By making Brazil's power structures responsible the novel attacks the underlying ideology of racism by displacing "Nature" and privileging systems and institutions.

While negligence represents the underlying theme of *Subúrbio* and violence of *Cidade*, *Graduado* focuses on drug trafficking. The novel, however, rejects the traditional portrayal of drugs as a business, a way out of poverty, or the thrill of an action movie. Instead, it emphasizes the different institutions involved in the drug trade which in turn function because of corruption and violence.

Rather than portray drug trafficking as something particular of the *favela* the novel explains how the drugs

and weapons manage to enter the country, how they are moved within Brazil, and who consumes the most expensive drugs (thus, who finances the trade). Rather than describe drug trafficking as a business by and for the *favela*, the third-person narrator takes the reader on a national tour during which all the different parties involved are presented. This provides a much more ample view of how the drug industry depends on and thrives due to the pervasive cooperation between all the different sectors of society. The novel also illustrates the corruption within the justice system, between police and drug traffickers, and even among the prisoners themselves; a dramatic contrast with *Subúrbio* and *Cidade de Deus* (both novel and film), which give a sense of isolation from the "outside" world. Thus, *Graduado* moves away from a discourse based on violence and replaces it with an *exposé* of the institutionalization of corruption. *Graduado* does not construct a specific image of the *favelado*, instead the narrative offers a complex and interconnected view of Brazil as it brings the periphery and the center together.

In order to further illustrate the reach of Brazil's corrupt institutions, the novel insists on showing how the world outside Clementina bears as much responsibility

(maybe more) than the world inside by bringing together the *morro* (*favela*) and the *asfalto* (middle and upper class neighborhoods). By so doing, the novel moves away from using violence as its main theme and instead focuses on social and economic relationships in order to redefine the concept of inside/outside and periphery/center.

Within urban literature, the outside refers to the periphery as the "unofficial" city. In *Subúrbio* the *velho* speaks of the "city" as something unreachable. Although Paulo Lins aims to change the *locus* of enunciation, the narrative never leaves the *favela* except when its residents go out to rob "the city's" citizens. As a result, these texts make the reader feel as a spectator, turning the *favela* into something foreign, outside, and far removed from the readers' reality.

Unlike Bonassi's *Subúrbio* (discussed in detail in Chapter 1) *Graduado* does not look to generalize life in the suburbs. As its title suggests, *Subúrbio* makes life "outside" of São Paulo the focus. This in turn alludes to the idea that violence and hopelessness represent characteristics specific to the hundreds of miles of sprawling outskirts. *Graduado* by contrast avoids a "universalist" approach by focusing on a specific *favela*.



To support this idea further, the novel mentions other *favelas* in which drug trafficking does not exist and more importantly, it brings life "outside" Vila Clementina into the narrative. Therefore, *Graduado* does not construct a narrative based on a discourse of violence; instead the novel emphasizes the social, economic, and political relations affecting *favelados* and non-*favelados*. This reflects an awareness of the balancing act that portraying suburban life (which does involve violence and drugs) requires in order to avoid sensationalism and/or stereotyping. As a result, *Graduado* offers a narrative in which both violence as a way of subjectification and the outside/inside binary become irrelevant.

Another way *Graduado* looks to interconnect these two worlds is through its diversity of characters. As the plot develops the third person narrator introduces different characters into the narrative in order to shape it (police officers, politicians, middle class, mass media). This transforms the storyline into one in which everybody regardless of socio-economic class or race becomes implicated. In a sense there no longer exists an inside/outside nor an us/them. *Graduado* does not try to recreate neat binarisms, instead it tries to break from the

binaries that place European/white culture at the center by ignoring the traditional spatial boundaries of *morro* and *asfalto*. It becomes a powerful counter offensive against the old idea of *cidade partida* (divided city) which placed distance between the realities of the poor and rich. The novel suggests that the decisions made by the different sectors of society directly affect every Brazilian, the poor being the ones bearing most of the social cost.

In addition to underscoring sides of the drug war that urban writers don't touch upon, *Graduado* portrays drugs not as a thrill but rather as deadly. While nobody dies of overdose in *Cidade de Deus*, drug use and drug trafficking in Clementina often turn into a death sentence. In the following passage, the text juxtaposes the effects created by using drugs against those caused by reading. Both activities begin with enthusiasm, both provide an escape, but only one proves deadly:

Enquanto Vander viaja na literatura de José Louzeiro<sup>26</sup>,  
Casquinha estica vinte centímetros de cocaína. O livro,

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<sup>26</sup> José Louzeiro is a journalist whose book *Infância dos mortos* was made into the acclaimed movie "Pixote". Both book and movie portray the life of Rio de Janeiro's street children and society's indifference toward the problem. Lúcio Flavio was a famous bank robber during the most repressive time of Brazil's dictatorship. Some consider him a "modern Robin Hood" and was instrumental in exposing the infamous activities of the 'Esquadrão da Morte' as well as its leaders. Louzeiro was the last person to interview Flavio before his murder and wrote a book based on this extensive interview.

"Lúcio Flávio: O passageiro da Agonia" empolga a leitura de Vander, enquanto o nória está feliz pelo que irá consumir. Vander pára por um momento e coça os olhos, Casquinha coça o nariz, e o coloca no inicio da linha feita de pó. Vander volta a leitura, o nória inicia a sua viagem para a morte. Casquinha começa a inspirar a carreira, antes de chegar no fim cai no chão, ...subitamente pára de se bater o seu coração finaliza os seus movimentos.

Vander fecha o livro e vai dormir. (151)

While the literature of José Louzeiro makes Vander fantasize, Casquinha stretches twenty centimeters of cocaine. A feeling of euphoria takes over Vander as he reads "Lúcio Flavio: Agony's Passenger", in the meantime Paranoid is happy because of what he's about to consume. Vander stops for a moment and rubs his eyes, Casquinha rubs his nose as he puts it at the beginning of the line made out of powder. Vander goes back to his reading, Paranoid begins his trip toward death. Casquinha begins to inhale the line, before reaching the end he falls to the ground, ... suddenly his heart stops beating his movements end.

Vander closes his book and goes to sleep.

The choice of words, the alternating subjects, and the different spaces makes the parallel between these two situations strong. The narrator uses the word *viajar* at the beginning to allude to the idea that literature makes the reader "travel" to other worlds. The sentence continues however with the image of Casquinha and cocaine which brings to mind *viajar's* other meaning in slang, "hallucinate" which in this case relates to the effects of drugs. Later we learn that Casquinha will *viajar* (travel) to his death. The narrator also uses *empolgar* (to be

overwhelmed with euphoria) to describe the effects of literature over Vander, which also alludes to drugs and the effect they have over a person's mind and body. Lastly, the narrator describes the "line" of powder, which parallels to the lines of text Vander is "consuming".

In addition, the passage alludes to the underlying discourse of the novel by juxtaposing drugs with corruption through the image of Lúcio Flávio (who Brazilians relate to the country's death squads -Esquadrão da Morte- financed and supported by police and the elite). While Vander reads about the bloody history of these groups who triggered petty thieves of the suburbs from the 1960s through the 90s and as Casquinha dies of overdose, the novel emphasizes further the damaging effects that corruption, *clientelismo*, and drugs have over the marginalized.

Although *literatura periférica* introduces violence into the narrative, the use of violence within *literatura periférica* does not work as a tool that helps construct the image of the "Other" nor does it represent the thread that holds the narrative together. Instead, violence plays an educational role. *Graduado*, as most *literatura periférica*, touches on this reality not by sensationalizing it but rather by describing the horrors of it. Within *Cidade de*

*Deus* violent beatings and brutal killings become acceptable and expected behavior of the characters. Each violent scene becomes superseded by another much more violent one thus leaving a feeling of indifference in the reader.

By contrast, shock or sadness at the horrors of death always follow the few acts of violence within *Graduado*, "[...]empunhou o objeto puntiagudo no peito da vítima que caiu no chão e ficou se debatendo, o dono da arma branca sentou na barriga do coitado e cravou novamente o peito dele. Vander não conseguiu sair dali imediatamente, ficou chocado com o que estava vendo" "[...] he pushed the pointy object into the victim's chest who fell to the ground as he struggled to stay alive, the owner of the arm sat on the stomach of the poor unfortunate victim and again nailed his chest. Vander wasn't able to leave immediately; the scene he just witnessed left him paralyzed with shock" (113). Although the previous quote refers to a confrontation between two prisoners, the narrator describes the stabbed man as a victim and chooses to call him "poor unfortunate". The choice of words and their relation to the characters they describe illustrates the novel's criticism of violence, regardless of where it occurs and who suffers from it. In addition, Vander's reaction -his inability to leave- makes

the reader take a critical distance from violence. By contrast, within urban literature of the 90s violence is often gratuitous or appears as the inevitable destiny every young male of the margins faces. This approach to violence further emphasizes the idea that death represents the only possible outcome of the *favelados'* inherent individualism, greed, and violent behavior.

In line with previous analysis on the use of violence, it could be argued that *Graduado* also illustrates violence as the manifestation of individualistic desires and thus a symbol of the capitalistic system. Unlike the novels discussed in Chapter One, however, the character that demonstrates irrational violence comes from outside the *favela*. Thus, Lúcio, a corrupt police officer who enters the drug trafficking business, represents savage capitalism. Unlike other works, however, *Graduado* takes this idea a step further as it presents capitalism as something not inherent to the *favela* but rather as a system imposed on it. As Vander sets out to look for a job in order to help his mom, Lúcio intercepts him and laughs at Vander's plans. Lúcio then offers him a lucrative role within the trafficking business. Vander rejects him, but many of Clementina's young men accept the offers. Again the

emphasis lies on portraying the direct relationships between periphery and center by making the outside forces important players in the lives of the residents of Vila Clementina. Lúcio represents one of these forces whose arrival also brings the slow destruction of the tight knit community.

Along with the criticism of capitalism, however, the novel also portrays the solidarity that exists among the residents of Clementina. The generosity and sense of community exhibited by locals counters prevalent images of indifference and greed while providing concrete examples of how this community struggles to survive by helping each other. Some examples the novel uses to emphasize the sense of solidarity among its residents are neighbors offering their cars to those who don't own one (40); people taking care of ill friends and their children (38); people helping each other find work (50); or residents mobilizing to demand the city provide them with the deeds to their homes (23). Thus, the novel offers a much more complex view of *favela* life.

Within this theme of solidarity the novel presents Escobar, the local drug trafficker who Lúcio kills in order to take over his business. The novel portrays these two

characters as opposites. While Lúcio resembles the traffickers found in *Cidade*, Escobar never uses violence and behaves as someone who helps his community and who only conducts drug sales among nonresidents. While some might interpret Escobar as a "modern Robin Hood" I argue that the novel does not construct images of humanized drug lords. Rather, it represents an attempt at demonstrating how decades of negligence by the State has been replaced by forces that have grown powerful and difficult to control.

Unfortunately, there exist real-life-Escobars inside some *favelas* that have benefited from the State's absence. As a result, residents offer them protection in exchange for favors. Thus, Escobar serves as yet another example of *clientelismo* as the novel demonstrates how this practice has penetrated every level of Brazil's society. In addition, the novel's constant demonizing of drugs and the violence they generate support the claim that Escobar does not represent a role model to the young residents of Clementina. When Escobar gets killed by Lúcio the narrator states that Escobar will go to hell. Escobar's death relates to Vander's as it illustrates that regardless of someone's good intentions drugs can never bring anything good. Rather, drugs appear as a constant threat to young residents'



strong desire of living productive lives. Vander and his friends value hard work and constantly struggle to find honest jobs. Their battle takes place along the constant presence of temptation from the lucrative drug business. This contrasts dramatically with the residents of City of God who are portrayed as eager and willing to enter drug trafficking and crime while mocking blue collar workers by calling them *otários* (idiots).

### ***Complexities within Vila Clementina***

Although the novel attempts to redefine the marginalized by incorporating the pervasive role socio-political institutions play in everyday life, the narrative does not present the residents of Clementina in oversimplified roles of victims or heroes. In contrast to urban literature which relies on stereotypes, the characters in *Graduado* do not fit neatly into one particular profile. The text rejects the approach of hegemonic discourse in which, as Shohat and Stam argue, "every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogenous community" (183). By resisting this approach, the text avoids promoting the idea that representation

becomes allegorical. While feelings of desperation, hopelessness, isolation, and violence define the urban literature of the 90s, *Graduado* avoids any generalizations. Although the novel points to Clementina's socio-economic reality as the cause of much of its problems, the novel also makes its residents responsible for giving into vice rather than occupying their time and their children's with productive activities -reading being Vander's favorite:

- Vício maldito.- Vander praguejou consigo mesmo. Enquanto muitas crianças não querem estudar o preferem um cd de axé ao invés de um gibi, aquela menina queria uma revestinha de pintar, mas a mãe preferiu sustentar o seu próprio vício a desenvolver a mente da criança. Vander desistiu de comprar a revista que procurava e saiu da banca indignado. (104)

- Damn vice. - Vander cursed to himself. While many children don't want to study or prefer an axé CD over comic books, that little girl wanted a coloring book, but her mother preferred to feed her vice rather than develop the kid's mind. Vander abandoned the idea of buying the magazine he was looking for and left the newspaper stand outraged.

Similarly, just as the novel presents a middle class person as indifferent and as the cause of much poverty and exploitation, the narrative also brings in middle class characters who side with the *favelado*, "O único que não reclamava do trabalho de Ângela era Saik, que tinha consciência que seus pais faziam aquilo só para justificar

o pequeno salario que pagavam para Ângela" 'The only person who didn't complain about Angela's work was Saik, who understood that the only reason his parents did that [complain] was to justify the small wage they paid Angela' (57). Thus, the novel does not rely on the construction of stereotypes as a way to help it define any one of the two worlds (center/periphery).

Instead, *Graduado* moves away from the identification of images as either positive or negative as not one character can be defined as "good" or "bad" but rather as a combination of attributes and flaws: Escobar is a drug trafficker but also someone who brings safety and provides financial assistance to the community; Vander is a loving son and husband but also a drug trafficker who doesn't consume drugs but books; Vander's friends are resourceful and caring but also drug users who will steal to finance their vice, etc. In essence by complicating "reality" the novel forces the reader to disregard and purge his/herself from seeing the world and thinking the world in binary terms.

*Graduado* does not try to recreate neat binarisms. Instead it presents overlapping multiplicities of identity and affiliation in order to counter the binaries that

accompany colonial tropes. Homi Bhabha states that with regards to undoing the "arrested fixated form of representation" of stereotypes:

It is [the] possibility of difference and circulation which would liberate the signifier of skin/culture from the signified of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of race and cultural dominance or degeneration. (Bhabha 27-28)

*Graduado* does not offer a clear "standard" by which to measure any one group against the other and thus to diagnosed difference; but as a result it completely dismantles the idea of difference. Within *Graduado* defining oneself or one group in terms of some other group in itself implies imposing one's ideas over the other. The novel not only redefines good, bad, wrong, and right but makes the boundaries between these hazy.

*Graduado* also avoids what Spence and Stam call a "positive image paradigm" which results in reductionist and paternalistic representations. It also avoids "naïve integrationism" which simply inserts new heroes/heroines into the old functional roles that were themselves oppressive. Through these two methods subalterns are "invited" in but always on European/white terms as they are portrayed as "fitting" European standards. In addition, focusing on portraying positive images can lead to a kind

of essentialism, "as the critic reduces a complex diversity of portrayals to a limited set of reified stereotypes" (9-10). The novel presents drugs and corruption as the only clear ills in which any one member of any one group can and does participate.

In addition to undoing the center/periphery and good/savage tropes, *Graduado* directly contests the notion that the European/white subject represents mind/lettered while the subaltern subject stands for body/raw material to be exploited. Not only is the main character an avid reader, the text itself has been written by the colonized subject. Boundaries become blurred. The writer does not present himself as an ethnographer (as does Paulo Lins). Instead, the author locates himself on the same side of the 'colonial difference', within the community that he lives in allowing for mutual recognition. This becomes evident in the epigraph and during a passage in which the narrator states that Vander is the best person to guide his group through Vila Clementina because, "Para se saber dum local é preciso ter vivido e passado grandes momentos nele..." 'In order to have knowledge of a place it is necessary to have lived and experienced great moments in it' (130). The statement also represents a subtle criticism of those who

have written about the margins without ever living or setting foot there.

Therefore, Vander claims authority to make an explicitly politicized picture of the contact zone from the perspective of the colonized and resistant historical subject<sup>27</sup>. By extension, Vander also becomes the reader's best possible "guide." The novel's title, *Graduado em Marginalidade*, also contests established notions of what it means to be *marginal* -uneducated, violent, criminal. Unlike most *periféricos*, the novel appropriates the term but with the purpose of redefining it by attaching it to a learning process (*graduado*). This link also challenges the place of academia as the only place in which facts and theories emerge by alluding to the idea that the margins also produce intellectuals<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination - like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4).

