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Voicing the Violence of Favelas

Berkeley A. Kershisnik

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Voicing the Violence of Favelas

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This project analyzes three examples of testimonial literature written by favela residents in Brazil to demonstrate the extent to which these accounts contest or confirm the popular news media's violent representation of favelas and their inhabitants. The literary works *Quatrocentos contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho* (1991) by William da Silva Lima and *Capão pecado* (2000) by Ferréz and the documentary *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999) present an insider's perspective of the violence that takes place in the favela and thus can reveal the factors that contribute to it.

Through these explanations, readers and viewers become aware of the generally unheard side of the story of the repressed and ignored poor class. Lima's voice in *Quatrocentos contra um* serves to explain the way that crime was organized as a means of survival to combat the repression and abuse of the government, and in *Capão pecado* Ferréz demonstrates the difficulty that favela residents who are not involved in drug trafficking have in avoiding the violence that surrounds them because they do not have equal opportunity for education and employment. He suggests a non-violent rebellion through artistic means to build a positive image of favela inhabitants, both inside and outside of the poor community. The documentary *Notícias de uma guerra particular* directed by João Moreira Salles and Kátia Lund presents information that places much of the blame for violence on the lack of social structure that would integrate the poor, and more importantly allows for honest, hardworking favela residents to share their experience of trying to make a living and avoid illegal activity while suffering from the stereotype that all who live in poor communities are involved in violent activity. Together these works constitute an attempt for the violence of the favelas to be explained through the voice of favela residents themselves.

Keywords: favela, testimonial literature, violence, military, drug trafficking, William da Silva Lima, Ferréz, *Notícias de uma guerra particular*

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Introduction

Despite long-standing government efforts to maintain Brazil's picture postcard image throughout the country's history, violence rates have climbed so much in recent years that poor areas on the outskirts of major cities and the drug gangs that rule them have attracted national attention to the compelling concept of the favelas. Many questions surround the political, social, economic, and racial situation that has caused a drastic division within the country and the complex relationship between those living in the favelas, police, and drug traffickers make immediate change difficult. However, the identity and representation of members of the poor class begs consideration because of the stereotypes that have formed of all favela inhabitants and furthered their alienation from the rest of the society, whether they participate in violence or not.

Among the many ways that Brazil's lower class has been represented in literature and film, the most authentic descriptions can be found in the written and spoken testimonies of favela residents themselves. After years of favelas being represented from the outside, the testimonial genre offers eyewitness accounts of life from inside the favela itself, explaining which parts of the violent image of the marginalized portrayed in popular news media are true and which are false, and more importantly, this genre represents the fact that the voice of the favela is attempting to be heard—speaking its own language and creating its own identity so it can be understood by higher social classes.

To understand the current violence in Brazil's favelas and evaluate the representation of favelas in modern literature and film, it is necessary to understand

how and why the favelas emerged as well as what caused the violence that now occurs there to escalate so rapidly in the past few decades. Although favelas can be found throughout the country, the city of Rio de Janeiro has become the focal point of the international awareness of the violence and drug trade:

Falar da favela é falar da história do Brasil desde a virada do século passado. É falar particularmente da cidade do Rio de Janeiro na República, entrecortada por interesses e conflitos regionais profundos. Pode-se dizer que as favelas tornaram-se uma marca da capital federal, em decorrência (não intencional) das tentativas dos republicanos radicais e dos teóricos do embranquecimento...para torná-la uma cidade europeia. (Zaluar & Alvito 7)

Because of its sheer size and population (and historic promise of employment and success due to the coffee industry), the city of São Paulo has also become a well-known location of violence and poverty: “A favela, vista pelos olhos das instituições e dos governos, é o lugar por excelência da *desordem*. Vista pelos olhos de outras regiões, estados e metrópoles que concorrem com o Rio de Janeiro pela importância cultural e política do país, especialmente São Paulo, ela é também, por extensão, a própria imagem da cidade” (14). Although much of the attention given to the favelas has been directed to the novel (1997) and popular film *Cidade de Deus* (2002), there are other important testimonial accounts of favela residents from Rio and São Paulo both in literature and film.

A brief history of how the first favelas were formed sheds light on the deep-rooted problems between the Brazilian government and the poor class that still exist today and are a key point of contention and resentment between the two parties, one of the undeniable problems being racial discrimination. Teresa A. Meade explains that the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 closely followed by the proclamation of the Republic in 1889 created an interesting and threatening situation for the new government. In what she calls “Black Rio,” in the country’s capital following abolition, “both former slaves and *libertos* moved freely about the center city and, in the paranoid eyes of the white elite, dominated the streets” (41). Aside from the fact that the social and racial norms established from the time of colonization did not allow for such intermingling of classes and races, the city of Rio was in the process of *embranquecimento* – the process of making the city (in design and skin color) more European to try to erase the image of the black and indigenous members of society from the Brazilian norm.

Even though the abolition of slavery was put into law, the social conditions of former slaves did not undergo radical change, and they were hardly integrated into the society that had originally enslaved them. Because of their lack of economic opportunity, they were often forced to group together in poor housing communities known as *cortiços* that became viewed as a place of gathering for the “undesirable” members of society, as seen in Aluizio de Azevedo’s novel *O cortiço* (1890) (Valladares 193). Valladares explains that the *cortiços* could be considered “o ‘germe’ da favela” because their function and image within society were similar; in fact their destruction

led to the increased occupation of the favelas in the twentieth century (24). As time and the process of whitening Rio de Janeiro moved forward, the government sought to sweep the problem of the poor class under the rug by destroying the *cortiços* and pushing the poor to the outer edges of the city where they would not interfere with the new European look of Rio de Janeiro.

Under the pretense of improving the city's sanitation, the government was able to make laws to destroy the unsightly *cortiços* that, in their opinion, marred the city's modern profile. Since the government had already neglected to integrate the poor class to the extent that they had resorted to unsanitary housing situations, it also conveniently had a reason to eliminate such structures in the name of the well being of all in the city. Although the poor may have had no alternative to living in communities such as *cortiços*, their unfortunate conditions were exactly what gave the government and privileged members of society reason to destroy them in the name of health, order, and progress.

At the end of the nineteenth century when these changes were taking place, the Brazilian government sent groups of soldiers to the northeastern region of the country to crush a rebellion led by the historical figure Antônio Conselheiro as he and his followers were considered a threat to the new republic. After the tragic Guerra de Canudos that took place in the 1890s, soldiers returned to the capital city of Rio de Janeiro and awaited promised payment and housing from the government they had just defended. Unable to pay, the government left soldiers to build small shacks on the *Morro de Providência*, which was renamed *Morro da Favela* after a place they had become

familiar with during the war in Bahia (Valladares 193). Luis Kehl explains: “Os soldados que retornavam da Campanha de Canudos em 1894, desmobilizados, por sua vez, recebiam na mesma época, à guisa de compensação, autorizações para se instalar no Morro da Providência, próximo ao centro da cidade; para ali se mudaram, centenas, depois milhares” (18). The *Morro da Favela* (which gave rise to the general term “favela”), home of veteran soldiers awaiting their compensation, soon became stigmatized as a precarious area, much like the *cortiços* had been:

[O *cortiço*] possuía barracos e habitações precárias do mesmo tipo identificado em seguida no Morro da Providência. Outros autores também estabeleceram uma ligação direta entre as demolições dos *cortiços* do Centro da cidade e a ocupação ilegal dos morros no início do século XX. (Valladares 24)

Instead of the government solving the problem of the unsanitary living conditions of the poor so that the lower class could be integrated into the rest of society, the problem simply changed name and location and continued in the form of the favela.

During the first part of the twentieth century, society in general began to forget the *cortiços* as a thing of the past as they had been almost completely eradicated, which made the focus turn to the growing favelas and their role in Brazil’s future. Even though the *cortiços* had been mostly destroyed, the poor class had not been, and because of the government’s failure to create a system that would provide equal educational and economic opportunities in society, the poor were merely pushed from the city and into the favelas where they maintained the stigma that was associated with *cortiços*.

In their research, Zaluar & Alvito found several government documents that give physical evidence of the fact that even the first favela was labeled a dangerous area almost immediately after it was formed. They explain that the two documents that they discovered in Brazil's national archive are important for one reason in particular: "mostram que o 'morro da Favela', apenas três anos depois de o Ministério da Guerra permitir que ali viessem a se alojar os veteranos da campanha de Canudos (1897), já era percebido pelas autoridades policiais como um 'foco de desertores, ladrões e praças do Exército'" (9). In only three years, what was meant to be a government housing arrangement became a place of economic struggle and a target of social stigma. These authors make it clear: "[a favela] já começa a ser percebida como um 'problema' praticamente no momento em que surge, muito embora, a despeito dessa clara oposição à sua presença na cidade, tenha continuado a crescer sem interrupção" (10). This initial reaction to the formation of favelas has remained relatively unchanged in the minds of those outside of it while those within it continue to harbor feelings of abandonment by the government.

Despite plans to clean and urbanize the favelas as the city of Rio was being reformed, in the end the process of incorporating the favelas into the scene of the country's capital was simply not worth the trouble—instead of being reformed they would be removed. The intention to erase the favelas from the new face of the city was proposed in 1927 when a plan of "remodelação, extensão e embelezamento" of Rio was created and suggested that all favela residents be transferred to a different location to enjoy a "liberdade individual ilimitada" that later had serious consequences (Zaluar &

Alvito 11-12). The consensus at the time was that the problem of trying to incorporate the favelas into the new structure of the city would be too complicated and that a more suitable alternative would be to build inexpensive housing units and move favela residents into them to solve the “problem” (Zaluar *A máquina* 64). The systematic relocating of favela residents took place in the 1960s during the government of Carlos Lacerda, who began his career as a journalist and who wrote in 1948 in favor of the extinction of the favelas. He later became governor of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1960, at which time he put his beliefs into practice and started the program to remove the favelas and transfer their residents far from the center of the city (Kehl 49). This relocation program affected 27 favelas and 41,958 favela residents who were removed by force from their homes (49). The process of building housing communities far from the center of the city and forcing favela residents into them seemed a good solution to those trying to Europeanize Rio de Janeiro, but this solution actually put the poor at an even greater disadvantage as they were far from their homes and the commercial center of the city.

The poor class was powerless against drastic measures practiced by the government, which as a part of relocation included the burning of favelas like Morro do Pasmado and Praia do Pinto (Kehl 65-66). In her book *The Myth of Marginality*, Janice Perlman includes pictures of the burning of the favela Praia do Pinto and a description of the aftermath: “After residents refused to leave, the favela was burned to the ground...The following morning...people, despairing at the disaster, tried to salvage what they could of their meager possessions or to seek relatives lost in the chaos. Police

piled people into garbage trucks and hauled them off to the outskirts of the city” (208). While burning the favelas was one means of forcing residents out of them, physical force on the part of civil and military police officers was another form of violence used by those in power to subject the poor class to their demands. Although the government supposedly was offering more organized community housing to former favela residents, it was really not concerned with how the residents felt about the change nor did they allow any type of resistance. The reality of the situation was that the favela residents were simply being placed out of sight and out of mind, and these types of mistreatment help to explain the growing feeling of abuse and repression that currently exists among favela residents.

When Carlos Lacerda lost his position in the government with the beginning of the military dictatorship (1964), four housing developments for favela residents had already been built or were under construction. (*Zaluar A máquina* 66). After their completion, the houses in these complexes traded hands and the original proclaimed purpose of the communities – to offer better, more sanitary housing to the poor – was forgotten. The largest of the four developments was named Cidade de Deus, which later became possibly the most well-known favela in Brazil because of the appearance of the book (1997) and film (2002) both called *Cidade de Deus*, which demonstrated the consequences of the way that the originally organized housing communities were left to fend for themselves.

Kehl describes the condition of favela residents in the new housing complexes this way: “Longe das luzes da cidade, estas pessoas passaram a levar, por anos a fio,

uma existência semirural, que a sociedade progressista da época parte fingia ignorar, parte via como meramente parasitária” (19). The poor treatment that the lower class received only reinforced the rest of society’s view of favela residents at the same time that the poor themselves, because of the way they had been alienated, lost even more faith in the middle and upper classes as well as the government to which they were subjected. Long-established stereotypes about the favela residents (that dated back to when the first *Morro da Favela* was described as a problem within the society) including their indolence and unsanitary lifestyles were propagated even if favela residents were no longer living in the center of the city (19).