<sup>28</sup> *Periféricos* do not fitly neatly into Gramsci's concept of organic intellectual. On the one side they do hope to become leaders of their communities and the Hip-Hop movement. They also believe that literacy is an important component of their social and political projects. However, few hip-hoppers have passed through the state educational system. And those who have, such as the rapper GOG, look to reinterpret state discourse not emulate it. As such, *periféricos* do not privilege Western thought nor do they view it as the source of answers to the problems facing the marginalized.

The novel does not differentiate between literature written by the middle class and *periféricos*. Instead, among the books Vander avidly reads the narrator locates both mainstream writers and *periféricos*. The text does not talk about one writer being “better” than any other, which illustrates Sacolinha’s idea of literature in general.<sup>29</sup> Still, while *Graduado* places canonical literature at the same level as *periférica*, orality is privileged.

Although the text simulates orality, this does not translate into the over usage of profanity and slang as does urban literature. Sacolinha, and *perifericos* in general, refuse this approach and instead focus on the sounds and form of oral culture. The difference between spoken and written language becomes particularly apparent in Brazilian Portuguese. While written Portuguese tends to be formal and has a limited number of contractions, oral Portuguese is casual and contains short versions of words (“pra” for “para”, “duma” instead of “de uma”, “pro” for “para o”). Preference for spoken Portuguese also comes

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<sup>29</sup> When I asked Sacolinha about the term “literatura periférica” he replied that he personally dislikes the term, “Pra mim só existe um tipo de literatura, não acredito em marginal, urbana ou periférica” (email exchange, 2009). Something the text transmits as it places all the works mentioned at the same level of importance and influence regardless of authorship.

across in punctuation (there are sentences as long as paragraphs which only contain commas separating thoughts) and grammatical structures ("se ebranqueceu" for "enbranqueceu-se", reflexives in written Portuguese place the pronoun after the verb not before). Some authors, such as Limonada, even change the spelling of words to reflect their sound ("loka" for "louca").

Also, in a form similar to that of storytellers, *Graduado's* narrator at times asks the reader questions in order to engage him/her, "... para que ele não interfira no plano de Lúcio Tavares. E qual é a intenção de Lúcio? Dominar todas as redes de tráfico do Alto Tietê,..." '... in order for him to not interfere in the plans of Lucio Tavares. And what is the intention of Lucio? Dominate all the drug trafficking networks of Alto Tiete...' (81). The exchange between narrator and reader alludes to the call-and-response technique that characterizes culture of the African diaspora (Osumare 33). Thus, *Graduado* sounds as if someone were telling a story rather than reading it from a text.

These techniques reflect the desire of these authors to reach the people of the margins by speaking in "their" language, as most of them refer to oral culture. Just as



important, writing stories as if they were being told mimics the style of rap music as it counters traditional narratives (in both form and content) by privileging a form traditionally viewed as "unsophisticated" and marginal. Although João Guimarães Rosa successfully incorporates orality into his literature in the 1930, 40s, and 50s no other writer continues the trend. While urban writers claim to replicate the speech of the marginalized, their approach for the most part relies on integrating colloquialism and profanity into dialogue. Furthermore, Guimarães' most famous character, a *sertanejo* named Riobaldo, asks the reader to correct his grammar and at times comments on his "poor" level of Portuguese. The literature of *periféricos* on the other hand, does not view orality as a "lower" form and incorporates it not only to dialogue but into the narrative voice.

### ***A New Perspective on Race***

Just as Sacolinha's novel dismantles fixed binarisms, the novel also brings a new approach to the issue of race. *Graduado's* approach differs greatly from that of Paulo Lins' novel since the concept of racial democracy does not

come under attack as it does in *Cidade de Deus*. Perhaps because by the time of *Graduado*'s publication, 2004, racial democracy has become obsolete in defining race relations in Brazil (Telles 47). Racism represented one of Hip-Hop's main themes during the 1990s. As I mentioned above, however, the change in direction from government and society in general made Hip-Hop change its rhetoric as well.

While hip-hoppers continue to talk about the existence of racism, they also incorporate discussions on how to undo the damage created by centuries of racist policies. Questioning whether racism exists or not has now become irrelevant as the large majority of Brazilians now admit to its existence.<sup>30</sup> *Graduado* demonstrates this current as it emphasizes not hatred between races (which Lins' novel does) but rather the systematic problems that cause large sectors of the population to live in poverty and negligence. As such, it aims to demonstrate how disregard toward the margins along with corruption have and continue to affect *suburbanos* and Brazil as a whole. Sacolinha's novel also

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<sup>30</sup> A national survey performed in 1995 by Brazil's leading newspaper revealed that 90% of Brazilians from all regions (regardless of race) believed that Brazilian whites held racial prejudices. However, nearly 90% of all Brazilians also agreed with the statement that "race mixture is a good thing" thus sustaining the racial-democracy value of race mixture (Telles 53).

presents itself as a manual for survival to those affected by racial and social discrimination.

The issue of race comes forth not through attacks on specific groups, but by speaking of Afro-Brazilian pride. The text constantly alludes to Vander's African roots through the activities he engages in such as *capoeira*, *candomblé* (an afro-Brazilian religion) and samba. Yet, the novel only emphasizes Vander's Afro-Brazilian heritage. It does mention the important role migration from the northeast played in creating a diverse community. However, while *Cidade* talks about *nordestinos* as a "race", *Graduado's* focus on the regional aspect of their origin. This approach perhaps resembles the true make up of the *nordestino* given the diversity (ethnically and culturally) found within that region of the country. Also, black characters in *Cidade de Deus* tend to dislike *nordestinos*. This does not represent the reality of Clementina. Whether real or not, the text illustrates a community afflicted by the same problems and obstacles in spite of a person's origin.

With regards to race perhaps the most important statement can be found in the novel's dedication:

De Isabel de Sousa com um dono de escravos,

nasceu Maria.  
A junção de Maria Alves de Sousa, com um trabalhador  
rural,  
gerou Geralda.  
De Geralda Alves de Sousa, com um pedreiro,  
nasceu Maria Natalina.  
Do namoro de Maria Natalina Alves com um carpinteiro,  
nasceu Ademiro Alves.  
Dedico este livro á Maria Alves de Sousa (1907-2002).  
Acredito na história contada por protagonistas da  
novela real.

The dedication makes Sacolinha's African heritage clear by locating his origin at the time of slavery. The dedication, however, does not reveal the ethnicity of Sacolinha's male lineage. Instead, it links his African heritage to a particular socio-economic group. As such, it underlines the socio-economic reality that has always accompanied his family -poor laborers- and by association his race. I would also argue that by blurring the racial/ethnicity divide through the incorporation of socio-economic status Sacolinha looks to integrate all those sharing the common denominator of poverty and oppression. The strong influence of orality within the novel illustrates its desire to incorporate and reach both Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinos*. Yet, it does this while still underscoring his African heritage by naming his female lineage which originated within slavery; the dedication evocates at once the socio-economic and historical dimension of race.

After emphasizing his heritage Sacolinha then makes a statement about history as told by the "real" protagonists. In this case, the protagonists appear to be the Afro-Brazilian descendents he names. Differentiating between "history" and "story" gives the statement more power<sup>31</sup>. Yet, their history is described as a *novela real* alluding to the problematic relationship between memory and history and its connection to the hazy boundaries between fiction and reality. The purpose does not relate to a desire to undermine history but rather to emphasize the idea that there exist different perspectives to a national history (a "Grand Narrative"). Although this technique resembles that of *testimonio*, *Graduado* lacks a mediator/editor. In addition, Sacolinha incorporates the memory of slavery which brings to play the idea of plurality. Christine Chivallon suggests that with relation to memory in the Black diaspora an absence of a "meta-discourse" of community exists which opens the possibility to plural registers of memory. This absence also exists with relation to a "hierchization of registers with an implicit critical intention that prevents any one of them from setting itself

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<sup>31</sup> In Portuguese, unlike Spanish, "history" can be distinguished from "story" as *história* and *estória*.

up, precisely, as a meta-discourse" (873). In *Graduado*, not only do these concepts apply to history in general, but also to literary texts.

Although the novel demonstrates Black pride, it does not make race the cornerstone of the narrative. The reader learns about Vander's African heritage because of his favorite pastimes and during a passage in which he remembers his father teaching him about their origins rooted in samba and *capoeira*. Yet, the reader learns nothing about the other characters and the only instance the narrator mentions race directly, the reader is deceived, "... Nego Bá, esse ultimo apesar de ser branco recebera esse apelido" "... Nego Bá, that last one although he was white he received that nickname' (45). Thus, even as the narrative at times employs terms such as *nego velho* and *nega* the quote mentioned above makes the reader doubt about the real meaning of these terms. Are they meant to describe the character's background or are they terms of affection? Racial lines again are blurred and struggles bring the characters together rather than ethnic affiliation. This approach contrasts drastically with Afro-Brazilian literature of the 1960s and 70s in which Black pride was of utmost importance in both form and content. *Graduado*,

instead, engages the issue of race in a form that alludes to what Robert Stam and Ella Shohat refer to as "polycentric multiculturalism",

Polycentric multiculturalism describes the speaking subject as one that changes images and power relations; denies a unified, fixed essentialist concept of identities rather identities are multiple, unstable, historically situated; lays beyond identity politics, affiliation based on shared social interests; reciprocal. (46-48)

This idea parallels with the discourse found in current rap music: a strong demonstration of Black pride but also solidarity with other historically oppressed groups that live in the *favelas* and suburbs of urban Brazil.

Through an analysis of *Graduado em Marginalidade* this chapter illustrated how *literatura periférica* aims to offer counter discourses to those presented by mainstream media and culture. While urban literature and media of the 1990s relied on the use of violence to define the "Other", *periféricos* look to construct pluralistic images of *favela* life. Their approach reveals the need to demonstrate the complexities surrounding the issues of drugs, poverty, and race that Brazil faces and which directly affect the most marginalized. In the process, hip-hoppers look to contest mainstream ideas of Brazil's urban periphery as self-

contained places infested with drugs and violence. *Graduado* offers a complex view of Brazil as it considers how other parties contribute, question, and transform socio-political relationships. As such, *periféricos* aim to redefine the margins as places where different groups of people with different interests and ways of seeing the world converge.

Although *Graduado* places blame on Brazil's social, political, and economic structures, there also exists the possibility for a better future if people come to reject the idea that violence, drugs, and corruption represent their only reality. *Graduado* offers an opportunity for reflecting and reversing colonial tropes mass media and traditional culture have for years propagated. Rather than relying on violence to construct the *favelados'* subjectivity, the novel aims to change the terms and in the process the way the center views the margins and how *periféricos* view themselves. Thus, *Graduado* portrays a complex and interconnected society in a call for self-reflection and action.

Much like *literatura periférica*, rap music proposes new perspectives on what Brazilians regard as established ideas on race, history, and economic progress. Through a recuperative process that emphasizes the use of Word,



rappers hope to give agency to those who have been systematically marginalized and silenced in support of coloniality/modernity. In this context, *coloniality* refers to the "embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, and modernization..." (Mignolo *Idea 5*). In so doing, rappers deconstruct history in an attempt at exposing the racist policies the government and elite have used to marginalized Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinso*. Rap music also strongly criticizes *o sistema*'s depiction of capitalism as the answer to poverty and inequality.

### Chapter 3

#### Sabotaging Brazil's Hegemonic Discourse on Race and History, One Rap Song at a Time

Revolucionário, insano ou marginal  
Antigo e moderno, imortal  
Fronteira do céu com o inferno astral  
imprevisível como um ataque cardíaco no berço  
Violentamente pacífico, verídico,  
vim pra sabotar seu raciocínio...

E a profecia se fez como previsto:  
1 9 9 7 Depois de Cristo.  
A fúria negra ressuscita outra vez.

*Revolutionary, insane or marginal  
Old and modern, immortal  
On the border of heaven with hell  
Unpredictable like a heart attack in bed  
Violently pacific, truthful,  
I came to sabotage your reasoning...  
And the profecy occurred as predicted:  
1 9 9 7 A.D.  
The black fury resurrects again.*

*Racionais MC  
Capitulo 4, Versículo 3*

*O rap é informação. Informação e arma.*

*Alexandre Diogo, rapper and  
resident of the favela Capão Redondo*

Several factors go into making hip-hop culture in Brazil such a multifaceted movement, but for rap music, form and discourse represent the key components. Unlike the novels of *Subúrbio* and *Cidade de Deus*, rap gives utmost importance to dialogue and the ability to speak out. While *o velho* and *a velha* in *Subúrbio* hardly ever spoke to each other or to any of their neighbors and while Paulo Lins ends by emphasizing the impossibility of dialogue, rappers do exactly the opposite. Linked to the concept of expressivity called Africanist aesthetics, Word<sup>32</sup> among rappers represents the tool that will bring about a deeper understanding of what it means to be Afro-Brazilian.

Although *Cidade de Deus*, both the novel and the movie, portray the marginalized as brutal criminals, rappers refer to their music as "street poetry" (*poesia de rua*) and to themselves as "street poets" (*poetas da rua*). By employing these terms, rappers stress their belief that the margins also produce "intellectuals", capable of expression and effecting change. For rappers, Word is not only possible but essential for the success of their project of raising

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<sup>32</sup> "Word" refers to both the spoken and the written word. It does not stand for language- a system of encoding and decoding information- as there does not exist one way to "do" rap or to express oppression, desire for emancipation or the memory of slavery. "Word" alludes to the idea that such concerns are instead uttered orally and/or in written form.

consciousness, challenging the status quo, and bringing change.

### ***The Africanist Aesthetics of Hip-Hop***

The term Africanist aesthetics, coined by dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild, refers to cultural practices that manifest a historical continuum of African-based expressivity supported by a philosophical approach, spread into the African diaspora through the trans-Atlantic slave route (Osumare 12). With relation to hip-hop culture, Osumare defines Africanist aesthetics as "A processual mode of expressivity that privileges the negotiation of the self in the moment through a complex use of rhythmic timing, verbal or nonverbal rhetorical strategies, and multiple layers of meaning that draw from its sociocultural context and audience" (12). These characteristics can be seen in hip-hop's reliance on self-expressive improvisation such as, freestyling rap orality, b-boy dance, and moment-by-moment manipulations of turntable-synthesizers, all of which mandate an automatic engagement of the self. Hip-hop's emphasis on improvisation, rhetoric, and manipulation reflects its connection to the philosophical and artistic principles of Africanist aesthetics.

Minha intenção é ruim, esvazia o lugar  
Eu tô em cima, eu tô a fim, um - dois pra atirar  
Eu sou bem pior do que você tá vendo  
O preto aqui não tem dor, é cem por cento veneno  
A primeira faz BUM, a segunda faz TÁ!  
Eu tenho uma missão, e não vou parar  
Meu estilo é pesado e faz tremer o chão,  
minha palavra vale um tiro  
eu tenho muita munição....

*My intentions are bad, evacuate the area  
I'm on top, I have the intention, one-two to shoot  
I am worst than what you see  
Blacks here don't feel pain, they are 100% venom  
The first one goes BUM, the second one goes TA!  
I have a mission and I'm not going to stop  
My style is intense and makes the floor tremble,  
my word is like a shot fired  
I have a lot of ammunition*

*Racionais MC  
Capitulo 4 Versiculo 3 (1992)*

Word power, or *nommo*, is one of the principles of Africanist aesthetics found in hip-hop culture. This concept was first introduced by anthropologist Marcel Griaule in 1948 and it helped bring together the several African and New World African American cultures under one epistemological rubric. *Nommo* emphasizes the changing now and is based on the Bantu and Dogon anthropomorphic philosophy that claims "man has power over the Word, it is he who directs the life force" (Osumare 31). Because of the belief that humans have the responsibility to administer

change or action through Word, *word power* places huge importance on orality and singing. Booklets' of rap CDs in Brazil reflect this idea as they do not provide the lyrics to the songs. According to statements by rappers and their followers, suppressing the lyrics forces the listener to give his/her absolute attention to the song in order to learn its lyrics (*Caros Amigos*, Nov. 1998). This process also requires playing the song multiple times which helps the listener assimilate the message of the particular song, therefore becoming fully engaged in the process.

Because rappers privilege Word and believe orality to be an agent of change, they reveal, consciously or not, an understanding of the importance of *nommo*. In the verses quoted above, the poetic voice emphasizes word power as it describes how words will "shake up" the establishment. The song quoted above also stresses the importance of word by stating that rhetoric will give blacks agency. Before the song begins (which it does with the verses cited above) the MC presents the listener with a few stark statistics about blacks in Brazil<sup>33</sup>. These have the purpose of demonstrating

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<sup>33</sup> "60% dos jovens de periferia sem antecedentes criminais já sofreram violência policial; há cada 4 pessoas mortas pela polícia 3 são negras; nas universidades brasileiras apenas 2% dos alunos são negros; há cada 4

that the black population has come to represent a number related to crime, violence, and lack of education.