Beginning in the era of the military dictatorship (1964-84), the favelas took on an increasingly violent image due to criminal organization and the escalation of the cocaine trade throughout Brazil. When political prisoners were housed with common prisoners on Ilha Grande in Rio de Janeiro, political prisoners demonstrated ideas of unity and organization against repression that were then adopted by common criminals. One group of criminals, which later became known as the Comando Vermelho, adopted these tactics to protect members of their group and allow them to fight abuse by prison guards. When common prisoners escaped or were released from prison they implemented the same behaviors in the favelas, including within the realm of drug trafficking. Sociologist Janice Perlman spent time living in Rio’s favelas in the 1960s at which time the marijuana trade already existed and later returned to study the changes that had taken place in the drug trade and their violent consequences. She concludes: “it was only with the diversion of the cocaine trade through Rio, beginning

in the mid-1980s, that the explosive mixture of cash and crime began to devastate life in the favelas" (*Favela* 177). While the former prisoners' organization was not based on violence except as a means to enforce the group's rules, the way that the organization was applied to the lucrative trafficking of cocaine and weapons needed to defend it against rival gangs did contribute to much of the violence that exists in favelas today.

According to Zaluar & Alvito, it was at this time of growing violence between gangs that the stereotypes that had already been formed of favela residents took on a new element: automatic weapons. Not only was the favela problematic and unsanitary, but it became characterized as a "covil de bandidos, zona franca do crime, hábitat natural das 'classes perigosas'" (15). During this time popular media produced exaggerated stories about the violent actions of members of the Comando Vermelho both in prison and in the favela, but most media outlets ignored the voices of individual members of the poor class that were actually witnesses to violence that was taking place were not heard. These media portrayals alienated and marginalized favela residents, who were left to their own means of survival.

As the portrayal of the favelas and their residents in the media has often differed from reality, it is important to understand the way that the image of the favela has been constructed as well as which members of society have come to believe in its fictional characteristics. Inhabited by the marginalized who were otherwise ignored by the upper classes, the favelas became areas seen as precarious, mysterious, and threatening to the Europeanization of Brazil and to the safety of elite interests:

A imagem matriz da favela já estava, portanto, construída e dada a partir do olhar arguto e curioso do jornalista/observador. 'Um outro mundo', muito mais próximo da roça, do sertão, 'longe da cidade', onde só se poderia chegar através da 'ponte' construída pelo repórter ou cronista, levando o leitor até o alto do morro que ele, membro da classe média ou da elite, não ousava subir. Universo exótico, em meio a uma pobreza originalmente concentrada no Centro da cidade, em cortiços e outras modalidades de habitações coletivas, prolongava-se agora, morro acima, ameaçando o restante da cidade. Estava descoberta a favela...e lançadas as bases necessárias para sua transformação em problema. (Valladares 36)

Zaluar presents the idea that identity is constructed for the dominated by the dominator through stigmatizing the members of society that they are trying to repress, for example in the case of Brazil: "O espelho que se constrói agora no Brasil é este: pobre, criminoso, perigoso" (*Condomínio do diabo* 33). She explains that this mirror is found in the constant stories of death and crime in the poor areas of the country that appear almost daily in the country's newspapers (33-34). Often when favela residents try to find work they are denied when the employer finds out where they live, which only causes the marginalized to have a more distorted and negative vision of themselves. Even though there are many people involved in projects and organizations that are making an effort to create a new identity of the poor that comes from within the favela itself, there are still many favela residents that have come to believe the things they see in the media about themselves and their communities.

Although the favelas were always seen as dangerous places, in the past few decades the image of the favela has become drastically worse; “By the 1990s, the favelas were being identified with crime and violence almost to the exclusion of anything else. The media portrayed the violence of drug-trafficking gangs at war with one another, or with the police, as if homicide and drug dealing were endemic to favelas” (Alves & Evanson 16). This portrayal led to a division in society, separating the poor, supposedly violent class living in the hills from the law-abiding elite class living in surrounding neighborhoods (16). This division produced in part by the media has made hardworking favela residents suffer because they are often considered criminals by members of other social classes simply because they live in a poor community. In this way the favela itself, with its accompanying stereotypes, becomes the identity of those who live there, despite the fact that it does not apply to many inhabitants.

Zaluar makes an interesting conclusion about the way that favela residents react to seeing pictures of themselves, which act as a sort of mirror that differs from the violent images of the favela often printed on the front page of the newspaper:

Mas aprendi sobre o gosto imenso que têm de aparecer nas fotos – únicas representações iconográficas de suas pessoas, suas imagens nas casas sem espelho em que moram – e, portanto, o desejo de aparecerem sempre arrumados e limpos. Não gostam de ser flagrados. Preocupam-se em não parecerem ridículos ou de alguma maneira que os faça sentirem-se envergonhados. (*A máquina* 21)

Favela residents' concern with their image – the way they see themselves and are seen by others – highlights the importance of media produced from inside the favela because it offers an authentic description of what goes on in the favela and the people that live there as opposed to sensationalist stories in popular media. Testimonial accounts of the marginalized are a means for favela residents to present themselves without looking ridiculous so that they escape the stereotypes that they have been made a part of. According to Jaime Ginzburg, these types of testimonial accounts allow writers to reflect on their own identity and give an accurate portrayal of themselves and the world around them: “Ninguém poderia, tanto como o próprio eu, caracterizar sua identidade e atribuir sentido à sua experiência” (51). In addition to making sense of one's self, the testimonial genre allows for the presentation of the collective experience of a group of people living in similar circumstances. Ginzburg adds that this type of literature “pode assumir um papel de mediação, instrumento de confronto, em que a experiência individual atua como fundamento para interpretar e discutir a experiência coletiva” (52). In this sense, the analysis of several testimonial accounts written in the last two decades paints a picture of common experiences faced by members of today's poor communities.

According to Ettore Finazi-Agrò, literature is an important vehicle for those who witness violence to have their stories be heard:

Acho que apenas a literatura, frequentemente considerada como acessória e inútil, guarda essa possibilidade, justamente pelo fato de reinventar a realidade, de dar conta do impossível, ou seja, de testemunhar, em outro

nível, aquilo a que ninguém presta atenção e que, aliás, poderia ser relatado apenas por quem não pode falar, por quem, na verdade, fica a 'testemunha integral' de uma experiência de desumanidade e violência que tem atravessado mas que não consegue transmitir aos outros. (81-82)

With the appearance of the genre of marginal literature, members of Brazil's lower class began to try to transmit their experiences using their own voices, the first prominent example being the publication of Carolina Maria de Jesus' diary *Quarto de despejo* (1960) about the author's life in the favela Canindé in São Paulo. Audálio Dantas, the reporter who discovered Carolina "fez a primeira e bem sucedida matéria sobre Carolina, que consistiu na apresentação do diário, tudo exposto como depoimento e denúncia da situação vivida pelos pobres, a partir da perspectiva interna da favela" (Machado 106). This internal perspective presented an authentic description of the favela and was initially a success for de Jesus, but ultimately her account was ignored by the upper classes in her own country.

Even though her success was not lasting, Carolina Maria de Jesus represented the emergence of the voice of the marginalized in Brazilian literature. On one occasion, her neighbor made the following request: "You need to be the voice of the favela. Speak for us" (*I'm Going to Have a Little House* 103). This request was significant because, according to Regina Dalcastagnè, "não podemos deixar de indagar quem é, afinal, esse outro, que posição lhe é reservada na sociedade, e o que seu silêncio esconde" (20). Marginal literature has become a means for the "others" in Brazilian society to state their point of view and break the silence of the favela. To achieve understanding of the

voice of the favela, Dalcastangè argues that literary studies need to concern themselves more “com os problemas ligados ao *acesso à voz* e à representação dos múltiplos grupos sociais. Ou seja, [se tornar] mais conscientes das dificuldades associadas ao *lugar da fala: quem fala e em nome de quem*” (20). Testimonial literature written by marginalized members of society then becomes a source for true representations of the favela because it is written by members of the favela community that have a right to speak for themselves. For too long marginalized members of Brazilian society have remained almost completely absent from Brazilian literature, and when they did appear they were almost always in a secondary role in which they were denied a voice and were surrounded by stereotypes (18). Carolina Maria de Jesus’ account put the marginal voice in the spotlight and even though her insider’s perspective did not hold much value in her own country, this author’s diaries constitute an example of marginal literature that gave access to the voice of favela residents and representation to marginalized groups of the society.

Once her testimonial account of life in the favela had opened the door to the marginal voice in literature, other authors later followed her example and published accounts of their own experiences as marginalized members of society. Several notable examples that build on Carolina Maria de Jesus’s work include: William da Silva Lima’s *Quatrocentos contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho* (1991) and Ferréz’s *Capão pecado*. In addition to literature, film has also become an important means of broadcasting the voice of the favela, a prominent example being the documentary *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999), which presents interviews of the three groups

involved in some way in favela violence – police, traffickers, and other residents. These three testimonial accounts deal specifically with the experiences of marginal members of society and violence involving the poor class in Brazil from the internal perspective of the favela. These examples in some ways affirm the images of violence associated with gangs, drugs, and weapons, but are invaluable because they allow the marginalized themselves to explain the motives behind the violence that is going on in the favela and demonstrate that there is also a lot of beauty there that is being overlooked. As the marginalized express their point of view through testimony, members of all social classes have the opportunity to examine the silenced side of the story of violence associated with favelas and reevaluate their belief of long-standing stereotypes of Brazil's forgotten citizens.

Chapter 1

Quatrocentos contra um: The Voice of the Comando Vermelho

Although favelas were perceived as dangerous places almost from the moment the first was formed on the Morro de Providência in Rio de Janeiro by soldiers returning from the Guerra de Canudos (1897), it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that they took on the shockingly violent image by which they are known today. This violent image developed particularly during the period of the military dictatorship (1964-84). The government did not assume responsibility to create an infrastructure that would integrate the poor class into society, and some turned to criminal activity to survive, which often led to arrest and prison. During this period, many young revolutionaries were captured, brutally tortured, and also confined to prisons. Even though this type of violence marked the time of military rule as one of strong repression, it was not the only violent result of the rebellion. One notable effect stems from the instance of Ilha Grande, within the walls of the same prison where political prisoners were held, common prisoners adopted a form of collective behavior to combat repression and abuse that they then maintained in the favelas after they were released or escaped from prison.

In an attempt to eliminate subversive political groups during the dictatorship, militant political prisoners were often treated as common criminals, and as a precautionary measure, common criminals were even sometimes treated as political rebels. The military government's attempt to retain complete control had an unexpected

consequence: “the military regime’s repressive apparatus successfully stamped out armed political opposition. Yet these very repressive activities generated new enemies and new forms of oppositional identification...the interrogators produced that which they sought to repress” (Pengalese 125-26). In the 1970s the military captured and tortured William da Silva Lima, author of the testimonial account *Quatrocentos contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho* (1991), so that he would reveal which political movement he was participating in even though he was not actually a member of any subversive group. After being held and tortured for four days, Lima gave the following response: “Sou da organização da fumaça,” at which point he was sent to prison on Ilha Grande with valid reason to rebel against government authorities that caused him so much unwarranted suffering (Lima 48). Lima is an example of one of the “new enemies” inadvertently produced during the dictatorship because although he was a common prisoner, he became one of the most powerful leaders of the group referred to as the Comando Vermelho, an organization formed on Ilha Grande for the purpose of fighting the government’s mistreatment of political and common prisoners.

Ben Pengalese explains the connection between the military dictatorship and the unforeseen consequences that came from the ideology that revolutionaries introduced into the incarcerated community:

In a fairly direct sense, the Comando Vermelho was the bastard child of the dictatorship’s attempt to repress armed political opposition. As is now well-documented, the CV first emerged in the 1970s in the Cândido Mendes prison on Ilha Grande, where members of armed political groups

and common prisoners convicted under the Lei de Segurança Nacional, or LSN, were housed in the same unit of the prison, Galeria B. (125)

The imprisoned revolutionaries had experience organizing themselves because of their involvement in political movements, so when they arrived in the Galeria B where there existed a great deal of violence (both among the prisoners and between prisoners and guards), they established rules to maintain order and consolidate their forces against the repression of the government and demand better conditions (126).

In *Quatrocentos contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho*, Lima recounts his prison experience and explains the way that his contact with political prisoners influenced him to take part in the solidarity that the group later named the Comando Vermelho offered, not only so he could survive life within the prison but also to help him escape. His testimony is important because it offers a perspective from inside the prison that refutes accounts of popular media about violence and acts of crime committed by incarcerated and fugitive common criminals during the military dictatorship. Lima's argument is that the government and privileged classes of society were responsible for creating the oppressive circumstances that encouraged the poor class's desperate (and sometimes violent) attempts to obtain social equality, whether inside or outside the prison.

On Ilha Grande

At the beginning of his testimony Lima states his reason for writing his account of life in prison: "explicar como e porque vivi até hoje, na maior parte do tempo, sem

nome, sem profissão e sem ver minha família, tendo na violência a maneira de sobreviver entre os homens” (25). He felt the government and social system were responsible for depriving him of his identity and life as an equal citizen, and that since he was fortunate enough to survive twenty-three years in prison he had the responsibility to record his testimony of the way the guards (and even media) mistreated him and other prisoners. He states: “Todos os meus companheiros não podem mais oferecer o seu testemunho, e o silêncio a eles imposto talvez seja o que me mova com mais força nessa difícil empreitada...alguém precisa contar” (25). Much of this testimony denounces the poor class’s lack of educational and occupational opportunities in Brazilian society, and even the disadvantages of common prisoners in comparison with political prisoners on Ilha Grande.