Immediately after the statistics the poetic voice enters in an attempt to change the terms by giving agency and subjectivity to this much neglected sector of the population.

Because of the interrelationship between word and change that comprises *nommo*, this principle also alludes to the idea of *process*, of constant motion, of the improvisatory self through word. The dynamic characteristic of call-and-response found in hip-hop culture is a clear example of this. While lyrics represent the most common form by way of challenging the opponent and/or the audience, it also applies to dance and deejaying. Brazilian rappers claim that this way of making music has its roots in Africa and that the *de repente* tradition of Brazil's Northeast represents its first manifestation. In fact, rappers are often called *repentistas eletrônicos*. Peter Fryer's studies of how music and dance moved through the Atlantic supports this theory. In his book, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*, Fryer explains how "challenge

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horas um jovem negro morre violentamente em São Paulo. Aqui quem fala é Primo Preto mais um sobrevivente".

singing" was introduced to Portugal by the Arabs and then by the slaves, "There can be little doubt that in Lisbon at least there was some African as well as Arab influence on Portuguese challenge singing... Verbal contests- contending or duelling with words, often in song- are an important means of communication and entertainment in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa..." (3). He continues by stating that Brazil mediated the African influence on Portuguese music and dance due to its importance in the slave trade route. Thus, challenge singing arrived in Brazil through the Northeast and is now called *de repente* (4).

Rapper Rappin Hood recorded a song with a famous *repentista* in which he "calls in" the *de repente* tradition through sampling. With this gesture, Rappin Hood emphasizes the African roots of rap music by reviving the *de repente* tradition. In addition and just as important, he joins the *nordestinos'* plight for social justice to that of the afro-Brazilians. As Rappin Hood's example illustrates, call-and-response does not limit itself to the oral level or to one of genre. It incorporates different musical forms and discourses into the process of producing one song. This technique, called "sampling", has been interpreted by black music scholar Sam Floyd as discursive intertextuality.



Floyd based his theory of black music on the literary critical work of Henry Louis Gates Jr. called Signifyin(g). Floyd's theory employs the call-and-response technique of black musical tradition as its principle tool and defines it as an interpretation of discursive intertextuality. With relation to music, intertextuality refers to the literary and musical relationships between different pieces of music, between artists, and between artists and audiences. Of call-and-response, Floyd states, "[it is] the master trope, the musical trope of tropes, implies the presence within it of Signifyin(g) figures (calls) and Signifyin(g) revisions (responses in various guises) that can be one or the other, depending on their context" (95).

The influence from previous black musical movements in rap becomes apparent either through direct references or through sampling. Therefore, at both the oral and musical levels the intertextuality of black musical texts plays a crucial role in the production of rap music. Hip-hop's great dependence on the music of an earlier generation, combined with the reconfiguration of that music and passing it back to the general public, constitutes a kind of conversation with the black musical tradition. Imani Perry calls it "mimicry of the montage of memory, where phrases

and rifts exist inside the artists to be expressed in unique form, emerging within the fragmentary mosaic of memory" (34). In the North American context, scholars have talked about "calling in" the memory of the Civil Rights Movement through the incorporation of previous black musical forms (36). In the Brazilian case, call-and-response invokes previous musical forms associated with songs of social justice and struggle, such as *forró*, *samba*, *soul*, and *MPB*.

Although at the oral level dialogue with the past has always been at the core of Brazil's Hip-Hop movement - rappers reference Brazilian history in order to criticize it or deconstruct it- at the musical level it was not present at the beginning. This is in part due to the early nature of Brazilian rap music, which relied on imitating North American forms. Rappers' strong resistance towards incorporating national genres such as *samba* or *pagode* represented a form of protest towards the commercialization of Brazil's black music by the white elite. Therefore, rappers believed that mixing in *samba* and similar forms would reduce the political consciousness of their lyrics. In the last eight years Brazilian rappers have changed their stance as they have distanced themselves from their

North American *manos* and their commercialized form of rap. Distance has forced rappers in Brazil to look inward for inspiration. As a result, a wave of highly innovative and creative rap music has emerged, mixing not only the *de repente*, but *samba*, Brazilian funk and soul, MPB, *forró*, and earlier rap songs into the creation process.<sup>34</sup> An example of call-and-response done through lyrics and music can be found in the song "O Preto em Movimento" by MV Bill.

The following excerpts from *MV Bill's* song allude to past battles of resistance by enslaved blacks. From the beginning of the song -and in the title itself- the poetic voice makes it clear that blacks in general are not static observers, but movement in their own right. The verses talk about past battles of resistance by referencing black slave revolts and *quilombos*. Unlike Brazilian history that tends to portray blacks as submissive, the poetic voice states quite the opposite: blacks are people of victories and possess the spirit of warriors. To stress the idea of movement and victory, emphasis has been given to key words

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<sup>34</sup> Innovation and creativity might be at stake as the only factory that produces vinyl records in Brazil might be closing. DeeJay Dan Dan of São Paulo told me that this can have two effects 1) access to national music in vinyl would decrease making it more difficult to incorporate it into the sampling process, and 2) deejays would be forced to buy imports which are usually two to three times more expensive (conversation at a night club in the city of São Paulo, Aug. 2007).

by way of rhyme: negro/movimento; história/glórias;  
vitoria/combativa; the word lamentos on the other hand is  
left on its own:

Não sou o movimento negro  
Sou o preto em movimento  
Todos os lamentos  
[Me fazem refletir]  
Sobre a nossa história  
Marcada com glórias  
[Não posso mais fugir do]  
Sentimento que eu levo no peito é de vitória  
Seduzido pela paixão combativa

I am not the black movement  
I am the black in movement  
All the laments  
[They make me reflect]  
About our history  
Left with marks of glory  
[I can no longer escape from]  
Feeling that I carry in my  
chest is of victory  
Seduced by combative passion

In addition to speaking about past black resistance  
movements, MV Bill samples the song by Sandra "Sá Olhos  
Coloridos" (shown in brackets) in a call-and-response form.  
Sandra Sá's song became an anthem of the Soul and Funk  
movements of the 1970s and it is of great importance that  
MV Bill has chosen that particular song. As mentioned,  
sampling or intertextuality has the purpose of "calling in"  
previous discourses in order to rearticulate, reformulate

them, or to emphasize their importance. In the case of "O Preto em Movimento", inserting key phrases from Sandra Sá's song emphasizes a new awareness of Afro-Brazilian pride. Sandra Sá emphasizes the physical by talking about eyes and hair (as in the phrase *olhos coloridos* and *cabelos enrolados* of her song) to reflect and raise Afro-Brazilian consciousness. MV Bill, however, replaces *olhos coloridos* with *lamentos* while calling-in other famous statements from Sá's song *me fazem refletir* (they make me reflect), *não posso mais fugir* (I can't escape anymore). By making this change the song is taken to a different level in which the marks of history become the point of departure for raising awareness and Afro-Brazilian pride.

These much more musically sophisticated forms of rap also present an example of Brazilian rappers' deeper understanding of hip-hop culture. As such, call-and-response has reached several levels of creation due to an understanding of the symbolic references and cultural history from which the music derives. As Floyd argues, "The execution of Call-Response tropes opens up the symbolic field, where reside the longstanding sublimated conflicts, taboos, and myths of personal and group emotional experience and our relationship to them" (230). MV Bill's

song demonstrates this connection by taking it a step further. Not only does he speak of physical characteristics and attributes but also of traits such as courage and mobilization. In addition, MV Bill incorporates history into the discussion.

While "word power", improvisation, and call-and-response play a significant role within hip-hop culture, *oriki* is another key component of the Africanist aesthetics found in rap music. *Oriki*, or praise poetry, forms part of Yoruba oral culture and its main characteristics are rhythmic speech and the weaving of different stories (Osumare 33). Following Floyd's concept of defining call-and-response in literary terms, I venture to call weaving a form of fragmentation similar to what is found in modern and post-modern literature. The early songs of *Racionais MC*, which tend to have durations of about ten minutes on average (e.g. "Homem na Estrada", "Diario de um Detento", "Fim de Semana no Parque", "Periferia é Periferia") offer the best examples. These are composed of three or four storylines, each featuring an archetypical character of the periphery (the drug addict, the fatherless boy, the drug

dealer, the police officer)<sup>35</sup>. As the songs advance the stories disclose the same recurring theme (usually drugs, violence, poverty, or racism) which functions as the connecting force. Sometimes the different storylines within a song connect directly to one another, other times the connection happens through association. The use of fragmentation and jumps in time, such as flashbacks, heightens the complexity of these storylines. The level of complexity in the lyrics of much of Brazilian rap finds little relation to rap in the US<sup>36</sup>.

Scholars of African Studies point to the use of complex allusions and connections as typical characteristics of oral tradition. In speaking of the Yoruba's praise poems, Clifford Geertz states that:

[they] are distinguished by the insistence with which they are chanted (shouted or screamed) at the individual being addressed.. The performer weaves a web

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<sup>35</sup> The definition of the word "periphery" that is used in this dissertation does not refer to that which is used with relation to dependency theory. This theory, which was popular in the 1960s, conceptualizes the periphery as the area that lies outside the center of economic and political power and for which dependency on the "center" is unalterable and unavoidable. I have chosen to employ the term because as explained in Chapter 2, it is the term hip-hoppers prefer to use when talking about the suburbs and *favelas*. It does not, however, allude to the idea of inalterability on which dependency theory is based.

<sup>36</sup> Rap songs in the US are much shorter, averaging four minutes and appear to lack the complex storylines that make up much of Brazilian rap. This could be due in part to the demands of the record industry which has a definite say in how rap music is produced in the US.

of allusion by combining many disparate elements- the more skilled the performer the more radical the breaks and twists she can succeed in introducing while maintaining the thread. (Osumare 33)

Brazilian rappers also incorporate the weaving of storylines into their CDs as they break with the Eurocentric tradition of harmonious endings. While traditional Western style songs and CDs tend to have a clear end marked by a pause, rap CDs loop one song to the next, therefore creating a circular storyline. The technique of linking all the narratives of the CD produces a feeling of interconnectivity. As a result, the lives spoken about through song come together with the purpose of creating one large narrative. This technique alludes to two words frequently inserted into rap songs, *elo* (link) and *corrente* (chain). As one might imagine, these refer to the chains used on slaves. Rappers reference these two words to stress the memory of slavery unites them. However, and unlike other Black Consciousness movements, dwelling on the past does not represent rappers' main purpose. Instead, rap employs the memory of slavery to call its brothers and sisters to action.

One of the objectives of these complex stories reveals another principle of the Africanist aesthetics found in



hip-hop culture, the recuperative process of "naming." As a manifestation of word power, naming, or renaming, represents an empowering process common in African culture. Gottschild politicizes the term by explaining it as the telling of one's story: "If language is the exercise of power, and the act of naming is the act of empowerment, then what is not named or misnamed becomes an impotent backdrop to someone else's story" (Osumare 36). In a way, naming alludes to subaltern studies' concept of telling Other histories and is manifested in the intricate stories rappers tell which seek to speak of Other truths. It also appears in the form of call-and-response which rappers employ to speak directly *to/with* history in order to question and contest it. In addition, rappers use discourse or word power to comment directly on certain historic moments. In this way, rap music provides a vehicle with which to counter hegemony and offers a recuperative process for Brazil's black population.

Naming works in tandem with the principle of the trickster. Through his/her role of translator of signs and representations, the trickster looks to challenge the status quo. The trickster is a master linguist who translates the language of the gods to humans and vice

versa, therefore becoming a master of literacy. Thus, the emcee as both writer and performer is the master of the vernacular language and invoker of *nommo*, the legacy of the original trickster-linguist (Osumare 38-39). A skillful rapper as trickster employs metaphors and allusions in order to provide access to the world of representations. The following verses illustrate the use of metaphor, allusion, and imagery by calling *serpente* those who lure youngsters into illicit activities and away from their families and friends. Also by employing the sinking ship as a metaphor of those who renounce their African roots and community and lose themselves in drugs and crime. The poetic voice claims to be proud of who he is (poor, black, and with a sad past) and because of this will continue walking while avoiding temptation (*serpent*), and transforming the world through word (the use of a pen):

Não vou recuar, Sei quem sou  
Me afastar de quem rachou.  
Quem se sujou, foi pro mar e naufragou.  
Não para, nasci pobre com vergonha na cara  
Caminhando e desviando do bote da serpente  
Que ta camuflando entre toda nossa gente.  
Até o fim sou Chapa Preta  
Transformando o mundo com o poder de uma caneta.  
Rio de Janeiro minha casa, CDD meu lugar

I won't pull back, I know who I am  
I move away from those who split.  
Who got dirty, went to sea and sunk.  
I won't stop, I was born poor with  
shame on my face  
Walking and deflecting the serpent's boat  
That is camouflaging among all of our people.  
Until the end I am "Chapa Preta"  
Transforming the world with the power of a pen.  
Rio de Janeiro my home, CDD my place

*Sei Quem Sou*  
*MV Bill*

The Africanist principles that characterize rap's form challenge Eurocentric aesthetics by utilizing word power, call-and-response, weaving, improvisation, and naming. However, Africanist aesthetics have influenced the production of Brazilian music for years. An example of this is the importance of percussion in Brazilian music. The percussive performance style of *samba* offers one example. Robert Stam describes it as "synergistic dialectic of multiple rhythms existing in intricate and constantly changing relationships to one another, a frequency of overlapping call and response patterns (between the *puxador* (caller) of *samba* and the responding chorus)" (38). Offbeat phrasing and suspended accentuation along with the assumption that the music has the right, even the duty, to speak to its time and community through social commentary

and allusion also characterize *samba* (Thompson 15). Still, while Brazilian music since the eighteenth century has paid tribute to Afro-Brazilian cultural expression, it has failed to speak about racism and the legacies of slavery (although Gilberto Gil offers a few exceptions)<sup>37</sup>. In sharp contrast, rap music not only employs form to contest hegemonic discourses of a Eurocentric *brasilidade*. It also speaks out against past and present discriminatory practices applied in support of coloniality/modernity<sup>38</sup>. By employing form and discourse rap looks to deconstruct the negative image purposely attached to Afro-Brazilian identity.

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<sup>37</sup> In his book, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil*, Peter Fryer traces the first form of Brazilian popular music to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This musical style was called *modinha* and it merged Italian, Portuguese, and African forms. Although other "hybrid" styles had already emerged, such as *chorinho*, *modinha* was the first to be embraced by Brazilians of all socio-economic classes (138,145).

<sup>38</sup> For Mignolo, modernity's origin is not only attributed to the European Renaissance (early modern period) but also to the Renaissance's concurrent colonial enterprise, the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of what we today refer to as America. As such, and by borrowing Anibal Quijano's idea of modernity being "double-sided and of double density", *coloniality* constitutes the "dark" side of the dichotomy. In this context, *coloniality* refers to the "embedded logic that enforces control, domination, and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, and modernization..." *Coloniality of power* refers to the power relations necessary for this dichotomy to exist. These relationships of power pertain to the control of finance, of authority, of sexuality, of knowledge and of subjectivity among other things (Mignolo *Idea* 5-6).

***History's Weight:***

Branços ensima  
Negros embaixo  
Ainda é normal, natural  
400 anos depois  
1992 todo igual  
Bem-vindos ao Brasil colonial

Whites on top  
Blacks on the bottom  
It is still normal, natural  
400 years later  
1992 everything is the same  
Welcome to colonial Brazil

*Racionais MC  
Voz ativa*

Saiba você no pasado o que aconteceu.  
Os livros contam uma historia que não ocorreu.  
A verdade eles querem ocultar  
Mas nossos avôs contam o que você não vai acreditar

You should know what happened in the past  
Books tell of a story that didn't occur  
They want to hide the truth  
But our grandparents tell stories you won't believe

*Rappin Hood  
Vida de negro*

In her book, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Tricia Rose stresses the point that while the Afro-diasporic elements within hip-hop

culture must be considered, so must the economic and political situation surrounding hip-hop's birth. Interestingly, the social, economic, and political exclusion prevalent among hip-hoppers in New York's Bronx of the 1970s, parallels to the situation among São Paulo's hip-hoppers of 1980s. Even though funk and soul dominated Rio's margins, it was in São Paulo where hip-hop culture was born and where it continues to thrive. There is no doubt that some of this is related to São Paulo's position as the port of entry to "everything international", both goods and culture. Still, these cultural products arrive to Rio and other major urban centers almost immediately, thus, diminishing this advantage. What, then, influenced the emergence of São Paulo as the mecca of hip-hop culture?