Lima came from the underprivileged class and recognized that “a ideia de que a Justiça é igual para todos é história para boi dormir” (108), and that “poder e dinheiro caminham juntos em nossa sociedade, na qual nasci pobre e sempre me senti marginal” (115). While in prison, he noticed the injustice of the penal system because most incarcerated prisoners were poor criminals, likely because rich criminals did not call the attention of the police as much because their crimes were of a different nature, for example, financial corruption: “Existem bandidos em todas as camadas sociais, mas na cadeia, estão apenas os pobres. Quando o bandido é pobre ou ignorante, age de forma precária, bruta, rápida, imediata, visível...O bandido rico não precisa usar de violência direta, e sua brutalidade não aparece” (118). This description exemplifies Lima’s stance that Brazil’s government and social structure created an unfair justice system that put

poor criminals at a disadvantage because their crimes are more violent and therefore more easily recognized, and often their victims can cry for help, being immediately recognized (118).

Lima's reaction to his prison experience presents the consequences in terms of the crime that it produced because after being arrested several times for theft, he confesses: "a prisão me profissionalizara no crime. Com quase trinta anos de vida e mais de dez na cadeia, não via como voltar atrás" (47). The Brazilian penal system ironically served as a school of crime for minor offenders, especially in the Cândido Mendes prison: "A Ilha Grande ganha *status* de um curso de pós-doutorado no crime. Quem entra ladrão sai assaltante" (Amorim 40). The prison system produced a vicious cycle as prison did not prepare its inhabitants to be reintegrated into society but instead ironically taught them criminal skills that would further alienate them from it.

While inside the prison, Lima came to understand the unjust legal system involving prisoners such as himself: "E agora estava ali, vendo o que se fazia sob a sagrada proteção da Lei. Não havíamos sido condenados à morte, mas perdêramos o direito à vida, cumprindo pena de um tipo determinado por tribunais informais" (81). Although he did not receive a life sentence, the conditions inside the prison (as well as the social conditions he would return to if he escaped or was released) had already robbed him not only of the right the decent living conditions within the prison, but of his identity outside of his criminal activity:

Somos, simplesmente, assaltantes. Ou estelionatários. Ou homicidas. Entre os direitos que perdemos se encontra o de sermos conhecidos pela

totalidade das nossas ações, boas e más, como qualquer ser humano. O ato criminoso – o único devidamente divulgado e reproduzido nas fichas – define tudo o que somos, resumindo, de forma mágica, passado, presente e futuro. (Lima 44)

The lack of sanitary conditions within the prisons and the way that guards mistreated prisoners dehumanized criminals to the point that they often lost any previous sense of identity they had and turned to any means necessary to survive prison life, which often included combating violence of guards and other prisoners with more violence.

Before meeting the political prisoners on Ilha Grande where he learned the power of solidarity to rebel against authorities, Lima was held in other prisons in Rio such as Bangu and Frei Caneca where prison guards often committed violent acts against prisoners: “Maus tratos e espancamentos faziam parte do dia a dia em Bangu, nivelando carcereiros e massa carcerária numa mesma miséria moral” (31). He also points out that violence was common between prisoners themselves: “O ambiente era paranóico, dominado por desconfiança e medo, não apenas da violência dos guardas, mas também da ação das quadrilhas formadas por presos para roubar, estuprar e matar seus companheiros” (44). It was not until Lima was incarcerated on Ilha Grande at the same time that political prisoners began to arrive there because of their opposition to the military regime (1964) that he became aware of a way to eliminate some of the violence that was taking place among guards and prisoners through organization and solidarity.

In an article that compares organized and common crime in Rio de Janeiro, Michel Misse explains that some political prisoners were considered participants in armed assaults on banks to fund their revolution, which allowed the government to treat intellectual revolutionaries as common criminals:

O regime militar sancionou então a Lei de Segurança Nacional, em 1969, considerando comuns os crimes cometidos pelos militantes de esquerda. Assim, militantes políticos e assaltantes de bancos comuns conviveram, sob a mesma lei, até a sua revogação mais de dez anos depois. (“Crime organizado” 18)

However, once inside the prisons, political prisoners did not act the same way common prisoners did but instead organized themselves to present a common front against the government. Because of their social engagement outside the penitentiary, many political prisoners were familiar with the means to attempt regaining basic human rights that the military government denied them during the dictatorship. Misse states: “Nesse período, os presos políticos organizaram-se dentro das penitenciárias do Rio de Janeiro para reivindicar alguns direitos que lhes estavam sendo negados” (18). From another perspective, Lima saw the military regime’s repression of basic human rights of those outside of the prison as an indication that the situation of those in prison was even more bleak: “Não havia perspectiva à vista: num tempo em que as garantias individuais do cidadão nas ruas estavam suspensas, que dizer das mesmas garantias para nós, condenados?” (63). However, common prisoners still saw the political prisoners’ ability

to act as a group a useful strategy to coexist more peacefully with other prisoners and serve as protection against abuse by the guards.

Misse further explains how the political prisoners passed on to common prisoners their somewhat successful ability to organize themselves: A “relativa vitória em suas reivindicações, na primeira metade dos anos 1970, criou um efeito de demonstração para os assaltantes de banco comuns....Eles também resolveram organizar-se para reivindicar direitos e impor seu domínio dentro do sistema penitenciário” (18). This explains that above all, the exchange that took place between political and common prisoners on Ilha Grande resulted in new ideals and behavior that could possibly help prisoners regain whatever rights they felt they were being denied – first within the prison, then in favelas. Gregório Bezerra, a military officer and condemned communist, explains his perspective of the influence of the political prisoners in the jails in terms of the ideals that they introduced:

Os presos comuns, quando reunidos aos presos políticos, “viviam uma experiência educadora....Passavam a entender melhor o mundo e a luta de classes,” explicou, “compreendendo as razões que produzem o crime e a violência.” A influência dos prisioneiros políticos se dava basicamente pela força do exemplo, pelo idealismo e altruísmo, pelo fato de que mesmo encarcerados continuávamos mantendo a organização e a disciplina revolucionárias. (Amorim 50)

Through such organization, common prisoners began to understand the power they had as a collective group that they did not have individually. As Lima recognizes, they

learned that they needed to “organizar os companheiros, superando diferenças trazidas da rua, estabelecendo um modo de vida que permitisse liberar nossas energias para o confronto com a repressão e a luta pela liberdade” (57). Janice Perlman notes that it was not merely domination by violence that was passed on to the common prisoners but the deeper concepts of fighting repression by rebelling as a group against established laws: “The students and leftist intellectuals started teaching the others about exploitation and injustice, while the criminals taught the leftists how to function outside the law” (*Favela* 178). In subsequent years, this type of organization and rebellion would mark the gangs that emerged in the favelas, because, as Misse states, some criminals followed the example of the cooperation between political prisoners and invented their own codes of loyalty between prisoners inside and outside the prison walls (124).

Lima explains that the original name of the group that formed on Ilha Grande represented the idea of solidarity that existed within it, as opposed to the name that the media later invented: “Na prisão, falange quer dizer um grupo de presos organizados em torno de qualquer interesse comum. Daí o apelido de Falange da LSN, logo transformada pela imprensa em Comando Vermelho” (95). This name appeared for the first time in 1979 in a report given by the director of the prison on Ilha Grande, Captain Nelson Bastos Salmon, to the Desipe (Departamento do Sistema Penitenciário do Rio de Janeiro) that commented that after several assassinations, the Comando Vermelho had taken complete control of Ilha Grande and thus began to command the organized crime activities in the prisons of Rio’s the penal system (95). According to Lima, this organization helped prisoners “deixar de ser barata tonta e afirmar-se como sujeito,

senhor de direitos e poderes, mesmo no interior das execráveis prisões brasileiras” (15). In contrast to Lima’s descriptions of prison disorganization and violence before he came in contact with political prisoners, this solidarity allowed prisoners to assume a new identity that helped them survive prison life.

Because of the determination of the political prisoners to increase their power against the penal system and remain unified, the government tried without success to dissolve the organization that prisoners had formed:

O que eles chamavam de Comando Vermelho não poderia ser destruído facilmente: não era uma organização, mas, antes de tudo, um comportamento, uma forma de sobreviver na adversidade. O que nos mantinha vivos e unidos não era nem um hierarquia, nem uma estrutura material, mas sim a afetividade que desenvolvemos uns com os outros nos períodos mais duros das nossas vidas. (Lima 96)

In the *coletivo* [collective] there was not one leader but instead all came together to fight repression and abuse. At the time, the common prisoners were not accustomed to that type of rebellion, so the political prisoners had to demonstrate the importance of the system by force, and in the end the collective was able to reach almost total unity within the prison (60). This type of order is still seen within trafficking gangs in the favelas, even though the organization today may not be as clear as it was at this time when it was instituted. In *Quatrocentos contra um*, Lima relates a specific experience in which it was necessary to use violence to establish order and peace among the prisoners and thus avoid additional violence. A member of his collective broke an important rule by

assaulting an inmate, so to demonstrate his determination and the power of the group, that prisoner was killed, which announced to all of Ilha Grande who had the power and that any person who broke the rules would face the same consequences (70). This moment of violence demonstrates how Lima adopted the organization of political prisoners to maintain order, and traffickers often still follow this example and punish criminals that commit violent acts toward residents of their own favelas. In addition, their collective organization is still used to protect their areas from rival traffickers and police, which shows that they have maintained the mentality of solidarity and self-defense against mistreatment of government authorities and privileged social classes.

In the early 1970s revolutionary prisoners were transferred from Galeria B to a prison in the center of Rio: “Ali eles aguardaram a anistia que devolveu todos à liberdade. Os presos políticos foram embora, mas deixaram muitas marcas na vida do presídio” (Amorim 46). These marks remained in the form of new attitudes and behaviors that common criminals continued to use to try to gain rights for better treatment for themselves. Although the unity that political prisoners demonstrated was successful for them, the poor, common prisoners did not enjoy the same outcome. While the government granted liberty to some militant political prisoners, common prisoners were left to fend for themselves: “Continuaríamos a reivindicar, para nós, a extensão de quaisquer direitos que viessem a ser concedidos a pessoas que, afinal, objetivamente, haviam cometido os mesmos crimes que nós – principalmente assaltos a bancos – e estavam enquadradas conosco na mesma lei” (Lima 68). Lima recognized that in this moment of political change that even if the government released political

prisoners from their sentences, it had no intention of pardoning lower-class prisoners:

“a quebra do nosso isolamento aparecia agora como uma manobra preparatória para nos excluir dos benefícios jurídicos que viessem a alcançar outros condenados...aos presos políticos foi dada anistia, enquanto nós fomos lentamente aniquilados” (69).

Even though common prisoners used the same tactics as political prisoners, their rebellion was not as visible nor did it bring about positive political change. In frustration, Lima pointed out the differences that existed between the two groups of prisoners despite the unity they developed among themselves: “o Desipe...cortou nossas comunicações com o exterior, tirou nosso pequeno estoque de sal e açúcar e fechou a água corrente. Que diferença! A greve de fome dos presos políticos tivera a presença de médicos e soro, com ampla divulgação!” (71). Although political and common prisoners learned to coexist peacefully on Ilha Grande and defend each other against acts of violence of guards and fight for better living conditions, the criminals from the poor class were left to complete their sentences and maintain their organization in their own way, which continued to spread to other prisons and eventually to the favelas.

From the Prison to the Favela

Despite the government’s eventual attempt to separate prisoners and thus dissolve the new order that had formed among them, by sending them to different locations it unknowingly opened the doors for the influence of the Comando Vermelho to spread throughout Rio, including its new tactics of rebellion within the prisons.

According to Leeds, “Na tentativa de enfraquecer a organização, as autoridades carcerárias transferiram os membros da lei de segurança para outras prisões, o que efetivamente difundiu e reforçou ainda mais a ideia de ação coletiva” (238). Perlman also comments that even though the government attempted to break up the unity forming on Ilha Grande by relocating prisoners, this actually allowed the collective spirit to spread instead of stopping its growth: “The government, realizing its error, then compounded it by separating the inmates from Ilha Grande and sending them to different prisons around the country – thereby enabling them to spread their new knowledge” (*Favela* 178). In this way, the common prisoners who were moved around the penal system then returned to the favelas carrying with them a new social order: “This structure of loose rules prohibiting rival organizations, and banning robbery, theft, rape and informing to the police, yet allowing for maximum individual autonomy, would eventually be carried by members of the CV into Rio’s favelas” (Pengalesse 127). This explains the way that the organization that political and common prisoners created to use force to maintain peace eventually played a part in the violence of the favelas as former criminals continued to use violence to protect each other, but with the added force of heavy weaponry, which will be discussed later.