It is important to know that the pioneers of Brazilian rap, such as *Racionais MC*, come from the southwestern region of greater São Paulo. The significance of their origin relates to the fact that the famous industrial zone known as the ABC is located here<sup>39</sup>. The ABC zone came about as early as the 1950s under Getulio Vargas' *Estado Novo*. It was around this time that the government

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<sup>39</sup> This industrial zone was mentioned in Chapter One when the novel *Subúrbio* was discussed.

lured North American and European automakers into moving their production facilities to Brazil. Because of São Paulo's financial and political clout, the automakers established their production facilities there. It then expanded under the neo-liberal policies of Brazil's military government of the 1970s. These factories created thousands of jobs, which also prompted migration from Brazil's impoverished Northeast region. As with any massive movement of people, this migration process produced accelerated unplanned urbanization. Not only were people forced into living in deplorable conditions, but they were left to deal with their problems without any government help. The south and the east sides transformed from middle class neighborhoods into ghettos and *favelas* within a very short period of time. Many of these plants either closed or laid off thousand of workers in the late 80's and early 90's as a result of globalization (cheaper labor in Asia) and technology, thus worsening the situation. The social and economic consequences were acute, and as thousands of people were left with no place to work, the level of crime and drug trafficking increased. It was in this socio-economic chaos that hip-hop was born<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> In spite of its wealth, São Paulo is also the site of unbelievable

Although the specific policies differed from the ones in New York City, the end results were the same: drastic shifts in demographics, in economic conditions, in access to housing, and in communication networks. Tricia Rose distinguishes them as "postindustrial" shifts and argues that they were "crucial to the formation of the conditions that nurtured the cultural hybrids and sociopolitical tenor of hip hop's lyrics and music" (26). The importance the economic and political situation had in creating the favorable conditions for such a cultural movement to emerge is evident in the lyrics of rap music. As the second part of this chapter will illustrate, while racism presents itself as the number one topic of discussion within rap music, economic marginalization appears as number two. Because of this, understanding the clear connection that rappers make between economic marginalization and racism is imperative. While hip-hoppers take ownership of the memory

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poverty, with between 25% and 35% of its 17 million residents living in dire poverty. The city's poor are largely concentrated in the sprawling Zona Leste (East Zone) - home to some 4 million people (or double the size of Toronto) of whom 1 million are totally unemployed, without jobs in either formal or informal economies. Much of the Zona Leste, in other words, is favela without paved roads or running water or waste disposal. And so, despite the fact that the city has the most congested helicopter traffic in the world as the super-rich commute from skyscraper to skyscraper, the Zona Leste's 4 million residents have access to seven hospitals (Read 284).



of slavery that characterizes Afro-diasporic cultural movements, the lyrics also speak about the legacies of coloniality that affect Afro-Brazilians today. As such, the "Other" stories rappers present seek to obtain subjectivity and to decolonize the present.

As mentioned earlier, previous cultural movements in Brazil have also dialogued with other Afro-diasporic movements. Hip-hop, however, has managed to challenge the hegemonic discourse on race like no other movement. Concerning the reach of *Negritude* within Brazil, Benedita Gouveia Damasceno concludes in her book, *Poesia Negra no Modernismo Brasileiro*, that "O Brasil, que conta com uma imensa população negra, possui determinantes históricas que fizeram que a assimilação racial e cultural caminhasse em direção a uma unidade nacional. Por isso, não há ou não houve no Brasil um movimento de poesia negra tão bem caracterizado como o ocorrido com os africanos residentes na França" (Damasceno 12). Black or Negritude poetry in Brazil is characterized by the search and reaffirmation of a black conscious/identity (Solano Trindade, "Sou Negro", "Orgulho", Oswaldo de Camargo, "A Modo de Súplica", "Grito de Angústia" "Eduardo de Oliveira, "Banzo", "Lamento Negro"). Black poetry resorts to a type of social protest

with emphasis on the forebears' suffering, on cultural and religious legacies, but mainly on protesting against the white oppressor. Afro rhythms and language are tools employed by these poets.

In spite of the intentions of Brazil's black poets, however, black poetry in Brazil tends to stay on what might be termed the "first level" of Negritude, that of lament and sorrowful memories. These poets also share the belief that the general population should admit to both the contributions made by the black population to the construction of the ethno-cultural realm of Brazilian life and to the suffering that the Afro-Brazilian population has experienced. In contrast to the Negritude of the Francophone world, poets in Brazil did not adopt a sense of revolt but rather a desire to build a true racially democratic society. Much like Cuban poet Nicolás Guillen, Brazilian black intellectuals call for an appraisal of their country as neither white nor black, but a synthesis, a view that aligns itself with the *Modernistas* (Preto-Rodas 31). It is due to this lack of insurgency in its tone that Brazil's Negritude movement did not produce anything comparable to that of its Francophone counterparts (Damasceno; Preto-Rodas).

Something similar can be said about Brazil's *Modernismo* of the 1920s and 30s. While Damasceno credits Brazil's *Modernismo* for introducing among the intellectuals an awareness of Brazil's African influence and characteristics, *Antropofagia* failed to incorporate the Afro-Brazilian voice and aesthetics. The *modernistas'* discourse supported the idea of *embranquecimento* through miscegenation as the solution to the "problema do negro". It is interesting to note Mário de Andrade's concept of race through his most famous work, *Macunaíma*. In Andrade's epic, the hero who has no character is black and ugly. He then takes a bath which cleanses him and whiteness him, making him beautiful. There is hardly any other metaphor as strong as this one in support of *embranquecimento*.

The approach to the production of culture by Black artists changed in the 1970s and popular culture became the principal medium of manifestation. Rather than speaking of the beauty of their color or their traditions in a voice of passivity as black poetry had done, black artists now looked to attack directly the social imaginaries by offering counter-images of beauty (Damasceno 125). The change of direction within the production of Afro-Brazilian culture can be attributed to the influences of the Black

Power movement of the United States as well as to the emergence of African nationalist movements and new African nations. Also of importance was Brazilian sociologist, Clóvis Moura, who insisted that in order for Afro-Brazilians to reject what he called "pensamento social subordinado," they should see themselves as subjects of their own history, and not as the object of others' history (in Gomes 7). All these factors contributed to the wide acceptance of soul and funk, and to the emergence of hip-hop culture.

Funk, soul, and rap differed from the commercial popular music of Brazil in their treatment of race. While previous musical movements rarely mention race issues, race is the central theme of *música black*. In addition, soul, funk, and rap contested certain images and stereotypes that had managed to transcend time within other genres, these being: the black woman as a sexual object with no voice or opinion; black hair and color as unattractive; the black man as old, poor, and humble; the perpetual marks of slavery which turned black people submissive and accommodating; the *malandro* (hustler) who provides humor but does not threaten the whites or the established hierarchy; the black man as a romantic hustler; and

inversions of skin color in Carnival music which supports the myth of racial democracy (Johnson 282- 287).

Interestingly, these images allude to those perpetuated by canonical literature. The way Afro-Brazilians were represented in popular culture, however, changed with the emergence of soul, funk, and rap.

Song texts that presented not only positive images but self-esteem, pride, and a sense of autonomy from the perspective of the black population composed Black musical movements of the 1970s (Johnson 287). During this time, transnational musical styles associated with black Diaspora culture systematically entered Brazil. Because these songs view race relations through the "black eye", they created new images or counter-images and perspectives for understanding race relations. One of the first manifestations of a revitalized black consciousness in Brazil occurred in the early 1970s in the working-class suburbs of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Inspired by the black movement of the United States, black soul adopted North American music, dress styles and behavior (Afro hairstyles, dashikis, elaborate handshakes). This cultural movement sought to raise awareness of and promote an Afro-Brazilian identity in the black body. Black Soul had no

specific political ideology, but its very existence challenged conventional views of race by asserting a unique black identity within Brazilian society. Much like early rap music in Brazil, black Soul viewed *samba* as corrupted by commercialism and white cultural dominance. As a result, Soul rejected traditional Afro-Brazilian practices and instead adopted cultural forms frequently associated with the militancy of the Black Power movement in the United States. Thus, black Soul's participants aligned themselves with a transnational assertion of black identity. By calling attention to blacks as blacks with their own identity, Soul implicitly challenged the official ideology of racial democracy and harmony. As Randall Johnson observes, it represented "a threat to the national project" (Johnson 6).

It was not until 1988, with the emergence of Brazilian rap music, that lyrics radically changed. Rap music went beyond building black consciousness on color alone and instead looked to contest history's portrayal of Brazil's black population, discrimination, and the effects of slavery and coloniality. In addition, the singer and the poetic subject become one and the same: "the lyrical mode disappears and the I-Thou relationship becomes a conscious

and controlled dialogue..." (Johnson 290). Therefore unlike soul, rap constituted a highly critical discourse that threatened the national project in many ways.

Although other musical movements emerged from the margins in order to speak of social injustice, rap music differentiates itself from these in many ways. In relation to *samba* and *forró*, which emerged from the *favelas* of Rio and the Northeastern backlands, the melodies and beats of early rap did not incorporate traditional Afro-Brazilian instruments in creating upbeat music. Instead, early rap music made use of electrical sampling and scratching, something never heard of before. Also, the tone of the singers' voices was not one of conformity, sadness or longing for inclusion but one that transmitted strong anger, resentment, and the rejection of the middle and upper classes. As mentioned earlier, the songs tend to narrate very complex storylines and employ the techniques of fragmentation and flashbacks. Also, unlike *samba* and *forró*, early rap music did not talk about love and other themes that could be considered universal in scope. Today, in addition to the integration of different Brazilian musical forms, current rap artists are now writing about love and everyday occurrences ("9 da manhã", "De Repente", "Estilo

Vagabundo", "Nega"). Still, the stark realities of the marginalized, capitalism's negative effects, and racism continue as the dominant themes.

Even though rap stands for "rhythm and poetics," in Brazil rap music today is far from gaining acceptance as a poetic form. Instead, most academics tend to criticize rap's non-traditional form and explain it by stating that rappers have no formal education, "A falta do conhecimento clássico da metrificaco faz com que os *rappers* ignorem o ritmo silábico do verso e o substituam pela batida forte da música; mais precisamente é possível dizer que o cantor/compositor segue o compasso do bumbo.. Nas letras de *rap*, portanto, não se pode falar em regularidade no sistema quantitativo" (Cardoso 4)<sup>41</sup>, thus categorizing rap as lower culture. The singularity of rap lies in the rhythmic scheme of the refrain, the irregular use of rhyme, the variation of meters, and the indiscriminate use of short and long verses. The following example illustrates how verses within the same song tend to have completely different metric

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<sup>41</sup> These critics also claim that rap music is solely based on imitation due to rappers' lack of formal musical training. These critics fail to understand the creative process of rap music. The process of sampling different sounds and songs is far more complicated and intricate than simple imitation. This process involves creating a song without any instruments by electronically selecting sounds, beats, rhythms, melodies, etc. from other songs. These components are then reconfigured electronically into one single song.



forms. This particular example contains an *alejandrino* accentuated in the 2nd, 6th and 12th syllable, a verso with eleven syllables, one with five, etc.:

Diadema 2 do doze de 99.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9-12

Saudades amigo Dexter, tudo bem?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Espero que sim e que esta o encontre na mais pura paz  
espiritual, e que você esteja

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23  
24 25 26

firme e forte.

27 28 29

Olha, por aqui

1 2 3 4 5

nada anda bem, cada dia que passa as coisas ficam mais  
difíceis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Depending on the aim of the song, rap employs freely both the first and second person and many times relies on an omniscient voice. In the song, "Rapaz Comum", Racionais MC utilizes the voice in first person of a deceased to reflect on his life of crime<sup>42</sup>. The song portrays crime as the worst option for youngsters to obtain material gain. It also

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<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Racionais MC utilizes, consciously or not, one of Machado de Assis' most revered techniques. Employed in his novel *Memórias Póstumas de Bras Cubas*, in which the first-person narrator and author is deceased.

speaks about the overall negative effects crime has on the margins.

In addition to its "nontraditional" form, rap's explicit and direct lyrics contrast with previous musical movements. Although rap employs plain and explicit language, simplicity does not characterize its lyrics. Rappers, as skilled tricksters, draw on metaphors and play with words while at times they employ straight forward accounts. Rappers use colloquial Portuguese, slang specific to the marginalized, and profanity. In contrast to soul and funk, rap has a political objective that challenges the "national project" directly. Also, while black poets use paradoxes in order to "neutralize" anger, rap is purposely aggressive, non-forgiving, and non-apologetic in its objective of challenging the status quo: "Eu tenho algo a dizer / e explicar para você / mais não garanto porém / que engraçado eu serei desta vez"<sup>43</sup>; or titles of CDs such as, *Declaração de Guerra*.

While the Negritude Movement of Brazil was characterized by the search and reaffirmation of a black conscious/identity, it nonetheless failed to reach a tone

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<sup>43</sup> I have something to tell you / and explain to you / but I don't guarantee / that I'll be funny this time around

of revolt. Rap on the other hand, speaks of a revolution based on displacing traditional discourses and the established *modus vivendi* imposed by *o sistema*. Rap's defiant attitude and tone looks to undo the image of the poor black as either content and conformist or as physically violent. Instead, rappers hope to portray an image of the non-submissive Afro-Brazilian who looks to fight its battles with the use of knowledge, not weapons. In addition, hip-hop's constant reference to *o sistema* and to its manipulation clearly differentiates it from previous Black Conscience movements in Brazil. In a sense, it understands the power relations established by coloniality for the sake of modernity.

Rap's contestation of Brazil's myth of a racial democracy is twofold. On one side it openly and aggressively speaks of racist practices inherent in all aspects of Brazilian life. Rappers for example, highly criticize Brazil's whitening project as they reject to identify themselves as *morenos*, *pardos*, or *mulattos*. In their view, Brazil's system of racial categorization is one the elite created to keep afro-Brazilians from uniting under one common purpose. In order to counterattack the elite's whitening project, rappers always call themselves

*negros* or *pretos* and constantly strive to create a black conscious based on pride and strong self-esteem. They hope this will allow them to build a solid base which can be mobilized to fight racism and subjugation. On the other hand, rappers understand that discrimination based on someone's skin color and culture is a tool employed by the elite to defend its hegemony. Rappers constantly speak of modernity as a continuation of coloniality and they strongly criticize the logic behind capitalism and the project of modernity.

***Deciphering Brazil's Rap Music:***

Brazil's Hip-Hop movement has been looking to create a black conscience which would be able to pursue a number of objectives. These include: 1) help mobilize Brazil's black population in the fight against racism; 2) bring to the forefront the social and economic problems afflicting the people living in the margins of Brazil's urban centers; 3) condemn the police brutality exercise against the poorest people of the cities; 4) warn marginalized youth about the negative repercussions that come from living a life of crime; 5) contest the belief that Brazilians live in a

racial democracy; and 6) emphasize the important role of *o sistema* plays in perpetuating the marginalization of the poor. Through their lyrics and in interviews hip-hoppers refer to the interconnected relationships that exist between capitalism, mass media, and government as *o sistema*. This power structure is in turn controlled by the elite. As such, *o sistema* encompasses the players, policies, and logic behind the projects of coloniality and modernity. Rappers' understand the interdependent nature of these relationships:

Hora extra é necessário pro alimento.  
Un real a mais no salário, esmola do padrão  
Cuzão milionário!  
Ser escravo do dinheiro é isso, fulano!  
360 dias por ano sem plano.

Se a escravidão acabar pra você:  
vai viver de quem? Vai viver de quê?  
O sistema manipula sem ninguém saber.  
A lavagem cerebral te faz esquecer  
que andar com as próprias pernas não é difícil.  
Mais fácil se entregar, se omitir.

Overtime is necessary for food  
One more Real in the salary, alms from the boss  
Millionaire jerk!  
That's what it means to be money's slave, guy!  
360 days without a plan.

If slavery ends for you:  
You are going to live from who? Of what?  
The system manipulates without anybody knowing  
The brain washing makes you forget

That walking on your own feet is not difficult  
It is easier to give in, to omit oneself.

*Periferi é Periferia*  
*Racionais MC*

In this song, capitalism appears as the principal threat of *o sistema*. The emphasis on money throughout the first five verses (*hora extra, Real, salário, milionário, dinheiro, plano*) alludes to the idea that a money based economic system governs every aspect of life. Becoming enslaved by this system represents the negative effect the poetic voice warns its listeners against. By incorporating the noun *escravidão* the song seeks to underscore the severity of capitalism's negative repercussions. Also, the poetic voice connects today's market economy to Afro-Brazilian's oppressive past, thereby alluding to the idea that the oppression of the black subject by the white elite continues to this day. The juxtaposition of the workers' economic condition against that of the boss's supports the idea of modern enslavement by contrasting the millions the boss makes at the expense of the workers' low wage and lack of benefits. The correlation between slavery and capitalism also illustrates how the system has purposely and for centuries driven Afro-Brazilians to a state of resignation. In this case, the word *plano* followed by "Se a escravidão

acabar pra você: vai viver de quem? Vai viver de quê?" refers to the abolition process during which freed men and women were literally thrown into the streets without a government plan or assistance for incorporating them into society.