The political prisoners’ organization was not a direct cause of the organization of crime that spread to drug trafficking, but instead simply demonstrated the power of solidarity that inspired common prisoners as they returned to the favelas. Amorim states: “Os presos políticos não ensinaram a criar uma organização criminosa, mas a convivência passou para os prisioneiros comuns um ‘novo significado de

solidariedade'. O que veio a seguir foi por conta e obra dos criminosos comuns" (77).

Many factors have contributed to today's favela violence, but this type of solidarity formed within the prisons with the purpose fight repression of the government and the abuse of guards remained the most important ideology of common criminals as they maintained their gangs in the favelas and worked as groups to protect their own favelas.

In 1980, Lima escaped from prison with two other men with the following purpose that demonstrates the way the prisoners maintained their loyalty to the collective even outside the prison walls:

Os três têm uma missão importante: organizar uma nova 'frente de luta', uma estrutura de ação capaz de modernizar a mentalidade no mundo do crime. Eles vão montar uma quadrilha de respeito, vão levar para as favelas da cidade um método de operação que imita as principais características da guerrilha urbana dos anos 70. (Amorim 127)

Because of their new form of organization, many common criminals were able to escape from prison with the help of others on the outside and return to the favelas. With the money from the bank robberies and drug trafficking, the ex-prisoners continued to be loyal to their companions still in prison and searched for ways to help them to escape.

"Assaltamos um banco para equilibrar as finanças...[e] logo surgiu a ideia de ajudar de alguma maneira nossos antigos companheiros do Fundão. Compramos então uma lancha, batizada de Jupira, nome que na prisão quer dizer de todo mundo" (Lima 97).

The idea of unity learned in prison helped them to maintain organization and collective

power to help their fellow prisoners escape. Since many prisoners had come from the favelas, they naturally returned to them and there recognized the advantage of being a part of an organization like the Comando Vermelho in case they were arrested again (Pengalese 128).

As the influence of the Comando Vermelho spread, those who escaped began to establish bases in the favelas for many reasons, especially to ensure safety and continued solidarity: “Começamos a nos instalar em favelas, por questão de segurança. Respeitávamos a coletividade e éramos bem-vindos” (Lima 97). Perlman also described the advantages of the former prisoners taking refuge in the favelas of Rio based on their topography, which made them perfect hiding places. She explains that the steep hills and narrow passageways were difficult for outsiders to navigate, and even more importantly, “The ultimate advantage from a strategic point of view is that most favelas are on hillsides, providing vantage points from which to look down on anyone coming up the entryways. This makes them easily defendable” – both against rival gangs and police officers (*Favela* 175). Once in the favelas, former prisoners continued to use their organization to gain power in the favela and help others escape.

After determining the location for their organization to continue outside of prison, the question arose of financing the collective. After regaining a large amount of money through bank robberies, another important leader of the Comando Vermelho, José Jorge Saldanha (nicknamed Zé do Bigode), was the first who “exigiu do tráfico de drogas as contribuições mais expressivas para financiar as ações do grupo” (Amorim 112). Even though some of its leaders were still in prison, in the 1980s the Comando

Vermelho began to enter into drug trafficking in a systematic way, because unfortunately the organization of crime at this time in Brazil's history happened to coincide with the U.S. War on Drugs taking action to close Colombian borders. This rerouted the trafficking of cocaine through Brazil, especially through the ports of Rio de Janeiro, and since favelas already had functioning *bocas de fumo* as a point of sale for marijuana, which was grown locally (as opposed to cocaine, which had to be imported), cocaine dealers took advantage of these locations to sell and recruit other favela residents to help them with the drug trade (Perlman 178). At this time when gang organization reached from leaders in prison to criminals in the favelas and cocaine began to be trafficked, violence increased as rival gangs fought each other for control of the market, and as police either fought the drug trade or became participants in it.

Once the Comando Vermelho had established itself in the favelas, the police fiercely hunted its leaders so they could either kill them or take them back to prison. The title of Lima's book references a specific battle between police officers and two members of the Comando Vermelho, José Jorge Saldanha (Zé do Bigode) and João Damiano Neto. According to Lima, when the police officers began to climb the hills into the favela to arrest them, radio and television stations broadcast the event live: "parecia que dois exércitos iriam iniciar uma batalha. Na verdade, era mais ou menos isso....[João Damiano Neto] não tardou a ser morto, numa das diversas tentativas de invasão. Restaram, nessa batalha sem glória, quatrocentos homens contra um" (100-1).

While it may seem hard to believe that such a small number of criminals would put up such a fight against police who were trying to arrest them again, Amorim describes the

mentality of the members of the Comando Vermelho, which included the unity that they had learned from political prisoners:

Zé do Bigode, ao resistir até a morte, estava movido pelo ódio contra a polícia que o prendeu e torturou várias vezes. E também pelo sentimento de que não podia trair a confiança dos companheiros....Ele ajudou a criar uma irmandade no crime – o Comando Vermelho....Um dos mandamentos da organização certamente ficou ecoando em sua cabeça durante a última noite de vida: “Luta permanente contra a repressão e os abusos!” Na mente de um homem que não tem qualquer futuro à vista, vale a pena morrer por isso. (120)

Lima’s experience not only demonstrates the adoption of the mentality of the collective among common prisoners but also highlights the violence that the government continued to use against them outside of the prison. The prison system ended up perpetrating the vicious cycle of violence and crime that resulted in a battle of hundreds of members of the police force hunting down only a few criminals. However, feeling that they did not have the opportunity to follow a different path, men like those who were members of the Comando Vermelho preferred to lose their lives in battle with the collective to fighting alone.

Beyond maintaining prison rules of solidarity among group members, the criminals who became organized drug traffickers also imposed the system on others in the favelas. As attacks, robbery, and rape were prohibited in the Fundão, “the CV instituted a system of forced reciprocity in favelas by which traffickers provided

security in favelas, outlawing theft, robbery or rape, in exchange for the silence or complicity of favela residents” (Pengalese 129). Misse comments that this system served to distinguish organized crime from common crime, because individual areas under gang command were protected from common crime by organized crime: “Na área sob controle do tráfico, o crime comum diminui, pois os traficantes reprimem-no violentamente, exercendo forte controle social em seu território. O contrário ocorre fora da área sob controle do tráfico, que vem a ser a cidade como um todo” (“Crime organizado” 20). Because of the organization of the Comando Vermelho, this new social structure worked well in face of the unjust and sporadic violence of the police. Pengalese explains: “Police terror is more feared than the barbarity of drug traffickers, since the police disdain rules and enjoy an ad hoc morbid creativity, while traffickers constrain themselves with basic principles and subordinate their despotic practice to an intelligible and public order” (132). The drug traffickers helped the people living in the favela with their financial needs and in return the people living in the favela offered silence as to the whereabouts of the traffickers. This mutual behavior created a form of solidarity (although not without its difficulties) within the favela that the rest of Brazilian society did not offer them.

The Comando Vermelho in the Media

To further explain the way that criminals from the poor class were alienated by the rest of society, Lima makes several comparisons between his experiences in prison and the way the same experiences were portrayed in popular media, in which cases he

makes it clear that the explanations in the media are untruthful and often place the blame of prison violence on the prisoners instead of on the government and prison authorities. These distinctions make his testimony important to the representation of marginal voices as his perspective transfers some of the blame for violence involving the poor class from the marginalized themselves to larger governmental and social systems and their lack of infrastructure to support members of the lower class. As previously mentioned, after the government granted amnesty to political prisoners and they left Ilha Grande, a member of the Comando Vermelho assaulted another member of the collective and was in turn murdered by the other members of the group. Lima comments: “Nesses momentos críticos é que a vida de um coletivo qualquer se põe à prova. Em nosso caso, o cadáver do preso assaltante...anunciou a toda Ilha Grande que não estávamos brincando” (70). While the members of the Comando Vermelho committed this act of violence to in fact establish peace and maintain order in the prison, the media used this experience to cast a negative light on the collective: “Como prevíamos, a imprensa e o sistema penal logo capitalizaram os acontecimentos: queríamos *status* de presos políticos, mas éramos apenas bandidos sanguinários, capazes de eliminar friamente quem a nós se opusesse” (70). In contrast with Lima’s personal account of this experience in which members of the Comando Vermelho killed the offending prisoner out of strict obedience to the group’s rules, the media portrayed the event as an attempt by violent common prisoners to gain status within the prison.

Once Lima and other members of the Comando Vermelho were outside of the prison they maintained their sense of unity, which continued to be misconstrued by popular media:

De volta à rua depois de longos anos de sofrimento, eu e alguns companheiros sentimos necessidade de ajudar quem havia ficado na cadeia. Mais uma vez, um gesto normal de solidariedade não tardou a ser apresentado à opinião pública de forma distorcida: segundo os jornais, formara-se um pacto, pelo qual se destinavam 10% dos assaltos para o financiamento de fugas. Não era essa a única fantasia: falava-se em guerra na Ilha Grande para obter o controle do jogo e do tráfico dentro dos presídios. (Lima 94)

To combat journalists' false claims, Lima explains that it would not have been worth it to traffic drugs through the prisons because prisoners did not have enough money to support the trade: "Por que correr riscos imensos, traficando produtos ilegais para dentro das cadeias, se o poder aquisitivo da massa é tão baixo?" (94). Although Lima's argument is logical, he perceived that the media insisted that not only were members of the Comando Vermelho assaulting banks to help their friends escape from prison, but went as far as to say that all assaults on all banks were the work of this group: "A imprensa atribuía a nós – Comando Vermelho – todos os assaltos a bancos, e logo o nome caiu em uso comum. Qualquer policial oportunista dizia ter prendido integrantes do tal comando, mesmo que fossem pessoas sem nenhuma vinculação conosco" (97).

Not only did police take advantage of the popularity of the name of the Comando

Vermelho to gain recognition for the supposed arrest of its members, but arrested criminals went along with the mistake either because the police pressured them to, or because they hoped that it would guarantee them protection in prison – “Ao largo de tudo isso, a imprensa, vendendo jornais” (97). These, among other examples presented in Lima’s account, represent the side of the story that was not represented in popular media and thus allowed journalists to paint a negative image of lower-class criminals with the intent to simply sell as many newspapers as possible, whether or not their stories were true.

Even though many of the reports that journalists printed in popular media concerning members of the Comando Vermelho were not true, because of their acquired organizational tactics criminals, during the 1980s they were able to consolidate drug trafficking in the factions that were formed in the prisons. The power of the Comando Vermelho continued to grow and by the end of 1985 the group had gained control of seventy percent of the drug trafficking in the favelas of Rio (Pengalese 128). Because of their ability to band together against a repressive society and because of publicity in the media, group leaders such as those of the Comando Vermelho gained a certain respect from favela residents, whether out of fear or genuine admiration: “Graças à imprensa, os atuais chefes do Comando Vermelho tornaram-se figuras populares, se não heróis, entre os favelados e a população em geral (Leeds 238). The powerful figures that gang leaders became were created, however, by the fact that they had money and guns in hand – this because of their involvement with drug trafficking and their need to defend their portion of the trade.

Violence existed in the favelas long before the arrival of cocaine and modern weapons of war, except that in previous decades (the 1960s and 70s), “The main ‘drugs’ then were beer, cachaça, and marijuana...the instruments of violence were fists, knives, or broken beer bottles, and the cocaine and weapons that are now ubiquitous were not readily available” (Perlman 197). The period of the military dictatorship was pivotal in Brazil’s history where the favelas are concerned, because not only did political prisoners learn how to organize themselves into collectives, but this process also happened to coincide with the introduction of the cocaine trade through Brazil. In addition, the acquisition of dangerous weapons contributed to the increase in the amount of violent deaths that take place in Brazil’s picture postcard city – an unexpected and disastrous combination.

As time went on, some gangs disappeared, others were formed, and violence continued. Carlos Gregório (“Gordo”), another founder of the Comando Vermelho, also comments that in drug trafficking, everything is short term so things changed quickly and became disorganized to the point that only the name and myth of the gang remain (*Notícias*). Perlman confirms that within a few years of being formed, “conflicts over the spoils within the Comando Vermelho led to the creation of two splinter groups that became bitter rivals – the Terceiro Comando (Third Command) and the Amigos dos Amigos (AMA-Friends of Friends). Then the wars began in earnest” (*Favela* 178). Since that time other factions have emerged and have continually been at war with each other. The new generation tried to uphold the Comando Vermelho’s legacy, but they were younger, more violent, and less organized so the situation ended up becoming

even worse: “o Comando Vermelho começ[ou] a perder hegemonia e se divid[iu] em facções cada vez menores e mais violentas, que radicalizaram as guerras internas entre bandidos permitindo um crescimento estrondoso do crime e o surgimento de um sentimento geral de banalização da violência” (Schollhammer 39). The political and common prisoners created an organized group to maintain order and peace and regain lost rights, but this strategy ended up being more successful for political than common prisoners because their political cause was more visible and perhaps more pressing at the time of the dictatorship when many rights were suspended for all citizens. Still, common prisoners benefited from the collective because it offered protection and support in the incarcerated community, as well as contacts outside the prison that could help them escape. However, in the years following the dictatorship the added elements of cocaine, weapons, and divided gangs turned the useful strategy of the collective into a motive for violence since drug trafficking became a profitable means of survival for those with the most power.