By juxtaposing today's capitalism with slavery, the poetic voice makes the realities of 1888 relevant and similar to the present. Lacking skills or education the poor are now trapped to capitalism and to their condition; what would they do without their low paying job? It appears that the poetic voice agrees with the idea of not having options, no way out of the system. This, however, changes in the next verse by inserting the words *lavagem cerebral* (brain washing) which alludes to what is perhaps more important for hip-hoppers, the mental enslavement caused by mass media. This "brain washing" refers to the reality TV portrays in which Afro-Brazilians can only dream of becoming maids and doormen in a system controlled by the white elite. For rappers, the images that TV constantly plays does not allow the marginalized to imagine other options and criticizes the "Mais facil se entregar, se omitir", mentality which hip-hoppers are working to change. This mentality is reflected in the attitude that the poor

and oppressed have adopted: indifference, hopelessness, and renouncing their dreams rather than fighting for them.

MV Bill, sobrevivente  
da guerra interna.  
Dentro da favela  
só morre preto e branco pobre  
que faz parte dela.  
O sistema faz o povo lutar contra o povo.  
Mas na verdade o nosso inimigo é outro.  
O inimigo usa terno e gravata.  
Mas ao contrário a gente aqui é quem se mata  
através do álcool,  
através da droga,  
destruição na boca de fumo,  
destruição na birosca  
Saindo para roubar para botar um Nike no pé!  
Armadilha pra pegar negão  
se liga na fita  
MV Bill traficando informação

MV Bill, survivor  
Of the internal war.  
Inside the favela  
only poor blacks and whites die  
who make part of it.  
The system makes the people fight against each other  
But in reality our enemy is someone else  
The enemy wears a suit and a tie  
But instead we are the ones who kill each other here  
with alcohol,  
with drugs,  
destruction at the dope house  
destruction at the bar  
Doing exactly what the system wants  
going out to steal  
In order to put a Nike on our foot!  
Tricks to catch blacks  
see the truth  
MV Bill trafficking information

*Traficando Informação*



For hip-hoppers, *o sistema* has another very important repercussion, drugs and violence. Hip-hoppers blame capitalism for the drug problems and therefore the violence afflicting the slums and the suburbs of Brazil's metropolis. As MV Bill mentions, hip-hoppers want to make the marginalized understand that infighting does not offer the solution since the enemy, the guy with the suit and the tie, is not among them. Rappers believe that the material happiness portrayed in mass media pushes the youth of the margins into drug trafficking or stealing in order to obtain the money that will allow them to buy happiness. This parallels with one of the arguments in *Cidade de Deus* in which young boys look at drug trafficking as the only option for economic advancement.

Furthermore, much like the position taken in *Cidade de Deus*, hip-hoppers believe that the infighting, drug use, and stealing that drug trafficking generates has been introduced into the periphery by the system in order for the marginalized to destroy themselves. Verses such as "o sistema de racismo é muito eficaz/pra eles um preto a menos é melhor que um preto a mais" (the system of racism is very

effective/for them one less black is better than one more black) and "a sociedade dando as costas para C.D.D." (society turning its back on C.D.D. (City of God)) reflect direct accusations of society's negligence towards the black and marginalized. Among the different stories woven within the songs, rappers hold the marginalized accountable for their situation, "isso acontece porque aqui ninguem ajuda ninguem/um preto não quer outro preto bem" 'this happens here because nobody helps nobody/a black does not want to see another black do well'. Assigning responsibility to the marginalized appears as a common and recurring theme within Brazilian rap music. The purpose, as I will explain in the next chapter, is to criticize the individualistic mentality of capitalism. According to hip-hopppers the imposition of this philosophy has managed to erase the community-driven approach inherent in Afro-Brazilians and found in the *quilombos*. It is not without reason that MV Bill's song has the title "Traficando Informação". With this title he alludes to the idea that he (and Hip-Hop in general) aims to change the terms, instead of trafficking drugs they will traffic information with the purpose of educating and mobilizing the marginalized.

### ***Two Contrasting Views on Race Relations:***

While economics presents itself as one of the main issues that separate how hip-hoppers and those in "the system" perceive and experience the world, race is another one. Since Brazil began the process of nation building, race has always been an issue of contention. How and to what extent were/are Brazilians willing to accept their African roots? As mentioned in earlier chapters, Gilberto Freyre's racial democracy theory provided the white elite with the best tool to address issues of race. It also allowed Brazilians a feeling of superiority over the United States as Freyre compared the violent and exclusionary history of North America's slavery to what he called the Afro-Brazilian's harmonious assimilation process. The supporting argument Freyre used for his theories was based on his portrayal of the relationships between slave owners and their female slaves as being both positive and non-violent (Skidmore 353). Freyre not only argued that economic factors rather than racial ones caused Brazil's social inequality, he also managed to erase the most

oppressive and violent period of Brazil's history<sup>44</sup>. The replacement of racism with a discourse on economic disparity and harmonious coexistence, thus turned over three hundred years of slavery into an irrelevant chapter in Brazilian history, incapable of explaining the condition of marginality that Afro-Brazilians live under. The Hip-Hop movement, as do black activists in Brazil, vehemently criticizes Freyre's theories on race and is constantly seeking to dismantle Brazil's racial democracy myth. One example is the song, "Racistas Otários" ("Stupid Racists") by *Racionais MC* which samples in Brazil's famous discourse of racial democracy and follows it with laughter. In addition the song juxtaposes the racial democracy myth against a series of examples illustrating why the idea of Brazil as a "Pais de clima tropical onde as raças se misturam naturalmente e não há preconceito racial"<sup>45</sup> is just a construction and that Brazilian society is in fact a racist society.

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<sup>44</sup> The process of eliminating slavery from Brazil's history began in 1890 when Rui Barbosa, Minister of the Treasury, ordered all Brazilian records pertinent to the slave trade to be burned, ('the Republic is compelled to destroy these vestiges for the honour of the Fatherland') (Fryer 195 n37) .

<sup>45</sup> A country of tropical climate where different races mix naturally and where there is no racial discrimination.

Justiça,  
em nome disso eles são pagos.  
Mas a noção que se tem  
é limitada e eu sei  
que a lei  
é implacável com os oprimidos.  
Tornam bandidos  
os que eram pessoas de bem  
pois já é tão claro que é mais fácil dizer  
que eles são os certos e o culpado é você.  
Se existe ou não a culpa  
ninguém se preocupa  
pois em todo caso haverá  
sempre uma desculpa.  
O abuso é demais  
pra eles tanto faz  
não passará de simples fotos nos jornais  
pois gente negra e carente  
não muito influente  
e pouco frequente nas colunas sociais

Justice,  
In its name they are paid.  
But the notion that one has  
is limited and I know  
that the law  
is relentless with the oppressed.  
They make thieves  
out of those who were people of good.  
It is so clear now that it is easier to say  
that they are right and you are guilty.  
If fault exists or not  
nobody worries  
because in any instance there will  
always be an apology.  
Too much abuse  
For them it's all the same  
it won't go beyond a few pictures in the newspaper  
Because black people are poor  
not very influential  
and not very present in the social columns  
of the newspaper

*Racistas Otários*  
*Racionais MC*

This particular part of the song talks about racism within Brazil's judicial system. In the fifth and sixth verses the poetic voice mentions a belief shared by everybody within the hip-hop community: law is fully applied only to the poor and marginalized. This is because, as it states in the last three verses, black Brazilians lack the money ("carente"), the contacts ("influyente"), and the physical appearance ("colunas sociais") to protect them. Verses seven to fifteen make reference to the idea that the judicial system incriminates innocent people, allowing for a photo opportunity used to show society that they are doing their job of protecting the citizens.

In addition to speaking about the discriminatory practices within the judicial system, rap music speaks of other race related issues to demystify Brazil's racial equality. Through their lyrics, rappers contest Brazil history which they blame for downplaying the role racism plays in perpetuating the marginalization of the black population<sup>46</sup>. Rappers also blame the "official" history for

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<sup>46</sup> An example of this are the streets called "Voluntarios da Patria", which are present in every Brazilian city. The word "voluntarios" does not refer to the blacks who fought in the Paraguayan war and who were ceded by their owners. Instead, "voluntarios" refers to the owners themselves who let their slaves go to war. In other words, the owners became volunteers without having been to war (source, Museu Afro-Brasil,

portraying the black population as submissive, and as one which has made little contributions to Brazil as a nation. Hip-Hop presents itself as a way to rethink and rearticulate the traditional discourse on the nation. With relation to counterattacking the image of the black population as submissive, it is a common technique to mention names of black leaders, Zumbi being the most popular, as well as to bring about the *quilombos* and the many resistance movements that occurred throughout Brazil's territory and history. In order to rescue and show the realities of slavery, rappers constantly make comparisons between the police brutality, the prison system, and capitalism of today, against the repressive and oppressive system of slavery. Rappers also criticize the celebration of the discovery of Brazil since in their eyes, the discovery meant the death of Brazil's indigenous people and the beginning of the systematic marginalization of Brazil's black population.

In addition, Rap frequently comments on Brazil's "Lei Aurea", a law signed by Princess Isabel in 1888 with the purpose of abolishing slavery. In the eyes of hip-hoppers

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São Paulo). Also the fact that textbooks in Brazil until the late 1990s made no mention of slave revots, including Brazil's most famous Palmares (Telles --).

and black activists in general, the Lei Aurea did not abolish slavery. Instead it simply changed its format<sup>47</sup>. Rappers talk about how many slaves had either freed themselves by running away to *quilombos* or by buying their freedom. Hence in their view slavery was already being ended by blacks themselves<sup>48</sup>. In effect, what the Lei Aurea created was another system of exploitation, the capitalistic labor market. This system continued to propagate financial inequality at the same time that it allowed for the exclusion of the black population, as the immigration policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries demonstrate<sup>49</sup>. Thus, for Afro-Brazilians and their supporters the Lei Aurea did not bring freedom but rather a

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<sup>47</sup> Several studies support the claim that abolition in Brazil was part of the modernizing project. On one side, it was imposed by the government with the purpose of bringing about order. Slave revolts and riots were becoming too frequent and violent for the landowners to control. In addition, abolition allowed the government to coerce freedmen and women into specific sectors of employment (Butler; Brown). It has also been shown that in 1885 slaves began to ignore their owners' orders as they demanded liberty. This was followed by a large exodus of slaves from the plantations (Carril 74).

<sup>48</sup> Kim D. Butler's studies of post-abolition Brazil show that while 50% of the population in 1822 was composed of slaves, this percentage dropped to 5% by the time of abolition (7).

<sup>49</sup> In their quest to become more European, the "liberals" of late 1800s opposed slavery but they also opposed the idea of having a black population. They proposed freeing the slaves and deporting them to Africa. The deportation never occurred so their solution was to keep the black population without access to education, housing, and decent paying jobs. In 1850 the Lei de Terras which prohibited non-whites to own land was signed. In addition, the influx of 1.1 million European immigrants between 1881-1900 worsened the competition for jobs. While whites were employed in commerce and industry, blacks were employed in agriculture (Campos 46-48, Butler 27).



more iniquitous dependency and produced the problems that afflict the marginalized up to this day: lack of decent housing, of education, of employment, of health, of dignity. For hip-hoppers, the idea of abolition is a tool *o sistema* uses to support the illusion of a racial democracy. Rappers' view of history reflects a new and different perspective. This perspective reflects an understanding of how knowledge and rules are "geo-historically located in the structure of power of the modern colonial world" (Mignolo 13).

### ***Beyond Music:***

Because of its roots, politically charged lyrics, and aesthetics hip-hop culture was and continuous to be highly controversial among middle and upper class Brazilians. Not only do emcees and deejays contest establish discourses on race relations, they also employ a musical form that transgresses against Eurocentric aesthetics. In addition, the tone and language employed is aggressive and unapologetic, creating even more uneasiness among the people their music criticizes. Still, for the youth of the margins, hip-hop culture offers much more than a medium for

expressing discontent and anger. Hip-hop culture represents pride, community, knowledge, creativity, alternatives, and hope.

Rap's tone of revolt along with some of the artist's personal backgrounds have been conveniently used by mainstream media to propagate a negative image of what in reality is the Hip-Hop movement (*Istoé, O Globo, Época*). Unfortunately, the articles in these newspapers and magazines have been used to steer attention away from the real messages that rappers transmit not only through their lyrics but through their social activities. An example of the bias exercised by mainstream media becomes evident as articles about confrontations that have occurred at a few of *Racionais MC's* concerts always appear as front page news. In contrast, articles related to the inaugurations of community libraries or centers, built with the financial support of famous rappers (including *Racionais MC*) never make it into the newspapers. The Movement's online blogs offer the only medium by which to propagate news of this nature.

Hip-hoppers express lament and remorse against o *sistema* through interviews found in newspapers and books (*Hip-Hop: a periferia grita; Caros amigos*). However, they

also say that in the end Hip-Hop is a movement by and for the periphery and that they don't really expect the middle class to understand it. Alessandro Buzo, writer and rapper, understands it as two groups living "in two very different worlds and having very different logics."<sup>50</sup> The negative way in which these two worlds are connected and how these logics differ lays at the core of Brazil's Hip-Hop movement, as opposed to what mainstream media tends to promote about the hip-hop community.

Ironically, while mainstream media's approach toward hip-hop culture remains almost the same since 1988, hip-hop has in the last eight years reinvented itself. In the beginning, a tone of exclusion, images of violence, and constant criticism of "the system's" practices characterized rap music. Today, while these aspects continue to distinguish rap music, others have been introduced. Rappers not only speak for Afro-Brazilians, but also for all those who have been marginalized by the elite and government with the sole purpose of advancing their modernizing agenda. In addition, rap is now avoiding the use of violent imagery to depict the periphery. This has in

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<sup>50</sup> During an informal interview with the writer at his bookstore on September 5, 2007.

part resulted from looking at the proliferation of *gangsta rap* in North America and fear that Brazilian rap might move in that direction<sup>51</sup>. On this same note, the aggressive commercialization of rap music that has occurred in the United States is something Brazilian rappers strongly disagree with and are constantly striving to avoid. As the following chapter will explain, these changes reflect a deeper understanding of race, modernity, and coloniality. As such, rap music today offers something else that early rappers lacked, solutions.

It is important to understand how rappers and hip-hoppers in general employ the notion of race in order to move away from the *denuncia* approach and towards solutions. As mentioned earlier, race is a concept extending to realms as diverse as language, cultural production, religion, and knowledges. As Mignolo explained, racism is not limited to

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<sup>51</sup> Recently, Racionais MC has publicly acknowledged that the lyrics to some of their early songs can and were misinterpreted by some. Racionais MC's song "Sou 157" [I am 157] which refers to an article in the constitution that deals with armed robberies has been strongly criticized. Critics state that the song can be interpreted as justifying killing someone from the elite in an assault, as long as the money from the robbery is used to help the poor. In 2003, Mano Brown, the songwriter, apologized to the *comunidades*, denounced the song, and promised to never sing or record it again. Rappin Hood wrote the song "Ex 157" in an attempt to undo the damage. Hood's song speaks in first-person of someone how had been an armed robber and has now come clean. The song employs the sound of a machine gun in an interesting play of sounds and meaning. Instead of recording shots fired, Hood employs the loading sound of the machine gun to give rhythm to the song.

a person's phenotype. It is a construction by world geopolitics that extends into the "interpersonal realm of human activities" (*Idea 17*). The creation of these categories sets the standards by which to exclude people from the dominant discourse and from socio-political and economic institutions (*ibid*).

Similarly, MV Bill's understanding of race alludes to the idea that difference is not only measured in physical terms, but also in how a person, or group of people, sees the world:

A derrota se esconde  
no irmão que não se assume  
Chora quando é pra sorrir  
Rir na hora de chorar  
Levanta quando é pra dormir  
Dorme na hora de acordar  
Desperta!

Defeat hides itself  
in the brother that doesn't assume himself  
Cries when he should smile  
Laughs when it's time to cry  
Gets up when he should sleep  
Sleeps when it's time to wake up  
Awaken!

*O Preto em Movimento*  
MV Bill

How he employs the word "defeat" is important. The song gives a series of examples that describe someone who has

betrayed his or her roots/logic in order to illustrate the idea of defeat, of "selling out". This someone does things inversely to what one's ancestry tells him/her to do. His/her actions illustrate the idea of the different logics, different ways of looking at the world that do not fit together and are sometimes quite opposite to each other. In this way, hip-hop offers Brazil's marginalized the tools with which to demonstrate that not one logic/system should be privileged.

While rap music contests, questions, and alters history and socio-economic discourses, the next chapter will explore how, in the spirit of the *quilombos*, the hip-hop community aims to find solutions inside and outside the hegemonic system through rearticulating and reformulating different perspectives and practices.

## Chapter 4

### Decolonization through Hip-Hop Culture

Previous chapters have for the most part utilized subaltern studies concepts in order to analyze how different cultural forms represent the "Other". While postcolonial theory offers a tool with which to understand the social, political, and historical becoming of Afro-Brazilians, it nonetheless continues to privilege Eurocentric ontological and epistemological categories and references. As a result, using the term "Other" does not allow the subject to move out of the logic that excludes him/her.

Therefore, in order to gain a broader understanding of how hip-hoppers seek to undo the effects of colonialism and modernity (social and economic exclusion being the focus of Brazil's hip-hoppers) this chapter looks at subalternity beyond the scope of agency and representation. While rap music affords agency to the "Other" by providing a medium to voice demands and denounce racist socio-economic policies, hip-hop culture as a whole presents itself as a

tool for decolonization. As such, hip-hop seeks to counter the established *modus vivendi* by offering other ways of looking and thinking the world. This chapter will study how hip-hoppers make use of systems located both within and outside the *status quo* in order to find solutions to the problems that afflict the marginalized of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

### ***Urban Quilombos***

In his book, *The Expediency of Culture*, George Yúdice presents the cultural group *AfroReggae* as an example of how artists resort to culture, the markets, and different NGOs to disseminate their demands, obtain funds, and logistic support in order to provide cultural workshops to the most marginalized. *AfroReggae* was founded in 1993 by the residents of Vigário Geral, a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro. It has a recording contract with Universal and the marketing provided by two documentaries ("Favela Raising" and "Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra" by Cacá Diegues). The goal of *AfroReggae's* social programs focuses on offering the youth of the periphery alternatives to a "career" in drug-trafficking by teaching them to produce culture (in this case music) which in turn helps to keep them out of the street and away from drug's temptations. *Olodum* (in the



northeastern state of Bahia) offers another example of how artists resort to culture in order to fund social projects which focus on promoting the arts among disadvantaged youth (Armstrong; King-Calvek).

Unlike *AfroReggae* and *Olodum*, the Hip-Hop Movement is not a cultural group turned NGO but rather artists and community leaders connected by the belief that hip-hop culture can help promote values and ideologies founded on cooperation, negotiation, self-esteem, and education. As such, the Movement is not confined to one particular city or to the purpose of promoting music making as the only alternative to escaping drugs and poverty. Instead, it stretches throughout the margins of Brazil bringing together writers, activists, singers, students, politicians, and community organizers in order to promote education and cooperation through hip-hop culture<sup>52</sup>.

Just as important, the goal of hip-hoppers is not to promote music making as the sole alternative. Instead, Hip-Hop focuses on countering hegemonic discourses by promoting alternative knowledges with regards to history, race,

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<sup>52</sup> In the case of São Paulo, the Movement's organizers are: Ferréz, Alessandro Buzo, Sérgio Vaz, Rappin Hood, and Mano Brown. In Rio de Janeiro: MV Bill, Celso Atayde, and Nega Gizza. They all consider themselves artists as well as community organizers and maintain contacts with organizers of other cities and states.

economics, and social mobilization. Hip-hoppers believe that the solution to the problems afflicting the marginalized can be reached by combining education, self-esteem, negotiation, and cooperation. Therefore, rap does not represent the solution but rather one of several mediums available for protesting, questioning, speaking out, and educating oneself and others.

In addition, the strategic relationships the Movement has established with the suburbs, *favelas*, NGOs and government institutions allows it to avoid relying solely on a performative approach, an aspect of *AfroReggae* that George Yúdice questions: "My concern is that cultural practice runs the risk of responding to performative injunctions that leave little space for experiences that do not fit an NGOized depiction of development, worth, self-esteem, and so on" (*Parlaying* 61). Hip-Hop strongly rejects the strategy of commodifying diversity and thus, of perpetuating the stereotypical image of the Afro-Brazilian as an entertainer. Instead, hip-hoppers adopt concepts and behavior very much in-line with the *quilombo* philosophy of plurality, cooperation, negotiation, and contestation.

Even though research on *quilombos* is still incipient, it has become clear that several aspects of *quilombo* life

support and at times counter the traditional beliefs surrounding these communities. One such aspect relates to the idea that *quilombos* only housed runaway slaves. Current research has revealed that *quilombos* were diverse communities housing runaway slaves, self-manumitted slaves, indigenous people, and whites. Thus, the mobilizing efforts of *quilombos* went beyond ethnic and religious limitations as they drew different groups into the communities and into taking part in revolts. As a result these communities were characterized by their inclusiveness and by a multicultural and multilingual composition. The ethnic diversity of these communities reflected openness to establishing important alliances with other *quilombos* and with groups living in the urban centers. As such, *quilombos* provided points of contact between urban and rural groups that facilitated cooperation, which also offered the best hope for success in the uprisings and for survival (Reis; Gomes; Landers). Today, community-based organizations connected to the Hip-Hop movement share these same ideals.

It would be extremely difficult to compile a list of all the different community based organizations located in the outskirts of São Paulo. These organizations range from a community library housed in a person's living room, to

those who expand their activities (such as, free writing and deejaying workshops at prisons) throughout the suburbs and that benefit from third-party funding. Much like *quilombos*, each of these organizations emerges and evolves based on the community's needs and strategic relationships.

However, like *quilombos*, there exists a sense of solidarity among all these different organizations. Even though São Paulo's metropolitan area covers around 1,600 sq miles, hip-hoppers know who the social activists within each community are and who associates with the Movement. As a result, strong alliances form that allow for cooperation between different organizations. Assistance includes passing out information about concerts, CDs, and cultural, social and political events, as well as organizing and finding funding for these. In addition, rappers offer their concerts for free at such events in order to lure more participants.

Given the demographic nature of Brazil's peripheries, Afro-Brazilians make up a large percentage of the participants. As such, the suburbs and *favelas* are characterized by a strong presence of Afro-Brazilian culture. The organizations are conscious of the need to preserve contingent cultural values. Yet, much like

*quilombos*, these organizations do not represent gatekeepers of Afro-Brazilian culture. Instead, anybody from the community or from outside can participate in the activities or as volunteers regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic background. As Flavio dos Santos Gomes states about *quilombos*, "Cultural markers [*Siginificados*] of African origin were reinvented by the slaves in Brazil, not only by the first generation of Africans, but also by captive creoles. Therefore, we don't use 'Africanist' essentialism when thinking of *quilombola* culture ..." (271, my translation). The idea within this community-based organizations lies on maintaining a free-flow of ideas, much as it occurred within *quilombos*<sup>53</sup>.

Maciel Mota represents an example of this sort of community based organization. Maciel along with eleven other youngsters put together educational workshops for the children living in the *favela* of Parque Bristol. This group started organizing in 2002 while the members were still in high school. The realization that children in the *favela*

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<sup>53</sup> The concepts surrounding *quilombo* life were revived by activist Abdias do Nascimento in the 1980s with his *Quilombismo* movement. *Quilombismo* represented any form of resistance political or cultural that searched for a political ideal by blacks based on their own values rather than simply adopting those values accepted by society. *Quilombismo* also called for an Afro-Brazilian socio-economic policy based on collective economies and cooperatives (Carril 182-184).

had no recreational options and as a result were turning to drugs spearheaded their organization. The group offers lectures on leadership, racism, and sex education, as well as creative writing workshops with the help of rap artists. Their work cannot count on financial assistance from the local government and relies solely on volunteer work. Their work was featured in a 2005 BBC documentary ("Parque Bristol").

Another example of hip-hoppers' community organizing is *Cooperifa*. Established by writer Sérgio Vaz, *Cooperifa* provides young people from the periphery with writing workshops. *Cooperifa* also holds an open-mic night (*sarau*) every Wednesday at a bar in the suburb of Taboão da Serra. The bar becomes a literature haven where people of all ages come and read their favorite works or their own works. Readings are sometimes accompanied by *samba de raiz* and *fórró* (music from Brazil's Northeast). The wide range of literary works read and produced attests to the philosophy of inclusiveness that these organizations practice. Sacolinha, whose novel *Graduado em Marginalidade* was analyzed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, began his career in *Cooperifa*. The organization has helped other

periphery writers find funding support to publish their works (Alessandro Buzo, Dinha, Atins).

Cooperifa, as Maciel's group, relies on volunteer work; many of those collaborating are famous rappers such as Mano Brown of *Racionais*, Rappin Hood, and Ferréz. It is also heavily supported by the NGO Ação Educativa. This NGO provides financial assistance to periphery writers in order for them to publish their works. It also allows writers and rappers to use their computer labs free of charge (with access to internet, graphic design software, and multimedia software) and access to an auditorium in which they can hold cultural events. Cooperifa's association with Ação Educativa also grants the logistic support and contacts that allows these writers to present their works at different cultural events, book fairs, and academic events throughout São Paulo. Like Maciel's and Cooperifa there exist dozens of local organizations around the metropolitan area of São Paulo. Although they differ in size and scope of social work, they all share the basic core principle of cooperation and solidarity. While helping *perifericos* publish represents one of Cooperifa's main struggles, the main goal lies in raising self-esteem and educational

levels in order to free young *perifericos* from a life of drugs, violence, low self-esteem, and poverty.

Much like *quilombos'* adapted to their changing environment, so does the Hip-Hop movement. In the beginning, rap artists opted for passing fliers inside *favelas* and suburbs, inside the commuter trains and buses, and at the neighborhoods' *samba schools*. They also relied on *radios comunitarias*<sup>54</sup> to air their music. Currently, hip-hoppers still make use of these channels but are also employing new technology, such as the Internet, to disseminate information about new CDs, concerts, and cultural and political events. The internet has become a powerful tool for rappers and their followers to disseminate their message as the funding of several web-radio stations illustrates. In addition, both *radio comunitarias* and web-radio stations allow hip-hoppers to bypass commercial radio stations.

Much like in the beginning, most rappers and writers adopt alternative methods of production, marketing, and distribution in order to gain autonomy from large

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<sup>54</sup> *Radio comunitarias* are independent radio stations set up illegally inside favelas and other communities of the periphery.



publishing companies, big record labels, and large record stores. Thus, rappers record their own music under their own record labels (writers use their own money to publish their work at independent and locally owned printing presses) and sell their CDs at concerts, at cultural events sponsored by community-based organizations, on street corners, and at stores sympathetic to the Movement. Today, most rappers and writers still continue these practices while some have opted to function both from within and outside the market economy. Rather than rejecting the market economy, rappers have created alternative methods that allow them to transform traditional business models. This approach allows them to make use of the market instead of allowing the market to use them<sup>55</sup>.

For example, in order to expand their reach some famous rappers, such as MV Bill, have signed contracts with large multinationals such as Sony. These contracts, however, are not production contracts but rather distribution related. As such, artists negotiate the ability to maintain their own label. The artists still own the rights to their

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<sup>55</sup> Recently five writers who started their careers at Cooperifa have signed publishing contracts with a large company (Editora Global). The nature of these contracts was still unknown at the time of this dissertation.

music which gives them negotiating power in order to set the price of their CDs, DVDs, and concerts. Because the artist is fully responsible for the production cost, rappers have a final say as to where, how, and when concerts are held and music played. In addition, artists are not held accountable to a set schedule, giving them the autonomy to decide when they want to record and release a new CD. The distribution company only gets paid based on volume of CDs sold not on playing time.

The relationship with EMI records that Cuba's *Orishas* (a commercial rap group) has experienced illustrates why Brazilian hip-hoppers strongly believe in having autonomy and distancing themselves from large multinationals. The *Orishas* claims that its obligations to meet the demands of the group's recording contract have led to the replacement of artists by objects dedicated to profit making:

You have to really work out your ideas all in the same day, so they can exploit the maximum out of you. There is a need to produce quickly because there is a company that has invested in you, you are a worker. You have to extract the maximum from yourself because this is going to have repercussions for your future. If you make a bad record, and you don't sell copies, this reflects on your future artistic life. (Fernandes, *Island* 373)

Unlike rap in the United States which is purchased mainly by white middle class males, *perifericos* represent the target

market of Brazilian rap. Because of this economic reality, rappers can negotiate distribution contracts in which record companies are willing to compromise price for volume.

In addition, given the high levels of piracy that exist in Brazil, price becomes a bargaining chip rappers can easily use<sup>56</sup>. Currently rappers, such as GOG of Brasilia, are starting to study the possibility of bypassing record companies altogether by using the internet. The Movement *Música Para Baixar* (Music for Downloading) begun this year and brings together independent artists under the common purpose of obtaining total control of how their art is produced, sold, and distributed. The internet has also been used in order to set up *lojas virtuais* (virtual stores) in which hip-hop artists sell their CDs and DVDs. The stores, managed by hip-hoppers, allow artists to offer their products at any price they chose. Recently, MV Bill released his DVD "O Bode Não Para" through Central H2 for R\$5. Hip-hoppers seem to operate in similar fashion as the Pan-indigenous networks Freya Schiwy discusses in her book

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<sup>56</sup> Rappin Hood negotiated with TRAMA Records a deal that called for packaging differently the CDs sold in the *favelas* and suburbs. Rappin Hood asked TRAMA to replace the plastic packaging with a paper one in order to reduce the cost to R\$10 from the usual R\$20. Rappin Hood's concern was accessibility as well as piracy. TRAMA agreed (*Caros amigos*). In addition, famous and not so famous rappers are constantly staging free concerts inside *favelas*, in suburbs, and during cultural events sponsored by community based organizations.

*Indianizing Film*. According to Schiwy, these organizations “operate beyond the profit principle... Instead of indicating a wish to integrate into the existing global economic order, the multiple strategies making up the practice of indianizing film point to a transformation of this order” (208). As such, the main objective becomes the sharing of information, ideas, and knowledge.

Therefore, similar to *quilombos*, hip-hoppers in Brazil do not depend solely on a philosophy of resistance or open confrontation. For the *quilombados* negotiation represented a key and powerful tool that they used in order to reorganize, transform, and redefine the universe in which they lived. As Flavio dos Santos Gomes argues, “it was in the everyday activities that one could notice how slave related experiences had permanently recreated the meaning of freedom. Besides being a mere reaction, the establishment of *quilombos* and other forms of slave protest, explicit and not, occurred because of slaves acting as agents of change” (30, my translation). There is no doubt that slave owners held most of the clout in their battles against *quilombos* and revolts. However, the fact that a difference in power existed does not mean that the pressure imposed by *quilombolas* was in vane and thus that it did not

produce results. Revolts and *quilombos* presented a constant threat to slave owners who were always conscious of the infamous revolution of Saint Domingue of 1804; and thus provided certain bargaining power to slaves and their supporters (Gomes; Fischer)<sup>57</sup>. As the studies conducted by Kim Butler of Post-Abolition Brazil have demonstrated, one of the main reasons the oligarchy pushed for abolition was the constant revolts experienced by slave owners. These had become too expensive to suppress and extremely difficult for the government to contain.

In a way, the Hip-Hop movement has revived these ideals and has adapted them to present day needs and circumstances. It is not a coincidence that hip-hoppers refer to suburbs and *favelas* as "*quilombos urbanos*". Given the historical moment during which *quilombos* existed (slave based society and a mercantile economy) these communities developed different strategies for survival and for dealing with the urban centers located close to them, "... the *aquilombados* established complex alliances - circumstantial

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<sup>57</sup> As Gomes illustrates, the strategic social and economic alliances that the *aquilombados* built, allowed them to modify the terms of negotiation between slave owners, slaves, and *aquilombados*, "The act of fleeing was not simply and escape that emptied the potential of slave protest; it was on the contrary a political act with consequences, it disturbed the social balance, as it threatened to eliminate the influence that slavery held over its subjects (16, my translation).

and permeated with conflicts- with the society that surrounded them. Because of these and other strategies they were able to broaden their economic bases, their autonomy, and protection (Gomes 173, my translation). This approach resembles hip-hoppers' way of dealing with the market, media, and government.

Unlike the independent nature of rap in Brazil, the rap industry in Cuba depends on the financing and support of a combination of national and North American rappers, government institutions, and global market institutions. The main form of institutional support for Cuban rap comes from the *Asociación Hermanos Saiz* (Brothers Saiz Organization, AHS) and from the cultural youth organization, *Unión de Jóvenes Cubanos* (Union of Cuban Youth; both run by the government). In addition, underground (or political conscious) Cuban rappers maintain close ties with their underground counterparts in the United States. As a result of their close relationship, collaborations between rappers from both countries, trips to New York and Havana, and record deals have transpired. The global market via multinational record companies represents another avenue of transnational participation in Cuban hip-hop. The multinational labels, with their promises of videos,

records, and large contracts lure Cuban rappers as they face a lack of resources (Fernandes; Gómez).