Aside from the horror of the censorship, torture, and repression of the dictatorship, on Ilha Grande, political prisoners introduced common prisoners to a new form of organization – a system of rules and behavior that the common prisoners then maintained when they returned to the favelas and established their own type of leadership in the realm of drug trafficking. *Quatrocentos contra um* by William da Silva Lima is an example of testimonial evidence of the experience of a marginalized common criminal going through the Brazilian penal system and coming out of it with knowledge of organization as a form of revolt that ended up completely changing the image of

crime in Rio de Janeiro. In terms of the identity of the favelas, this moment in history when the two groups of prisoners met on Ilha Grande was important because of the solidarity that it created among common prisoners, which today remains a characteristic of the favelas. In the introduction to his book, professional journalist Carlos Amorim explains his interest in the story of the Comando Vermelho, especially surrounding the culminating battle recounted in Lima's *Quatrocentos contra um* and the way that members of the collective were so willing to face incredible odds and die, all for the ideology of the group:

A intensidade do combate e a determinação do assaltante de bancos deixaram em minha mente uma pergunta que levei muito tempo para responder: por que alguém desiste de viver apenas para manter de pé um juramento de lealdade entre criminosos comuns? Para o assaltante cercado, o companheirismo era mais importante do que a vida. (11)

As Lima states in his testimony, he decided to write his account to be the voice of his fellow prisoners that did not live to tell the story of the treatment they received at the hands of the country's penal system. This act in and of itself reiterates the mentality of the collective group to protect each other and help all prisoners' voices be heard.

The government's lack of investment in infrastructure and education of favela residents led to feelings of injustice and resentment that only increased as time went on until eventually common prisoners saw the way that political prisoners organized themselves to fight against repression. The combination of the organization of the revolutionaries and the frustration of the marginalized on Ilha Grande initiated a

catalyst reaction whose product left the walls of the prison and infiltrated the favelas, carrying violence and repression by the privileged classes and the government once again to the front doors of the marginalized. This situation demonstrates the inefficiency of the penal system, and despite the fact that the government was the one to commit the error, “o preço é pago pela sociedade inteira. Longe de transformar criminosos em trabalhadores, nossas prisões fabricam novos criminosos e nos afundam em criminalidade maior. Triste é o destino de uma instituição que, quanto mais fracassada, mais necessária se torna” (Lima 119). However, even after all of the experiences that he had while in prison, Lima does not regret his participation in the Comando Vermelho as he sees it as a justifiable means of fighting back against a government that offered prisoners no other escape:

Uma coisa é certa: a população carcerária, majoritariamente jovem, não será recuperada se ficar trancafiada em celas, brutalizada. Tivemos razão em lutar contra isso. Orgulho-me de ter integrado o grupo que inaugurou e difundiu, nas prisões, o comportamento – não a organização – que se chamou depois Comando Vermelho. (Lima 121)

Even when his book was published and he found himself again imprisoned, he remembers his contact with members of the group that became known as the Comando Vermelho as a positive step toward humane treatment of prisoners on Ilha Grande.

The unforeseen alignment of the moment of the organization of crime with the rise of cocaine sales in Brazil and in turn the acquisition of sophisticated guns and other weaponry sparked and fanned the flame that has grown into a wildfire that is stamped

across the front page of the newspaper, encouraging stereotypes and sensationalist media. As Lima's account demonstrates in the battle of 400 officers against one criminal, the media was drawn into the favela to broadcast the violence that took place that day from the point of view of one from the upper classes of society. His perspective is important because popular media representations have not highlighted the circumstances through which such traffickers created their organization, nor the reason that such tactics were necessary at that moment in history. When the situation is not closely observed, the blame for violence naturally falls where the media places it, which in many cases is on the poor class, whether they are criminals or not – making the testimonial perspective invaluable because it tells the previously unpublished side of the story.

In the final pages of his account, Lima calls for changes in Brazil's legal and social system so that members of the poor class can be integrated into society in a way that will secure their right to equal opportunity in society:

É preciso rever todo esse sistema. A paz duradoura precisa ser construída, entre outras medidas, com uma anistia que preceda um processo de reintegração a uma realidade social renovada. Eu chamo a sociedade a assumir suas responsabilidades, criando as condições para que essas pessoas – milhares? milhões? – conquistem seu direito à vida. Que ainda me é legalmente negado. (122)

Throughout his testimony, Lima gives examples of the need for reform not only in the prison system but also in society as a whole so that the underprivileged class of which

he is a part can have equal access to justice, government assistance, and education. His first-hand account of life inside the prison on Ilha Grande during the military dictatorship in Brazil gives specific examples of the way that the right to protection and decent living conditions within the prison were denied to all criminals, the way that common prisoners were denied amnesty even though political prisoners who had committed the same crimes were freed, and the way that the media distorted reports of violent acts involving prisoners (incarcerated or fugitive) in a way that took the blame for the violent situation in the prison off of government and prison authorities, where Lima insists that it actually belongs. In a final attempt to make his readers consider his perspective of a favela resident long silenced by incarceration, Lima declares: “Ouçam a voz da prisão!” (134).

Chapter 2

Capão pecado: A Contemporary Marginal Voice from São Paulo

A literatura marginal se faz presente para representar a cultura de um povo, composto de minorias, mas em seu todo uma maioria.
(Ferréz *Literatura Marginal* 11)

Throughout the history of Brazilian literature the voice of the lower class has emerged slowly but has often been ignored or misunderstood. Several authors from the underprivileged class managed varying levels of recognition and success in literary careers at the end of the nineteenth century, but an authentic representation of the lower class still faced difficulties because of the strong social stigma dealing with race. In David Brookshaw's book, *Race and Color in Brazilian Literature*, he points out the fact that when the novel *A escrava Isaura* (1875) by Guimarães Rosa was published, the main character, Isaura, was portrayed as a white slave because there was still prejudice from society against a black hero in a novel: "For all the author's good intentions as an abolitionist, he could not endow a dark person with excellence, for this would have called into question Brazil's whole social and ethnic structure" (27). He also mentions the authors Cruz e Sousa and the great Machado de Assis to demonstrate how mulatto authors in the late 1800s dealt with the question of race and social status so that they could be accepted by upper classes: "Cruz e Sousa, like his lighter-skinned contemporaries Machado de Assis and Tobias Barreto, represents...a desire to cross the compartment line and make up for visual or physical characteristics through the perfection of intellect and artistic sensibility" (186). While this tactic was perhaps

necessary given the dynamics at play at the time in history when these authors were trying to build their careers, in the following century other voices from the lower class were heard that did not attempt intellectual perfection, but instead gave personal account of the life of the poor and a straightforward description of their marginalized environment.

After the door to the marginal voice was opened with the publication of Carolina Maria de Jesus' diary *Quarto de despejo* (1960) portraying her life in a favela in São Paulo, Paulo Lins later became a well-known marginal author with the publication of his book *Cidade de Deus* (1997) based on research he participated in with Alba Zaluar. In the wake of this example of marginal literature, the author Ferréz stepped onto the literary stage with the publication of his novel *Capão pecado* (2000), an account of life in one of São Paulo's favelas portrayed in the experiences of a young man named Rael and his struggle to lead an honest life in the midst of violence in his home in Capão Redondo. Like its predecessor, *Cidade de Deus* (1997), *Capão pecado* gives the account of life inside a favela, although the former takes place in Rio and the latter in São Paulo. However, as Outraversão (one of Ferréz's collaborators) points out in the introduction to the third section of the book, the lives of favela residents are quite similar, independent of the city they live in:

Periferia é tudo igual, não importa o lugar: zona leste, oeste, norte ou sul.

Não importa se é no Rio de Janeiro, em Minas Gerais, Brasília ou em São

Paulo. Enfim, seja lá qual for o lugar, sempre serão os mesmos, problemas

que desqualificam o povo + [mais] pobre, moradores de casas amontoadas umas em cima das outras. (89)

While *Capão pecado* is not necessarily a novelty in its content, it demonstrates marginal literature produced after the book *Cidade de Deus* was published, and gives the perspective of a different venue for gang and police violence. His contemporary representation of the reality of favela life openly addresses the residents' difficulties in avoiding the violence that exists around them, but also presents glimpses of hope for means of non-violent rebellion against the repression of upper social classes by producing authentic art and literature, his own work serving as an example.

The Marginal Voice in Literature

In the middle of the twentieth century Carolina Maria de Jesus's marginal literature emerged from a favela in São Paulo to describe the day-to-day life of members of the lower class. Although her success was brief, her published diaries opened a door to the voice of the favela in its true form. In her article "Brazil's Escritura da Exclusão e Testimonio," Rebecca J. Atencio points out the precedent that de Jesus set that contemporary marginal authors such as Ferréz have followed: "André du Rap, Jocenir, and Ferréz are far from being the first in Brazil to speak or write from the margins and exemplify a conflictual order...The Brazilian figure whose writing has most often been likened to testimonio is Carolina Maria de Jesus" (285). Fernando Paixão compares the testimonial work *Quarto de despejo* (1960) by de Jesus and *Capão pecado* (2000) by Ferréz to evaluate the changes that had taken place in marginal literature and São Paulo's

favelas themselves over half a century, and found that many of the themes from de Jesus' diary remained provoking and unfortunately still applicable in the twenty-first century (99).

While both examples of marginal literature present lives of poverty in the favelas of São Paulo, the moment in history in which each was written creates a clear division between them that demonstrates not only literary changes, but highlights the social changes that have occurred within Brazil. The way Ferréz presents his testimony of favela life reflects the much more violent conditions in which he lived in the year 2000 in comparison with Carolina Maria de Jesus in 1960: "Uma mera catadora de papéis já não cumpre função nesta ciranda perversa do novo século. A pobreza, quem diria, já não reside no estômago: está agora impregnada no sangue que chega ao coração e à cabeça" (Paixão 99). Themes such as social and economic inequality and political exclusion appear in Ferréz's work in an even more shocking way that they did in de Jesus' writing because of the added violence associated with favela residents' attempt to call the attention of other social classes to the changes that the voice of the favela is demanding.

Ferréz's bold tone in his writing likely has to do with the audience to which he was directing his presentation of life in the favelas:

[É] um autor que sabe estar sendo lido por um leitor 'burguês' e assume diante disso uma atitude coruscante, marcada por recursos de ênfase e do uso frequente de verbos valorativos. Seu narrador mesmo confunde-se

com esse universo linguístico, contaminando de indignação quase todas as páginas. (Paixão 99)

It is clear that Ferréz wrote his novels with a middle class audience in mind because he dedicated his book to those “que não foram alfabetizados e, portanto, não poderão ler esta obra” (Ferréz 11). The very fact that many of those who Ferréz writes about are not able to read his works highlights his accusation that Brazil’s social system does not offer equal opportunities to members of the poor class, a fact that will be demonstrated by Rael, the protagonist of *Capão pecado*. As he calls the attention of his readers of higher social classes, Ferréz becomes an important voice in unashamedly explaining the reality of modern-day life in São Paulo’s favelas and promoting pride in the very act of the voice of the favela being heard.

Ferréz explains that the purpose of marginal literature is to allow members of the poor class to create their own image of themselves: “Quem inventou o barato não separou entre literatura boa/feita com caneta de ouro e literatura ruim/escrita com carvão, a regra é só uma, mostrar as caras. Não somos o retrato, pelo contrário, mudamos o foco e tiramos nós mesmos a nossa foto” (*Literatura Marginal* 9). This description of literature about the marginalized written by the marginalized is an appropriate summary of the vision that this particular author has of what literature from the favelas should do – unapologetically show the faces of the favela and let residents build their own identity. Since *Capão pecado* is based on the personal experiences of the author growing up in the favela, it provides a type of authentic self-portrait and vision of the life of the poor class in general:

Ferréz's status as the author of a fictional rendering of life in the urban periphery would seem to preclude a comparison with the testimonial genre...Nevertheless, the fact that the author bases the story upon his own experience growing up in the Capão Redondo slum confers an almost autobiographical legitimacy to his text. (Atencio 283)

Since Ferréz is a member of the community that he writes about, he is equipped to criticize his community and denounce social injustice while at the same time take pride in his surroundings, which allows readers to understand the parts of the favela that are a positive part of the author's identity.