Due to the large role played by multinational corporations, it has become difficult to clearly differentiate between the commercial and the politically conscious camps. Therefore, even though some Cuban rappers may self-identify as 'underground' or 'commercial', applying these labels proves problematic in the Cuban context, something Cuban rappers themselves acknowledge. Given that both have ties with international record labels and both can/may mix in Afro-Cuban rhythms (which some associate with "selling-out") differentiating between commercial and conscious rap becomes a difficult task (Fernandes, *Island* 362-363).

In the Brazilian context, labeling a rapper as commercial or conscious does not solely depend on whether or not they mix samba or other Afro-Brazilian rhythms. More importantly, due to the fact that multinationals do not produce Brazilian underground rap, commercial rap basically refers to the North American recordings that enter the country through traditional channels and to the few national rappers produced by large companies, such as Marcelo D2 and Gabriel O Pensador.

Some Cuban rap groups, who self-identify as 'underground', demonstrate hostility towards groups who attract foreign funding and attention due to their willingness to dilute their political stance. Fernandes offers the song "*El Barco*" (The Boat) by Los Paisanos as an example of the criticism faced by the more commercial rappers whose funding is interpreted as abandoning and compromising their politics and dedication to the purity of rap: "those without shame who say they are rappers, but who are patronized because of their mixture of rhythm." The rapper vents his anger against those who choose the commercial path: "I shoot words at them, I don't kill them, but I detest them and I don't silence the truth, but I bring it to the text." The group Los Paisanos, which started off with three members, lost one member who left the group for a foreign deal to make more commercial sounding rap mixed with salsa, forsaking both the group and his participation in the hip-hop movement (Fernandes, *Island* 362).

To a certain extent, refusing funding by multinationals relates to the Brazilian case, where it has the purpose of maintaining autonomy. However, in Cuba, unlike what occurs in Brazil, rappers not funded by the



private sector receive funding from state run institutions. As a result, Cuban rappers lack control and autonomy over the form and content of their art. Due to rappers' dependence on the state for funding, it becomes difficult to differentiate the "true" messengers from the "sell-outs."

It is claimed that Cuban rappers themselves appropriate discourses of rebellion in order to gain recognition from government run institutions in charge of organizing hip-hop festivals and of recording. As a result, rappers have given away some of their autonomy to government organizations, such as AHS, which encourages paternalistic relationships (González). Therefore, in Cuba the problem of autonomy has two sides. One represents the commercial rappers falling prey to the demands of multinationals and the other side corresponds to underground rappers' inability to openly criticize the government.

In the United States, the problem of autonomy relates to the influence the recording companies have on the content of the actual product. Like any business, the recording industry looks to capture the largest market share. In the case of rap in the US whites make up 75% of

the market (Jasper 292). Thus, the desire to break record sales have made rap acquired a white mainstream audience whose tastes increasingly determine the nature of the form.

Scholars claim that rap's popularity among whites did not result from cross-cultural understanding but from voyeurism and tolerance of racism in which black and white are both complicit. They also believe that the biggest problem this creates is assimilation by whites of black street culture without any degree of human interaction or real understanding between the races (Light 153). In the early days of US rap, focus on the social and political inequalities experienced by urban poor was central in defining the cutting edge of rap music. Recently, the thematic core of rap music in the US has moved toward a specific narrative of life in the "hood". As a result, "through an intense combination of media manipulation and artistic culpability, the issue of class struggle has been reduced to mere spectacle, as opposed to a sustained critical interrogation of domination and oppression" (Boyd 327).

Much of the debate surrounding hip-hop's "depoliticization" blames the nature of the business (white business men, white middle class youth market). Yvonne

Bynoe believes that due to the fact that whites rather than blacks dictate the production of rap in the US, its political and social message has been sacrificed to accommodate a "we are the world ethos based on hedonistic consumerism and general youth rebellion. Although in the past there existed an array of different rap styles and messages, today the hip-hop industry markets ghetto-centric and lascivious rap content globally as the singular black experience" (168). Gangsta rap offers an example of how the market can depoliticize culture. What once was a radical critique of repressive state apparatuses, as in NWA's *Fuck tha Police*, has been transformed into a series of unapologetic narratives that celebrate violence, humiliate women, and indulge marijuana use to excess. Gangsta epitomizes the distance artists are willing to go in search of the so called American Dream. It is from watching how the market has changed the nature of rap music in the US, that Brazilian political conscious rappers strive to maintain their independence from large record labels.

***Bridging the Gap Between the Market and Quilombos:***

*Fica ligado que eles querem te arrastar  
com drogas, dinheiro, bebida, mulheres.  
Querem fazer uma lavagem na sua mente.  
Querem que você seja um cara inconsciente,*

*tipo um demente  
uma marionete  
É isso que o sistema quer do negro quando cresce.  
A esclavidão não acabou  
É apenas um sonho...*

*Pay attention because they want to pull you in  
with drugs, money, alcohol, women.  
They want to brainwash you.  
They want you to become unengaged,  
like a mad person,  
a puppet.  
That's what the system wants black children to be when they  
grow up.  
Slavery did not end,  
that is just a dream...*

*Rappin Hood  
Us Guerreiro*

The analysis of rap's lyrics offered in the previous chapter demonstrated the artists' understanding of modernity as a process that replicates and perpetuates the ideologies of coloniality. Rappers illustrated the connection that exists between the past and the present by way of linking slavery and capitalistic practices. The examples in this chapter illustrate how hip-hoppers try to merge *quilombo's* philosophies with a global capitalistic order. Thus, to reconcile their belief in cooperation and solidarity with capitalism's extreme individualism rappers function at the border of two systems.

Much like *aquilombados*, hip-hoppers do not completely reject or exclude themselves from the market economy. Instead they have created an alternative system that allows them to use the market to their own benefit. As during the time of the colony, during which *quilombos* survived at the border of a barter system and a mercantile one, so does the Hip-Hop movement. While *quilombolas* sold the surplus crops of their cooperatives in order to obtain goods they couldn't produce themselves, hip-hoppers sell their art for the purpose of creating revenue for the community based organizations they are involved with. Hip-hoppers also exchange knowledge and assistance among one another.

Because of the individualistic and profit driven mentality promoted by capitalism, hip-hoppers understand that solely relying on the hegemonic economic system (in this case a market economy) to try and find alternative ways of governance does not present itself as a viable solution.

O cara  
que mandou a mensagem não desperdiça o tempo falando  
bobagem meusócio,  
Hip Hop seu negocio ganhar dinheiro e ajudar o próximo,  
não é rap de raiz senão...

*The guy  
who sent the message does not waste time with silly  
speech,*

*Hip hop's business is to make money in order to help  
fellow neighbor,  
otherwise it is not true rap...*

*Rappin Hood  
Convocação Geral*

Therefore hip-hoppers juxtapose the colonizer's and the colonized way of looking at the world in order to reconcile capitalism's philosophy of individuality and profit margins with that of social and economic solidarity.

Walter D. Mignolo refers to this process as *delinking*.

Delinking recognizes that "thinking other-wise is possible and (necessary) and that the best solutions are not necessarily found in the actual order of things" (Mignolo, *Idea* 117). Thus, being able to perceive the world from a different perspective allows for the possibility of developing alternative knowledges which take the form of "border thinking". As such, a call to epistemological rights is achieved by putting into dialogue two different logics.

Border thinking, as well as Hip-Hop, does not attempt to replace one particular logic with another, as this would not offer anything different than what the colonizers exercise. Instead, it offers a proposal for dialogue and inclusion. As stated earlier, *quilombos* promoted the free

flow of ideas and thus they revealed openness to other ethnic groups but also to other logics (Gomes 17). By placing side by side different systems, hip-hoppers can choose aspects of each that they believe will offer the most benefits to their communities. By juxtaposing diverging and converging ideological constructions, hip-hoppers aim to substitute a profit driven ideology with one of social and economic cooperation and solidarity. As such, hip-hoppers have created a system that reflects a *border thinking* of sorts and one that better speaks to their values and objectives. Hip-Hop is therefore, a practice as much as it is a form of representation.

Thus, even though rap's lyrics receive most of the attention, it is the Movement's internal system of cooperation and their use of the market that really looks to undo and counterattack the effects of capitalism (socio-economic exclusion). In addition, they demonstrate that contrary to what mass media and hegemonic discourses promote, the individualistic mentality behind capitalism does not offer the best possible outcome. Through their lyrics and actions hip-hoppers try to demonstrate that alternatives not embraced by *o sistema* exist and succeed. Thus, joint collaboration acts as the Movement's key weapon

in the battle against the individualistic mentality behind modernity.

By contrast, underground rappers in Cuba rely financially on the government as well as on hegemonic discourses embraced by the State (such as Marxist philosophy) that don't allow for real transformation. Even though they also criticize capitalism, their criticism engages Marxist ideology, therefore limiting their ability to speak up against the State. Tourism ends up carrying all of the blame as it represents the most pervasive side of capitalism. On one hand, criticism is directed toward the celebration of *jineterismo* (hustling) as this contradicts socialist ideals of honesty and work in order to raise oneself. On the other hand, underground rappers also criticize consumerism and mentalities of individualism introduced by the market. In their song, "Contaminación y Globalización" (Contamination and Globalization) Hermanos de Causa associate the globalization of capital and technology with processes of environmental destruction and consumerism:

Tecnología controlando el gusto de tu mente,  
eres esclavo del producto como mucha gente.  
El artículo y su marca no se desmarca,  
el eslogan que la firma domina y abarca.



*Technology controlling your tastes in your mind,  
you are a slave to the product like many people.  
The article and its brand are not distanced,  
the slogan of the firm extols and controls.*

The contamination of the environment caused by chemicals and pollutants is associated with a moral contamination caused by capitalism, which replaces collectivism and socialist ideals with individual consumerism and materialism. In addition, underground rappers reject *jineterismo* as a way of surviving in the special period, suggesting instead that it is important to maintain a belief in Socialist values of honesty and work in order to improve one's social and economic condition. Underground rap directs its criticism of *jineterismo* toward consumerist mentalities that have been emerging with increased access to a market economy.

In addition, underground rappers in Cuba condemn the desire of young people to find an 'easy fix' rather than working hard to achieve their goals and the goals of the revolution. In their song "Jinetera", Primera Base talks about the young girls who walk the streets in order to attract the attention of foreign men. The girls "don't have any sense" and "only think about dressing up and living in the moment". These values of vanity and consumerism are

presented as highly antithetical to revolutionary values. The male rapper continues by stating the unimportance of external beauty and materialism when compared with greater political and spiritual goals. Primera Base seeks to uphold conventional standards of morality in contrast with the open celebration of consumption, sexuality, and desire found in narratives dealing with *jineterismo* (Fernandes, *Island* 368). As for female rappers in Cuba and their thoughts on prostitution, they claim materialism -not economic need- lures women into prostitution as it offers an easy and fast alternative to making money (Brenner 287). Like their Cuban counterparts, Brazilian rappers blame consumerism for pushing marginalized youth into drugs and crime. They, however, also accuse the State's modernizing agenda for creating the dire socio-economic conditions that push the marginalized into these activities in the first-place. Therefore, hip-hoppers in Brazil incorporate a criticism of coloniality into their discourse where as Cuban hip-hoppers only focus on denouncing non-alliance to the State's socialist ideologies.

Therefore, Cuban rappers base the criticism they write and sing about on morals rather than on a difference of logics or systems. While tourism and all this entails

(*jineterismo*, prostitution, dishonesty, laziness, and immorality) appear as the main cause of Cuba's ills, the State which has allowed and promoted the tourism industry to boom in Cuba never appears in the songs. This represents a contrasting difference to Brazilian rappers and hip-hoppers in general who strongly criticize the State's negligence and role in the elite's modernizing project. While hip-hoppers in Brazil openly and aggressively blame coloniality and modernity for the current socio-economic conditions of Afro-Brazilians and *Nordestinos*, Cuban rappers avoid these issues all together as tourism offers the scapegoat of the island's problems. The fact that the government finances and produces underground rap in Cuba does not allow for new ideas and perspectives. As a result, underground rappers fail to speak in favor of a counter-system, a different way of seeing themselves which in the process will offer alternatives to the *status-quo*.

The autonomy enjoyed by Brazil's hip-hop culture affords it the ability to openly criticize, question, and challenge hegemonic discourses and systems. Therefore, criticism of individualism and capitalism does not represent a questioning of morals but of perspectives. While Brazilian rap music criticizes the individualistic

nature of crime, as it pushes the youth of the margins to steal, sell drugs, and at times kill, Hip-Hop as a whole does not look at individuality through a lens of morality. Their concern does not lie with the fact that one's desire for personal material gain may drive a person to crime, but rather that crime hinders the possibility of acting collectively for the good of the community. In stealing money, the crime does not become the act itself, but rather the fact that this person could instead choose to behave in a manner that would benefit him/her as well as the community (volunteering or obtaining an education). In so doing, hip-hoppers talk about and practice alternative forms of representation.

*Falso MC sempre diz nada  
Cresce o olho no que é dos outros e se atrapalha  
Cai na mala e vira só um passageiro  
.....  
Não sou teleguiado, multiplico no conjunto  
Aos guerreiro e guerreiras que lutam "tamo junto"  
.....  
Eu sou o elo da corrente  
que é ruim de quebrar.  
Tamo junto.  
Se quer subtrair,  
fique por aí,  
se não 'tiver a fim de somar*

*False MC never says a thing.  
Feels envy of what others have and can't think straight.  
Falls into the backseat and becomes a passenger*

.....

*I am not manipulated, I multiply when in a group  
To the warriors that fight "we are united".*

.....

*I am the link in the chain  
that is difficult to break  
We are united.  
Stay away if you want to subtract.  
Stay away if you don't want to add.*

*Junto e Misturado  
MV Bill & Kamila*

The song "Junto e Misturado" makes reference to the rap singers who have abandoned Hip-Hop's socio-political consciousness by turning to *gangsta* rap or other commercial forms of rap in order to make money<sup>58</sup>. The song clearly states that socio-politically conscious messages characterize "true" rap. On the other hand, songs which only talk about money characterize "false" rap. The second verse describes how the "falso profeta's" jealousy of what others have and his/her monetary ambition lure him/her into the capitalistic system. The song continues by saying that by becoming a *falso profeta* he/she has now become a "passenger." The use of the noun "passenger" further

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<sup>58</sup> *Gangsta* rap emerged in New York in the mid 1990s. It was characterized by lyrics that showed the hard edge of inner city life. Themes included crime, gang violence, drugs, misogyny, police brutality and other elements of ghetto living. The perception of *gangsta* rap as political changed when it moved to the big studios, where it became more profane and harder edge. It was then that *gangsta* distanced from its political side and its sole concerns became selling and making a profit.

supports the idea of lacking any engagement, commitment, or involvement with their surroundings since the passenger sits back and observes to take in what he/she sees.

Allusion to the passenger also occurs in other songs that reference "mental enslavement". As mentioned in the previous chapter, *lavagem cerebral* takes place when a person allows mainstream media to manipulate them into believing that capitalism and consumerism represents the road toward socio-economic well being. The use of the word "teleguiado" further supports the idea. The poetic voice tells the *falso MC* that she does not let media dictate how to live her life. Instead, she unifies/multiplies the warriors that fight together. In the last five verses the poetic voice further emphasizes the need for unity. As in a large majority of rap songs, there is an allusion to the memory of slavery that forever will unify them; in this case through the use of the words *elo* (link in chain) and *corrente* (chain). The stanza ends by saying that there is no place for those who want to take away (subtract) instead of contribute (add)<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> In this song, as in many others, MV Bill sings along Kamila, a female rap singer. MV Bill is known for integrating women into the Hip-Hop movement (one mainly dominated by men) not only through vocals but by helping them produce their own records. Thus, by alternating between a

As mentioned above, the Movement does not reject using the market economy, as hip-hoppers sell CDs, books, and DVDs. They do, however, reject following a profit driven philosophy. Unlike Cuban rappers, hip-hoppers in Brazil do not propose a Marxist based society. Instead, they direct their criticism toward those people (rappers or not) who forget their roots of cooperation by way of surrendering to the individualistic mentality of capitalism<sup>60</sup>. What they condemn relates to an artist forgetting the sense of community Afro-Brazilians believe to have inherited from the *quilombo* system. Loyalty and solidarity to a rapper's community can be manifested in helping organize, finance, and promote cultural and educational events.

To reinforce this crucial aspect of the Movement, famous rappers such as Racionais MC, MV Bill, and Rappin Hood continue to live in the suburbs and *favelas* they were born and raised in. This keeps them grounded and close to the reality they portray in their music. More importantly, however, is the strong message of solidarity that their

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male and a female singer, MV Bill adds another level to the song's title and stance, "junto e misturado". Not only is this a call to the unification of "brothers" but also of "sisters".

<sup>60</sup> People I talked to as well as the lyrics themselves do not criticize rappers who actually make money from producing and selling rap through alternative channels.

behavior sends to their communities. In addition to staying close to their communities, rappers in Brazil donate money to help build areas for recreation (basketball courts and soccer fields) and also to build "community libraries" as well as computer labs. Hip-hoppers strongly believe that providing young residents of the margins with recreational opportunities will help keep youngsters stay away from drugs and crime.

This contrasts dramatically with the behavior of Cuban and North American rappers. In Cuba, rappers who achieve fame slowly separate themselves from their communities as their economic success grows (González 185). While in the US the large majority of famous rappers, both conscious and commercial, do not come nor do they live in the "hood". Instead, US rappers are characterized by what Mark Anthony Neal calls a "postindustrial nostalgia"; the appropriation by middle class blacks of the narratives and styles of a cultural movement that emerged in the housing projects of the Bronx. According to Neal, this produced artists who failed to truly address inner-city realities that resulted from contemporary black youth's (middle class and not) attempt to reconstruct community, history, and memory (383). US hip-hop's inability to comprehend and sympathize with



marginalized youth relates to its profit driven nature and its entrepreneurial quality. "With Run-DMC and the suburban rap school, we looked at that [ghetto] life like a cowboy movie. To us, it was like Clint Eastwood. We could talk about those things because they weren't that close to home" (quoted in Light 139)<sup>61</sup>. As this statement from producer and co-founder of Def Jam Records Rick Rubin exemplifies, the main concern behind producing rap music in the US lies with product development.

Unlike the United States, however, hip-hop in Brazil emerged as both a cultural and a social movement. Brazilian rappers originate from *favelas* and city outskirts. In fact, many of Racionais MC's early songs are adaptations of lyrics sent to the group by actual inmates of São Paulo's infamous Carandiru prison. While in the United States rap artists from the West and the East began to compete for a piece of the market, in Brazil hip-hoppers founded the *Movimento Hip-Hop Organizado* or M2HO. This organization aimed to mobilize artists and activists across Brazil in order to fight the discrimination Brazil's poor face at all

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<sup>61</sup>The real breakthrough of underground rap came with Run-DMC's first album as it became the first conscious album to crossover to the middle-class market. Run-DMC's album has been described as having "stripped-to-the-bone sound, crunching beats, conventional rap boasting, and accessible but street-smart narratives" (Light 139).

levels. The M2HO employed hip-hop culture because of its defiant nature. Although the organization did not last long, Brazil has seen a reemergence of national networking and collaboration in the last seven years due in large part to the Internet. Rather than competing for a share of the market, hip-hoppers collaborate and assist each other in music production, distribution, and organizing social and cultural activities.

In a way, hip-hoppers are using the market in support of their social programs rather than allowing the market to use them in favor of profit making. Under this logic, the money generated by the sale of CDs and concerts does not represent the end, but rather the means to an end. This coincides with the time of slavery when gold did not represent any real value to slaves. Instead it was the tool slaves needed to obtain their freedom, as the story of Chico Rei and similar historical figures illustrates<sup>62</sup>. This contrasts with both US rappers and the individual needs that currently motivate most Cuban artists who turn to the

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<sup>62</sup> Chico Rei was a tribal leader from the Congo. In 1740 he and a large part of his tribe were captured, sold as slaves, and taken to Brazil. In Brazil he was set to work in the gold mines of Minas Gerais. By hiding gold in his body he amassed sufficient funds that allowed him to buy his son's freedom and later his own. He was also able to acquire the Encardideira gold mine in Vila Rica (now Ouro Preto). Profits from the mine were used to help other slaves buy their freedom and to build the church of Santa Efigênia also in Vila Rica (Carril).

private sector in order to achieve financial gain and fame even when this means allowing the industry to manipulate their message and style (González 185). The hip-hop community in Brazil looks to rearticulate existing discourses and logics in order to create new ways of thinking and operating within a capitalistic and urban Brazil.

### ***Hip-Hop and the Media***

Mass media presents a problem for the Movement. On the one hand, and as Chapter Two demonstrated, hip-hoppers blame mass media for perpetuating the misrepresentations that exist within Brazil's literary tradition with regards to the marginalized. On the other hand, they understand its power and thus a constant struggle exists between the decision to use it or not. Similarly, hip-hoppers' criticism of television is twofold. According to the Movement, mainstream channels such as Globo and SBT help promote an image of Brazil's *favelas* and suburbs as places infested with violence, drugs, and hopelessness. Since the majority of Brazil's black population lives in *favelas* and suburbs, this image also helps perpetuate the stereotype of

Afro-Brazilian men as violent criminals. Rappers also blame the TV industry for pushing marginalized youth into drug trafficking, since it offers the money they need in order to obtain the material "happiness" television promotes.

The misuse of information by mass media became apparent during my conversation with Maciel Mota about the BBC documentary that featured his group's social work. Maciel mentioned that TV Globo also visited the group about a year after the BBC team filmed their documentary. Unfortunately, their experience with Globo did not result as positive. Maciel claims that the Brazilian conglomerate decided to make a program that focused on the *favela's* violence and drug trafficking activity, while ignoring the group's social work. This approach from mainstream media towards the margins reflects how it manages to manipulate any information, be it positive or negative, surrounding Hip-Hop and the marginalized. Mainstream media tends to propagate an image of the suburbs where only hopelessness, infighting, and drugs exist<sup>63</sup>. The counter image of

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<sup>63</sup> In recent years mainstream media and independents have produced TV programs and films that present a much more complex view of Brazil's social, political, and economic make up (e.i. *Cidade dos homens*, *Manda Bala*, *Tropa de Elite*). This move has either resulted from or coincided with an overall change in attitude with regards to the effects racism and Brazil's power structures have had in creating Afro-Brazilians' low socio-economic condition (as discussed in Chapter 2).

concerned citizens facing neglect and acting on their own initiatives to try and keep their children away from violence and drugs rarely makes the headlines.

Due to the double threat that television represents hip-hoppers exercise caution when dealing with this medium. Rappers with the most radical ideologies avoid relating themselves with television. Those who used this medium usually choose government run *TV Cultura* which allows production to remain in the hands of hip-hoppers themselves. Music videos, shorts, DVDs, and the like are produced in small independent owned companies such as DGT Filmes. MV Bill, works with CUFA in producing his videos and DVDs<sup>64</sup>. MV Bill concedes the rights of these images to CUFA which provides the organization with a source of income needed to fund their social programs. Thus, the goal of these practices is to protest the manipulation of information seen on TV channels, such as Globo, by maintaining a

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<sup>64</sup> CUFA (Central Única das Favelas) was established in 1999 with the help of MV Bill and Celso Atayde. CUFA has projects in 19 states and within dozens of Rio's favelas. Although CUFA receives funding from international organizations, such as UNICEF and the Ford Foundation, local leaders and artists who reside in the favelas hold the decision making power. Leaving power in the hands of those who experience firsthand the benefits and drawbacks of CUFA's different projects, avoids the creation of paternalistic relationships. Thus, philanthropy becomes social work focused on the economic, political, and cultural advancement of the participants. This in turn leads to strategic partnerships among public, private, and cultural spheres in behalf of developing problem solving strategies.

distant relationship to mainstream television. This parallels Hip-Hop's alternative means of distribution and marketing as a way to bypass the traditional business models that large recording companies typically follow.

Nevertheless, when asked whether they would appear on TV Globo or whether they would sign with a big recording company, the majority of the rappers I met said they would do both. Limonada, a rapper and writer, explained it this way, "I'm selling my time, not my ideology. If I were to have full control of the production, I would do it." Limonada, as well as other rappers that made similar statements, is either unable to see the contradiction underlying that statement, or might see their analyses of *favela* life as unrelated to the risk of cooptation which the economic opportunities offered by profit oriented mass media entail. In either case, keeping their autonomy in the production, marketing, and distribution process represents their main concern and goal. For this reason distribution rather than production contracts currently offer the best option for maintaining this autonomy.

Hip-hop culture in Brazil ranges from protest and *denuncia*, to promoting self-esteem and Afro-Brazilian

culture and values, to political and economic strategy. Yet, all hip-hoppers seem to practice what Denise Ferreira da Silva believes to be a productive view of race, "to engage the racial as a modern political strategy, rather than attempting to resuscitate the sociohistorical logic of exclusion" (xxxv). While in the early days of the Movement hip-hoppers looked to emulate the United States' concept of race (one drop rule) hip-hoppers soon realized that the Brazilian case called for a different approach. As a result, discourse has with time become one based on solidarity but one that embraces plurality; a global one but with roots in the local.

Christine Chivallon speaks of the possibility of holding as specific to the Black world of the Americas "the plurality of 'converging and diverging' ideological constructions: an 'ensemble of texts' derived itself from so many 'practices (social, political, aesthetic), movements, and institutions,' that involve in some way 'putting Africa and slavery to use.' This ensemble in all these continuities and discontinuities (. . .) constitutes the black diaspora" (885)<sup>65</sup>. Hip-hoppers reveal these idea

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<sup>65</sup> Christine Chivallon uses David Scott's concept of Black Diaspora to formulate her theory. David Scott speaks of a "discursive community"

of “convergence and divergence; continuities and discontinuities” by knowingly, or not, adopting many of the strategies *quilombos* relied on for their survival. This has in turn allowed them to look beyond the established notions of socialist revolution or liberal identity politics and their claims on the State in order to not only to redefine what it means to be Black in Brazil, but also to transform how the marginalized looks at him/herself and in the process open up the possibility for change.

Although MV Bill and Rappin Hood write raps songs that talk about past battles, the lyrics serve as a call for action rather than as a medium to dwell on the past. Songs and books call on the marginalized to take on responsibility (or as they say: *tomar uma atitude*) in the form of mobilizing socially or politically for the benefit of their communities, as well as, in educating oneself and others. As a result, in addition to adopting ways that allow artistic and economic autonomy, hip-hoppers strongly believe in benefiting their communities socially and economically.

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that reveals the different ways of appropriating the two basic figures of the shared experience: Africa and slavery (Chavillon 884).



Thus, in order to reorganize, transform, and redefine the universe in which they live hip-hoppers function at the border of two systems. As Hip-Hop offers a proposal that is far removed from the dominant ideology of hegemony and exclusion, hip-hoppers move toward a process of decolonization of knowledge.

It is certainly too early to predict what long-lasting impact, if any, hip-hop culture will have on the young residents of Brazil's suburbs and *favelas*. Still, actual changes within the communities, among their residents, and within Brazilian society as a whole, point toward important transformations that may help move forward hip-hoppers' socio-political goals of eliminating racism and lifting self-esteem, educating, and mobilizing Brazil's most marginalized.

## Conclusion

The novels discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation illustrated the concepts of an industrialized and urban Brazil in which opposite but parallel worlds exist. The novels focus on the lives of the most marginalized and on their lives plagued with violence, crime, and desperation. The first novel, *Subúrbio* (1994), which takes place in the outskirts of São Paulo, looks at the suburbs as a homogenous collective. The second novel, *Cidade de Deus* (1997) unfolds in a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro and incorporates race into the discussion. Both represent the project of Brazil's urban literature: to expose the lives of those most affected by the violence and negligence born out of drug trafficking and neo-liberalism.

The analysis of *Suburbio* focused on the novel's criticism of the negative socio-economic effects of neo-liberalism and globalization (mainly criminality, isolation, and poverty). It also illustrated that the novel overlooks a critical analysis of Brazil's history. As a result, the novel ignores issues of race and defines marginality through economic policy alone. The study of *Cidade de Deus* on the other hand, showed how the novel introduces history

and race relations into the discussion of social and economic marginality.

In *Cidade de Deus*, race appears as a construction born from the project of modernity. As Brazil became a "modern" nation and its middle and upper classes grew, Afro-Brazilians and *nordestinos* were removed from the much desired city center. As a result, they were displaced to areas lacking sanitation, proper housing, and schools. This process had the collateral effect of creating a large uneducated class that was easily exploited by the modernizing project. The novel, however, insists on the importance of skin color rather than geo-politics of power as the foundation of Brazil's racist society. In addition, *Cidade de Deus* testimonio like qualities along with its focus on violence does not give voice or agency to the subaltern. *Cidade de Deus* concludes, as does *Subúrbio*, that there is no solution to today's social and economic problems afflicting the marginalized since the factors that caused them can't be altered or counteracted.

Chapter Two looked at a novel written by Sacolinha, a resident of São Paulo's outskirts, in order to gain a better understanding of what rappers in Brazil call the

"Fifth Element" of Hip-Hop. The fifth element refers to literature and films produced by hip-hoppers and their followers. Through an analysis of *Graduado em Marginalidade* Chapter two illustrated how *literatura periférica* aims to offer counter discourses to those presented by mainstream media and culture. While urban literature and media of the 1990s relied on the use of violence to define the "Other", *periféricos* look to construct pluralistic images of *favela* life. The study of *Graduado* revealed the need by hip-hoppers to demonstrate the complexities surrounding the issues of drugs, poverty, and race that Brazil faces and which directly affect the most marginalized. Chapter Two also demonstrated how hip-hoppers look to contest mainstream ideas of Brazil's urban periphery as self-contained places infested with drugs and violence. *Graduado* offers a complex view of Brazil as it considers how other parties contribute, question, and transform socio-political relationships. As such, *periféricos* aim to redefine the margins as places where different groups of people with different interests and ways of seeing the world converge.

*Graduado* also offers the possibility for a better future if people come to reject the idea that violence, drugs, and corruption represent their only reality.

*Graduado* offers an opportunity for reflecting and reversing what mass media and traditional culture have for years propagated. Rather than relying on violence to construct the *favelados'* subjectivity, the novel aims to change the terms and in the process the way the center views the margins and how *periféricos* view themselves. Thus, *Graduado* portrays a complex and interconnected society in a call for self-reflection and action.

Chapter Three analyzed the lyrics of three famous Brazilian rappers: Racionais MC, Rappin hood, and MV Bill. For rappers, Word<sup>66</sup> represents the tool that will bring about a deeper understanding of what it means to be Afro-Brazilian. Word is linked to the concept of expressivity called Africanist aesthetics. Chapter Three illustrated how for the youth of the margins, hip-hop culture offers much more than a medium for expressing discontent and anger. Hip-hop culture represents pride, community, knowledge, creativity, alternatives, and hope.

The Chapter illustrated how rappers use music to criticize capitalism, history, racism, violence, and drugs.

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<sup>66</sup> "Word" refers to both the spoken and the written word. It does not stand for language- a system of encoding and decoding information- as there does not exist one way to "do" rap or to express oppression, desire for emancipation or the memory of slavery. "Word" alludes to the idea that such concerns are instead uttered orally and/or in written form.

In addition, through the analysis of the songs the Chapter portrayed how rap music in Brazil has changed from its inception in 1988 to the present. In the beginning, a tone of exclusion, images of violence, and constant criticism of "the system's" practices characterized rap music. Today, while these aspects continue to distinguish rap music, others have been introduced. Rappers not only speak for Afro-Brazilians, but also for all those who have been marginalized by the elite and government with the sole purpose of advancing their modernizing agenda.

In addition, rap is now avoiding the use of violent imagery to depict the periphery. This has in part resulted from looking at the proliferation of *gangsta rap* in North America and fear that Brazilian rap might move in that direction. On this same note, the aggressive commercialization of rap music that has occurred in the United States is something Brazilian rappers strongly disagree with and are constantly striving to avoid. These changes reflect a deeper understanding of race, modernity, and coloniality. As such, rap music today offers something else that early rappers lacked, solutions.

Therefore, in order to gain a broader understanding of how hip-hoppers seek to undo the effects of colonialism and modernity (social and economic exclusion) Chapter Four looked at subalternity beyond the scope of agency and representation. While rap music affords agency to the "Other" by providing a medium to voice demands and denounce racist socio-economic policies, hip-hop culture as a whole presents itself as a tool for decolonization. Chapter Four studied how hip-hoppers make use of systems located both within and outside the *status quo* in order to find solutions to the problems that afflict the marginalized of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

By studying how hip-hoppers make use of the many strategies typical of *quilombo* culture, Chapter Four illustrated what Christine Chavillon calls specific traits of the Black world of the Americas, "convergence and divergence; continuities and discontinuities" (885). This has in turn allowed hip-hoppers in Brazil to look beyond the established notions of socialist revolution or liberal identity politics and their claims on the State in order to not only redefine what it means to be Black in Brazil, but also to transform how the marginalized looks at him/herself and in the process open up the possibility for change.

Although MV Bill and Rappin Hood write raps songs that talk about past battles, the lyrics serve as a call for action rather than as a medium to dwell on the past. Songs and books call on the marginalized to take on responsibility (or as they say: *tomar uma atitude*) in the form of mobilizing socially or politically for the benefit of their communities, as well as, in educating oneself and others. As a result, Chapter Four illustrated that in addition to adopting ways that allow artistic and economic autonomy, hip-hoppers strongly believe in benefiting their communities socially and economically.



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**Boyd "----" it's the joint!**

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