Ferréz sees marginal literature as one of the artistic vehicles that will allow favela residents to create a new identity for themselves that can then be projected to other social classes. In an interview published on his website, when asked "O que você fala para aqueles que dizem que o termo 'Literatura Marginal' estereotipa a literatura feita na periferia?" Ferréz responds: "Se eu ligasse para o que dizem estaria vendendo pão até hoje, faço literatura divergente, provocativa, com linguagem própria, que privilegia a margem, a perifa, então é L.M. [literatura marginal] mesmo" ("Escritor Ferréz"). This demonstrates that as an author he is more concerned with the authenticity of marginal works than the term itself, and that even though the interview raises an interesting question, he is not concerned so much in what his literature is called as he is in what it calls attention to: a perspective that he believes deserves its place in Brazilian literature and society just as the voices of all other classes and races.

In several instances Ferréz demands this right for the perspective of the poor class to be presented, with or without permission from society. In the introduction to his collection of marginal literature and poetry, he declares to his readers of higher social classes:

Sabe duma coisa, o mais louco é que não precisamos de sua legitimação, porque não batemos na porta para alguém abrir, nós arrombamos a porta e entramos. Sua negação não é novidade, você não entendeu? Não é o quanto vendemos, é o que falamos, não é por onde, nem como publicamos, é que sobrevivemos. (*Literatura Marginal* 10)

Without worrying about being accepted by the social classes that read his literature, Ferréz is able to speak openly about his reality and not worry about whom he might offend. After all the times that the marginalized had been silenced or ignored, he boldly replies: “Cala a boca, negro e pobre aqui não tem vez! Cala a boca! Cala a boca uma porra, agora a gente fala, agora a gente canta, e na moral agora a gente escreve” (9). Ferréz is adamant that the voice of the favela will be expressed in its own way, specifically in literature, possibly so that other social classes can understand this voice, but if not, then merely so the marginalized can find pride in the very act of writing and representing themselves.

In the interview published on his website, Ferréz was also asked the following question: “O que a Literatura Marginal faz que a literatura não consegue?” to which he responds: “Cativar, provar que é louco, que é gostoso ler, interpretar, escrever, que o bagulho é vida, que é nosso, que é de todo mundo e que você faz parte também”

("Escritor Ferréz"). Knowing that his readership would in large part consist of members of the middle class, this response is an example of the attempt to pull other members of society to a level at which they are eye-to-eye with the marginalized and are obligated to finally confront and acknowledge the reality of life in poor communities that surround them. With the last line of his preface to the collection *Literatura Marginal*, Ferréz boldly makes accomplices of all who would be introduced to the marginal world by reading his words, thus pulling them willingly or not into the crossfire: "Boa leitura, e muita paz se você merecê-la, senão, bem-vindo à guerra" (13). This invitation also applies to *Capão pecado* in which Ferréz's readers are not spared detailed descriptions of violence in *Capão pecado* because, as previously stated, Ferréz wants marginal literature to be completely authentic and unapologetic so that readers can understand the life of favela residents and see their strength and solidarity despite often violent circumstances.

One of the characteristics of marginal literature that reflects violence in examples such as *Cidade de Deus* and *Capão pecado* is the language with which they are written. In her article "Talking Bullets," Lúcia Nagib explores the way that violence has been portrayed through language, specifically citing examples from *Cidade de Deus*. She states: "The inventive use of slang, which verges on a dialect in its own right, results in an agile, precise, synthetic, and quick-fire language, which is highly expressive of contemporary Brazil" ("Talking Bullets" 240). This type of language helps to paint a true picture of the favelas while at the same time offering a type of aesthetic that sets it apart on the literary stage. In the case of *Capão pecado*, João Cezar de Castro Rocha

explains that language change is a symptom of other changes taking place in Brazilian society, and that such changes should be recognized and addressed: “Não se trata mais de negligenciar as diferenças, mas de evidenciá-las, recusando-se a improvável promessa de meio termo entre o pequeno mundo dos donos do poder e o crescente universo dos excluídos” (57). Ferréz feels a sense pride in taking ownership of the type of language found in his novels, which, as in *Cidade de Deus*, attempts to give a clearer description of the favelas because it becomes part of their marginal identity. He states: “E temos muito a proteger e a mostrar, temos nosso próprio vocabulário que é muito precioso, principalmente num país colonizado até os dias de hoje, onde a maioria não tem representatividade cultural e social” (*Literatura Marginal* 11). This passage reinforces the fact that Ferréz’s literature is not by any means trying to copy literature from higher social classes, but instead seeks to protect the true voice of the marginalized in its authentic expression.

In *Capão pecado*, not only do the characters involved in the plot speak in an authentic way, but even the narration is presented using a similar type of speech, once more placing emphasis on the fact that the story is being told about the marginalized by a member of their own social group: “The distance between the level of narration and that of the dialogues is minimal. In other words, much like the speech of the characters themselves, the third-person narration closely resembles colloquial, oral expression” (Atencio 284). The fact that the narrator’s language so closely resembles that of the characters in the book is a constant reminder to the reader that the story being presented is being told by a voice that is completely familiar with the world in which

the characters live and is not telling the story from any outside social, economic, or linguistic perspective. Paixão also comments on the way that the voice of the narrator takes sides with the characters in the book and thus presents the point of view that favela residents are at a clear social disadvantage:

Narrado em terceira pessoa, o livro de Ferréz toma corpo a partir do princípio de que deve “aderir” à miséria de seus personagens. Tomar o partido deles é o que lhe interessa, afirmando desse modo uma atitude participante e que não esconde o seu ponto de vista: metido numa vida em que só respira a violência, mortes e sangue, quase não sobram alternativas para o protagonista Rael, jovem que se deixa seduzir pela namorada de um traficante e mal consegue equilibrar-se no emprego. (99)

The plot of this book reveals an insider’s view of the favelas (especially for those attempting to lead honest lives), and although the language is an integral part of this representation, Ferréz comes to the following conclusion about the real importance of the book: “bom, [a linguagem marginal] fica para os estudiosos [sic], o que a gente faz é tentar explicar” (*Literatura Marginal* 12-13). Even though it is undeniable that the language used in marginal literature is different than that of other literary categories, it is mostly important in that it is an intrinsic part of the marginal identity that is being presented. What is said, and the fact that it is said at all, is even more important than the specific words that are used.

Capão pecado

Just as Paulo Lins' began his book *Cidade de Deus* with a poem, Ferréz's prefaces *Capão pecado* with the following text, which guides readers from literally any place or social class to slowly focus in on an either unknown or ignored speck on the map – Capão Redondo – the favela where the novel takes place:

Universo
Galáxias
Via-láctea
Sistema solar
Planeta Terra
Continente americano
América do Sul
Brasil
São Paulo
São Paulo
Zona Sul
Santo Amaro
Capão Redondo

Bem-vindos ao fundo do mundo (Ferréz 13)

Just as Ferréz zooms in on the community of Capão Redondo, he also focuses in on the protagonist Rael, whose experiences represent the greater collective experience of favela residents. Although the author is highlighting one character's story, the account can be expanded to represent a larger portion of Brazil's marginalized population, demonstrating a function of testimonial literature: "assumir um papel de mediação, instrumento de confronto, em que a experiência individual atua como fundamento para interpretar e discutir a experiência coletiva" (Ginzburg 52). In this way Ferréz uses the protagonist Rael to represent perhaps his own story as a resident of Capão Redondo as well as common experiences among all inhabitants of his favela.

When the novel is looked at from the perspective of a love story between Rael and his best friend's girlfriend, Paula, the story is not so different from a bourgeois novel except for the violence and poverty that surround the romance (Atencio 283). However, Ferréz's comment in the preface to the book prepares the reader to examine another interpretation that gives the work value as a representation of the image of the favela from within, because instead of being a member of the middle class, the protagonist is a marginal member of society and thus does not enjoy a happy ending to his story:

[A menina] é a culpada dos sonhos do menino terem ido para água abaixo, e o álcool completa o círculo de dor tão comum por aqui. A criança chora, o gato foge, ela desanima, e os sonhos acabam mais uma vez. O calor foi mais uma vez roubado do corpo – ele foi morto –, estava quase sem esperanças de ter um bom futuro, pois queria ter algo, mas estava sem dinheiro, numa área miserável onde todos cantam a mesma canção, que é a única coisa que alguém já fez exclusivamente para alguém daqui. (Ferréz 17-18)

The stark contrast between the well-known fairytale ending to the upper-class love story and the harsh reality of the lure and consequences of violence in the context of the favela reinforces the process of leading the reader to spiral down into a mysterious world that cannot rely on a Deus ex machina to magically change their reality and bring a good end. Paixão asks the same question that many readers may ask about Rael's harsh reality: "Afinal, que laços sociais restam aos miseráveis do Capão?" (99), to which

he responds using the text of the book itself: “Não temos muitas oportunidades por aqui, a não ser o tráfico, o roubo a banco, o futebol e o pagode” (160). As the plot of the book unfolds, the reader may not completely buy into this fatalistic approach, but certainly can understand more clearly how common violence is and how limited opportunities may seem.

Several details of Rael’s story serve as examples of the way that the happy-ending bourgeois story takes a sudden turn because of the marginal setting in which it takes place, as collaborator Mano Brown affirms: “Aqui as histórias de crime não têm romantismo e nem heróis” (Ferréz 24). In the first section of the book, Rael experiences the loss of two friends, Will and Dida, because they owed money at a *boca de fumo* (45). Rael’s mother was aware of the danger that these two friends posed to Rael, knowing that they were “correndo risco de vida, inclusive que lá em Paraisópolis eles tão com a cabeça valendo dinheiro,” and she was aware of the mentality of guilt by association that can put family members and even friends at risk in such situations. Shortly before Will and Dida are killed, Rael’s mother’s counsels him to avoid these friends and the drug trade because she is aware of the common outcome for anyone involved in trafficking in any way: “a encrenca toda foi armada porque eles se envolveram com as pedras, e cê sabe que desse tipo de droga ninguém sai vivo” (45). Before long, Rael sees a small crowd of people gathered together – an image he has come to associate with death, in this case, that of his friend Dida: “Rael corria e preferia que se tratasse do seu primeiro pensamento; mas não foi assim, Dida estava caído em frente à sua casa: estava de costas, sem o par de tênis e com uma enorme mancha de sangue nas costas. Rael se

abaixou, tocou seu rosto e começou a chorar” (49). Will is killed soon after, followed by even Maria Bolonhesa (Will and Dida’s mother), who was also brutally murdered (51). Violent events such as this included in the book that surround the love story between Paula and Rael reinforce the idea that they make up perhaps an equally large part of the life for the residents of Capão Redondo.

While violent acts are described throughout the book, the shocking change that takes place in Rael is tied to the fact that he falls in love with Paula, the girlfriend of his best friend, Matcherros. Paula works with Rael at the *metalúrgica* – a risky situation for Rael given his attraction to Paula and Matcherros’ capacity for violence: “Rael sempre se recordava das frases ditas pelos seus amigos. ‘Primeira lei da favela, parágrafo único: nunca cante a mina de um aliado, se não vai subir” (Ferréz 85). While Rael avoids participating in violence for most of the book despite the love triangle he is involved in, he is still painfully aware of the circumstances he lives in: “Rael chegou à conclusão mais óbvia: aqui é o inferno onde pagamos e estamos pagando, aqui é o inferno de algum outro lugar e desde o quilombo a gente paga, nada mudou” (73). At the same time that Rael arrives at this conclusion, he also experiences the overwhelming feeling that even honest attempts of positive action did not seem to do any good in Capão Redondo, which has laws of its own: “Rael não conseguiu rezar, pois no bairro a lei da sobrevivência é regida pelo pecado, o prazer dos pivetes em efetuar um disparo, a palavra revolução, a necessidade de ação, mais de duzentos mil revoltados que não estão enganados” (72). As the story goes on, the reader sees that his struggle to live an

honest life eventually falls apart and he succumbs to the violent influences around him when he sees that his good intentions leave him empty handed.

When Rael is offered a house near the *metalúrgica* by his boss, Seu Oscar, he finally confronts Matcheros and explains that he wants Paula to live with him there, to which Matcheros responds: “Da trairagem nem Jesus escapou” (Ferréz 156). These words ring true in Rael’s head when he returns home from work one evening to find that Paula has taken his son, Ramon, and all their belongings and left with Seu Oscar. When Seu Oscar is later spotted with Paula and Ramon, Rael realizes what had happened to the happy life that he had struggled so hard to build: “Finalmente ele tinha entendido tudo, a casa dos fundos da metalúrgica era um favor, mas não para ele, e sim para a amante do Seu Oscar” (165). Suddenly the protagonist that had described so many violent acts committed by others in the favela begins to participate in one himself, not for money, but to regain his own honor. The shocking experience is described in the following passage:

Seu Oscar desceu do carro e estava abrindo a primeira porta da Metalúrgica. Burgos estava do outro lado, Rael ia fazer por vingança, pela honra; Burgos ia fazer pela grana. Burgos o rendeu facilmente com uma pistola F.N. modelo 1903 calibre 9 mm, que fora desenhada para o exército Belga, o empurrou para dentro do escritório. Rael adentrou a metalúrgica e Seu Oscar suou frio quando o viu com uma calibre 12 nas mãos...Rael encostou a arma em sua cabeça e lembrou de Ramon...Rael se esqueceu de

Deus, de sua mãe e das coisas boas da vida, apertou o gatilho e fez um buraco de oito centímetros na cabeça de Seus Oscar. (165)

A neighbor hears the gunshot, sees Rael leave the *metalúrgica*, then calls the police and Rael is marked as a criminal for the first time in his life.

According to Paixão (and Rael himself, when he admits that in his favela, “a lei de sobrevivência é regida pelo pecado”), Rael was fighting a losing battle by trying to make his own life without being involved in violence and drugs: “A pobreza nas ruelas de Capão Redondo, como se pode deduzir, perdeu em inocência o que ganhou em barbárie. A Rael não resta outra opção...Na falta de relações sociais que garantam o mínimo de identidade pessoal, a justiça tem que ser feita com as próprias mãos, de forma bestial, sem piedade” (99). The final words of the book reinforce the concept of the dignity of holding to a calm, honest life – until circumstances make it necessary to react in another way: “Eu sempre procuro o bem, tá ligado? Mas se o mal vier, choque, que o Senhor tenha misericórdia” (Ferréz 172). Rael tried to earn an honest living and be faithful to Paula, but eventually he gave into the violence he had seen so much of to retaliate against the man he blamed for depriving him of his happy life. Ettore Finazi-Agrò offers an explanation for the way that being surrounded by violence can make it eventually seem like a normal form of retaliation: “Acho que se a violência representada chega, no fundo, a redefinir os nossos parâmetros éticos é porque ela continua sendo o inesperado habitando a nossa espera e apagando as nossas esperanças, tornando, aos poucos, normal aquilo que deveria, em princípio, ficar fora de toda norma humana” (80). Not only for the reader or television viewer of violence, but for Rael himself, who

grew up amidst violent acts, one eventually becomes somewhat accustomed to them and they do not take on the shocking image that they once did because they seem to be an inevitable part of life. For Rael, although he never intended to use violence to get what he wanted, it was a common solution in his environment and thus a seemingly obvious answer to his problem with Seu Oscar.

A Non-Violent Rebellion

There are several dialogues in the book that demonstrate the frustration of many favela residents on the subject of their lack of opportunities compared to those of members of higher social classes. In a conversation between two of Rael's friends, Narigaz and Matcheros, Narigaz comments, "Os playbas [sic] têm mais oportunidade, mas na minha opinião, acho que temos que vencê-los com nossa criatividade, tá ligado?" at which point he lists the names of residents of Capão Redondo and their artistic talents, including painters, rappers, soccer players, and artists (Ferréz 118). Even though he knows talented people in the favela, he also recognizes the fact that there are very few who actively try to make their situation better, so a better future still appears to be very far away: "quem tem o dom de ler um livro quem aqui você viu dizendo que tá tentando melhorar, que tá estudando em casa, que tá se aplicando? Ninguém, mano, pois pra sair no final de semana e beber todo mundo sai; mas pra estudar, aí é embaçado, e o futuro fica...bem mais pra frente daqui" (118-9). To this Matcheros responds: "Narigaz, se você parar pra pensar mesmo, você fica louco, por isso nem adiante mais fala, você fala, fala, e no final o cheio de querer é você, mas é como você

disse, o futuro fica mais pra frente, bem mais pra frente. Não é culpa do lugar, é da mente” (119). This comment points out that for favela residents, the key to a better future may not necessarily mean leaving the favela, but instead contributing to it in positive ways that will recreate a better image of the favela for both residents and outsiders, even though this may be a long, difficult battle – an observation that reclaims and recasts the whole image of the favela.

Despite the seemingly fatalistic side of life in Capão Redondo as demonstrated by the story of Rael, Ferréz and those he collaborated with to write small insertions at the beginning of each chapter point out the harsh reality of life in the favela, but are also themselves some of the very residents that are using their talents to make the most of their circumstances and even take pride in them. While the character Cebola expresses one side of the situation: “um pensamento surgiu e ele chorou pois, sabia que a realidade é muito triste, mas ela existe,” the book itself serves as an example that even though it is often a sad reality that exists in the favelas, the very fact that the story is being told is already a step in the right direction (Ferréz 137). Just before the last section of the book begins, collaborator Conceito Moral lists a few of the activities going on in the favelas that demonstrate the artistic potential that is there: “É aí que entram os movimentos alternativos: a leitura, o rap (que é um dos quatro elementos do Hip-Hop), e os projetos sociais que ajudam o povo da favela” (160). He describes this artistic and social movement as a means of revolutionizing the way the favelas are seen from the inside and outside without the use of violence: “O único jeito é crer em Deus, fazendo a revolução ideológica, montar formas de ataque, conseguindo espaço aos poucos, pois

temos força, sim, mano” (161). He shows complete confidence in his ideas because he understand the potential power in numbers: “Somos a maioria, é só usar nossas cabeças, estudando, nos informando, esperando a virada, e quando ela chegar, vamos dizer: Aí a favela, toma conta de ponta a ponta” (161). As demonstrated by his literary productions, Ferréz believes this revolution should come about through artistic instead of violent means so that favela residents take pride in their creative abilities and contribute to their communities and maybe even to society as a whole.

Although his book tells the story of a common destiny of favela residents that have not been able to change their circumstances through artistic means, Ferréz stands out as one who escaped from the vicious cycle and continues his mission to make the voice of the favela heard and appreciated. In the preface to *Capão pecado*, he compares the favela to a small tree that passersby pick leaves and branches off of, so a wooden gate is placed around it to protect it that at the same time almost blocks the tree from sight. He then makes the following comparison: “O homem que vive na periferia, quando resolve buscar o que lhe roubaram, é posto atrás das grades pelo sistema. Tentam proteger a sociedade dele, mas também escondem sua beleza” (Ferréz 15). While this hidden beauty may refer to artistic productions coming out of the favela, the book also reveals the beauty found in the people in the favela themselves that should not be overlooked.

To preface the first section of the book, Ferréz includes a short testimony by Mano Brown, a fellow resident of Capão Redondo, who explains: “Eu era bem pivetinho e já ligava o nome Capão Redondo a sofrimento, 80% dos primeiros

moradores, ou quase primeiros, eram nordestinos, analfabetos. Gente muito humilde, sofredora, que gosta da coisa certa” (23). Ferréz adds the perspective that in spite of the dangerous circumstances in which they live in Capão Redondo: “é com amor e carinho que criamos nossos filhos, sem nos darmos conta do local, dos amigos incertos e das coisas que injetam aqui, armas e drogas” (18). This perspective of the type of people that live in the favela shows that, despite their poverty, are very often loving, good, and supportive of one another – the beauty of solidarity that is often excluded from image of the favela.

Finazi-Agrò states that a difference between two groups found in Brazilian society (those that have nothing and those that have everything) is that among those that have nothing there is a: “estranha solidariedade, baseada numa força sem lei” (81). From his own experience, Rael gives a few examples of this type of love and solidarity, mostly in kind acts performed by his mother: “Sua mãe sempre lhe trazia café com leite na cama, e ele não sabia que essa era a época mais feliz de sua vida” (Ferréz 27). Later, on a cold night, Rael left the family’s blanket with his mother so she could have a more comfortable night’s sleep, but when he awoke he found that she in turn had put the blanket back on him: “Mais uma prova de amor de sua mãe, mais uma vez ela levantara de madrugada, o embrulhara com seu cobertor e ficara dormindo no frio” (101). These details support Ferréz’s statement that in the favelas there is also a lot of love, hope, and strong family ties, all of which continue to grow despite the violence. While violence should be recognized and understood as a part of life, beauty (whether it be found in

language itself, in art, or in solidarity found among the marginalized) should also be a focus in media produced both inside and outside of favelas.

As the dedication in the front cover states: “Este livro é dedicado...àqueles que sucumbiram à vontade de ter algo melhor, pois estavam cansados de viver na monotonia, e resolveram assim ter aquilo que a mídia clicou em suas mentes desde pequenos” (Ferréz 12). Whether this means that favela residents succumbed to trafficking or violence to have money or power in their lives, or those who fought to free themselves of poverty by honest means, Ferréz emphasizes the importance of the mentality that change is possible and can come from within the favelas themselves even if the rest of society refuses to participate. There are several parts of the book that point a finger directly at media produced outside of the favela and highlight the way that it affects favela residents and alienates them from the rest of society by showing them what they are not and what they do not have. The question then arises: “Qual será o lado real do monitor, o lado certo para se viver? Eles até tentam nos ludibriar, mas a realidade é um pouco diferente, e na TV a gente vê que a vida é muito bacana pra quem tem uma boa porcentagem da riqueza nacional” (17). The constant comparison between Brazil’s first-world (shown on television) and its third-world (found in the poverty of the favelas) can be detrimental to the positive identity that artists like Ferréz are trying to help favela residents make for themselves. He continues: “Toda uma nação está olhando para uma janela eletrônica; através dela está o passado manipulado, e o que ninguém vê é a porta que fica ao lado, a porta do futuro, que está trancada pela mediocridade dos nossos governantes” (18). His literary work then becomes an attempt

to direct the favela residents' attention to their own capacity for improvement instead of continuing to view images of either the upper-class life that they do not live, or violent images of their own surroundings that reinforce negative images of the favelas and prevent a better future from arriving sooner.

In his contributions to marginal literature, Ferréz hopes to further open the door to the authentic voice of Brazil's lower class, who make up a large part of the country and its culture, but that have been ignored: "Literatura de rua com sentido, sim, com um princípio, sim, e com um ideal, sim, trazer melhoras para o povo que constrói esse país mas não recebe sua parte" (*Literatura Marginal* 10). He continues, stating that the fight for space in literature is already underway, and that his goal is to make it so that current marginalized authors can be remembered by future generations: "Mas estamos na área, e já somos vários, estamos lutando pelo espaço para que no futuro os autores do gueto sejam também lembrados e eternizados, mostramos as várias faces da caneta que se faz presente na favela, e pra representar o grito do verdadeiro povo brasileiro, nada mais que os autênticos" (11). Once again, Ferréz emphasizes the importance in not hiding the reality of life in the favela because even though it can be unpleasant for members of higher social classes to face, favela residents do not need to remain silent, as they are a part of the true voice of Brazil.

While on one hand the violence that is shown in the news is a reality, as Ferréz's collaborator Negredo states (in collaboration com Ferréz): "O crime que é noticiado no rádio, jornal, televisão é sempre diretamente ligado à miséria. Por quê? Porque pondo os pés no chão, é bruta a nossa realidade" (Ferréz 133), there is still a sense among some

favela residents of revolution through non-violent means, as Ferréz attempts through literature. He declares: “Estamos na rua, loco, estamos na favela, no campo, no bar, nos viadutos, e somos marginais mas antes somos literatura, e isso vocês podem negar, podem fechar os olhos, virar as costas, mas, como já disse, continuaremos aqui, assim como o muro social invisível que divide este país” (*Literatura Marginal* 10). Paulo Lins (author of *Cidade de Deus*, 1997) reiterates the way that marginal literature brings to light things that have been willfully or unknowingly hidden for so long: “Ferréz traz à luz tudo aquilo que a sociedade colocou na sombra de modo natural, simples e cruel. Sua escrita vai revelando o que somos e escondemos de nós mesmos” (“Escritor Ferréz”). Favela residents’ literary and other artistic works can present residents’ talents to higher social classes, and even more importantly, reveal the creative abilities of favela residents to themselves and encourage their positive identity.

Ferréz’s effort to make the negative and positive sides of life in the favela known is rooted in his belief that the voice of the favela should be authentic and should call attention to both social problems and creative capabilities found in favelas. Although Carolina Maria de Jesus is often accredited with opening of the door to the voice of the favela, Paulo Lins literary work in *Cidade de Deus* (1997) forced the door open even further to create a space that Ferréz then took advantage of to present his own marginal voice to the rest of society. Ferréz’s writes specifically to denounce injustice to a middle and upper class audience, all the while wishing that more favela residents could read his description of the world that they live in together – a fact that further supports his accusations of an unjust and unequal society. His unapologetic representation of the

favela from within it offers an authentic description of not on the violence that takes place there, but the fact that solidarity, love, and beauty are also an integral part of the life of favela residents.

Atencio describes the new direction that Brazil's marginal voice is taking because of authors and artists like Ferréz: "At the very least, then, narratives such as... *Capão pecado* send a clarion message that Brazil's marginalized populations are no longer content with being written about and want to tell their own stories, challenging hegemonic discourses about the subaltern in Brazil" (286). As Ferréz himself declares, the marginalized are finding that they need not get permission from anyone for their voices to be presented, whether many or few hear them. The key lies in the importance of the creation of the representation itself, which will hopefully continue to be produced until it creates a more positive image of favelas and their residents in the eyes of all social classes.

Chapter 3

Notícias de uma guerra particular: The Voice of the War and the Crossfire in Brazilian Film

Beginning with films such as *Rio 40 Graus* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1955) and *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (Glauber Rocha, 1964) produced during the period in the history of Brazilian Cinema known as Cinema Novo, the focus shifted from the portrayal of the more developed part of the country to the hills, backlands, and favelas to highlight the poor class. Since the 1950s filmmakers have developed their portrayal of favelas to try to accurately depict and better understand life in poor communities. In her study of the connection between Brazilian cinema and society, Lúcia Nagib comments:

Indeed, films have provided Brazilians with not only an outlet for their dreams, even when there is little to dream about, but equally a means for getting to grips with their self-image, their inner turmoil, even when they find it difficult to recognize themselves in the mirror, given the extent to which they have been disfigured over the years. (*Brazil on Screen xi*)

As a visual medium, film has served as a quite literal mirror in which favela residents have often seen inaccurate images of themselves as members of the poor class. The documentary genre has been important in depicting favela residents because it allows the marginalized to be the ones appearing on screen to tell their own stories, allowing them to reconstruct their image and identity using their own voices. Even though film directors and editors still have the final say as to which dialogue is presented and its

sequence, their interview questions demonstrate the interest of upper class filmmakers in finally understanding the reality of life in the favela. While the voices presented in the documentary come directly from the favela, the fact that they are recorded by members of higher social classes shows that some attention is being paid by those outside the favela as to what is going on inside of it – an important step in the understanding of the favelas by all members of society.

While literature has also served as a vehicle for broadcasting the voice of the favela, Schollhammer explains that the portrayal of the reality of the favela in literature has its setbacks: “talvez o maior sintoma de sua fragilidade literária se possa perceber no fato de que [os] romances tenham encontrado maior sucesso em adaptações para cinema e televisão do que entre o público de leitores,” for example, the internationally successful film adaptation of Paulo Lins novel *Cidade de Deus* (2002) (34). The medium of film then becomes an important means of publicizing testimonial accounts of the marginalized because it often reaches a much wider audience than literature does – allowing the voice of the favela to have the chance to literally be heard by as big an audience as possible.

The documentary *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999) opens with the scene of police destroying the drugs they had confiscated in one month’s time from the favelas (which is generally anywhere between 200 kilos and 3 to 4 tons) and the following commentary: “A expansão do tráfico de drogas a partir da metade da década de 80 é diretamente responsável por um crescimento vertiginoso do número de homicídios. Uma pessoa morre a cada meia hora no Rio, 90% delas atingidas por bala de grosso

calibre.” This statistic opens the discussion that will take place throughout the documentary as to who is responsible for the startling amount of violence that takes place in Rio de Janeiro and why it continues to escalate. The immediate response of many viewers may be that favela residents are the principal perpetrators of the violence because of their heavy weaponry, and although the interviews presented in the documentary do in fact demonstrate that traffickers are well armed and capable of violence, there are compelling explanations for the violence that takes place in favelas, including police brutality and repression by the rest of society.

After many changes in the way filmmakers have represented the marginal members of Brazilian society on screen, in 1999 this documentary was released, presenting in interview form the first-hand accounts of the three groups dealing with the growing violence in favelas – police, traffickers, and other residents. A brief historical summary of the depiction of the marginalized in Brazilian film provides the background information necessary to understand the way that this documentary stands out as objective presentation of the extent to which the popular news media’s portrayal of this violence is correct or incorrect, as well as the explanation of who is being blamed for growing violence in Rio and who may actually be responsible for it.

Concerning the history of the favelas in Brazilian cinema, Ivana Bentes states: “The favelas in the film of the 1950s and 1960s were totally different. They were always the sites for idealized dreams of a beautiful and dignified poverty. The clichés of the ‘noble savage’ were applied to the ‘noble poor’” (129). This type of romanticism can be seen in films such as *Rio Zona Norte* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1957), and *Orfeu Negro*

(Marcel Camus, 1959) that introduced millions of foreigners to Brazilian culture, creating a connection between three concepts: “Brazilianness, blackness, and carnival” (Stam 167). Even though these films were created in an attempt to portray the favelas in a more realistic way, there was still an underlying element of romanticism that prevented the accurate portrayal of the reality of the life of favela residents. Nagib describes the meaning of the changes made in the development of the representation of the favela in Brazilian cinema:

The favela is currently going through its third historical stage. Up to the 1950s, the form through which the hills of Rio were represented in the sambas...and on the screen was, at its best, lyrical...In the past, they used to publicize an idea of purity and even privilege connected with the favela, for ‘those who live in the hills are close to heaven’...after they became overpopulated...and their doors were opened to violence and crime, another stage started...people started to think that living on the hills was close to hell. In the 1990s, a new stage began, the fight for affirmation and for the pride of being a favela inhabitant, even if one has to live day by day with its adversities. (“Death on the beach” 162)

Notícias de uma guerra particular (1999) is an example of the most recent stage in the representation of the favela because it openly discusses the adversities currently faced by favela residents (including drug trafficking and police violence) and the part that these adversities play in their struggle for pride and recognition.

Following the documentary's release, *Cidade de Deus* (2002), a film based on Paulo Lins' book by the same name, was also produced and became "Brazilian cinema's greatest international success of all time" (Nagib *Brazil on Screen* xxii). Nagib suggests that the novel *Cidade de Deus*'s narrative structure, which included authentic language used in the favelas, was successfully transferred to the film genre: "The book's language...is turned, in the film, into realistic acting and quick-fire editing to describe the inferno of crime that interrupted the *favela*'s 'golden age' of samba and solidarity" (xxii). However, the film *Cidade de Deus* still involved actors (even though many came from the favela), special effects, and other cinematographic elements and thus cannot be considered a completely authentic depiction of life in the favela: "given that the film is not a documentary, and that the actors are not nor could they ever be the gangsters they portray, its realist aspect is clearly not due to a mere attempt at copying reality" (244). Even though the film *Cidade de Deus* put the favela on the international stage, it was not the first, nor the closest that Brazilian film has come to portraying the favela using only its own voice. On the other hand, *Notícias de uma guerra particular* is a completely unscripted and unrehearsed dose of reality, although not unconstructed or unedited. Even though interview questions were prepared by film directors and the clips shown were chosen and arranged by editors, favela residents were filmed in the place where they actually live and were able to answer the interview questions in an honest way. This documentary demonstrates the progress of contemporary Brazilian cinema in the attempt to portray life in the favela as it really is, with its authentic speech, noises, solidarity, and violence, and serves not only to make upper class viewers aware of the

sources of the violence that exists so close to their own homes, but also to awaken the favela residents to their own feeling of power and identity.

The documentary, filmed under the direction of Kátia Lund and João Moreira Salles, shows the day-to-day life of those involved in the world of the favela Santa Marta by presenting the viewpoint of the three important groups that are caught up in the violence that takes place in the area – police, drug traffickers, and honest favela residents. Just as marginal literature made the shift from a vertical representation in which members of other social classes attempted to describe the life of favela inhabitants to a horizontal representation in which they spoke for themselves, Brazilian cinema followed a similar pattern when favela residents themselves became the ones to offer the description of life in a poor community:

A presença da violência urbana nos meios de comunicação de massa e seus produtos têm percorrido, nas últimas duas décadas, uma escala ascendente. Antes restrita às páginas policiais dos jornais sensacionalistas, a violência está hoje presente de forma horizontal em praticamente todos os produtos midiáticos. Nessa direção, a produção de documentários brasileiros dos últimos anos tem tomado como personagens principais pessoas que estejam diretamente vinculadas a tal contexto, sejam como agente sejam como vítima, como mostra o documentário *Notícias de uma guerra particular*. (Souza 115)

By presenting testimonies of actual favela residents, the documentary avoids any fictional elements such as the retelling of first-hand accounts (as in the book *Cidade de*

Deus) or the use of actors (as in the film), even though both of these techniques have value in presenting information in a captivating way.

The documentary is valuable in that it offers an unbiased opinion about the causes and effects of the struggle for drugs, guns, money, and power (and those caught in the crossfire) in the favelas and presents real problems faced by all groups involved. The completely unscripted first-hand accounts of the everyday life in the favela offered a realistic portrayal of this mysterious world. Presenting an unbiased approach, the documentary allows for what each group sees as reality to be explained without favoring one side over another: “Não faz apologia de nada, nem fica do lado de ninguém, apenas escancara a situação social do Rio de Janeiro” (Surian 230). This objective approach allows the viewer to be presented the opinions of all groups involved and arrive at their own conclusions about the situation and their beliefs of the prejudices and stereotypes that surround those participating in Rio’s private war.

Police Presence in Favelas

In the beginning of the documentary, Captain Pimentel of the Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais, or BOPE, represents the perspective of the police to explain the violence in the favelas. According to Pimentel, the enemy in the war is the trafficker causing violence in the favela (whether in disputes with other traffickers or with police officers) as well as in the streets of the surrounding neighborhoods of upper class residents. In a way, Pimentel is correct in stating that heavily armed traffickers are responsible for a lot of violence both in disputes with rival gangs and with police. For

example, a few traffickers interviewed express satisfaction in violence, especially directed toward police officers, who have a reputation for brutality among favela residents. In his interview, one trafficker admits that when he and other gang members are able to kill police officers that climb the hills into the favela they sometimes shoot off fireworks and celebrate, and another expresses his indifference to violent acts that he has committed. When Carlinhos (age 16) is asked about how he felt when he killed for the first time at age eleven, he responds: "Me senti normal. Que nem tou aqui agora" (*Notícias*). Perhaps because of the violence that youth see around them and perhaps because of the media portrayal of the favelas that they live in, youth in trafficking seem to have become desensitized to violence, accepting their lifestyle as something necessary or perhaps even natural.

A resident, Janete, mentions that the negative side to having weapons in the hands of traffickers in the favela is that although they often protect the favela from rival gangs or police, when they need to make a point about who is in charge, they are capable of terrible violence:

O lado cruel das arma [sic] é que quando eles tem que cobrar, seja de pessoa lá de baixo, seja da nossa comunidade, eles não vão medir...Se eles puderem matar e esquartejar e cortar e colocar lá pra todo mundo ver como exemplo, pra ninguém vacilar porque se não vai pra vala, eles são capazes disso. (*Notícias*)

However, Janete herself later argues that the traffickers often help residents of the favela, in her case financially, so the quote above represents a very small portion of the

documentary in which residents that are not part of the drug trafficking movement criticize those that are. Instead, most criticism is directed toward the police and other government institutions. For example, two incarcerated traffickers expressed their resentment toward the police, Leandro because from his experience “a polícia só bate nas pessoas,” and Maurinho because after he had already been arrested a police officer shot him in the foot before he was taken to prison. A female favela resident also explains that when the police come into the favela and arrest a trafficker, they will often lead him further up the hill instead of taking him down to the street where he can be taken to prison, which means that the police often come with the intention to kill instead of arrest. To protect the arrested, family members follow the police officers up the hill to make sure that they are not given the chance to be alone with the trafficker and potentially beat or kill him.

Captain Pimentel explains that being a member of the BOPE makes him feel invincible and that he is proud to be, in his opinion, a member of one of the most well trained forces in guerrilla warfare in the world. After explaining that the only difference between himself and any soldier going into battle is that he returns to his own home every night, he is asked the same question previously presented to the young trafficker Carlinhos about how he feels when he kills someone, to which he responds: "A sensação é de dever cumprido. Se dissesse que não durmo à noite, mentira" (*Notícias*). He later comments that his job is never ending because no matter how many drugs and weapons the police confiscate or how many traffickers they kill, there are always more ready to join and violence will continue. Although Pimentel's seemingly callous attitude toward

the favelas in general could be attributed, in part, to the fact that violence and death have become a part of his day-to-day life, he seems to welcome the chance to go into battle against traffickers despite what their reasons for illegal activity may be, and his interview is tinged with an air of superiority. In all his description of the BOPE and their mission, he never admits to fault on the part of police officers, government, or upper classes for giving favela residents a reason to take matters into their own hands.

Several favela residents, Luanda, Adão, and Janete also give their opinion about the feelings that those not involved in trafficking have about the presence of the police in their communities. Janete explains that the positive side of the introduction of automatic weapons in the favela is that it used to be common for police to force their way into people's homes, take what they wanted, and inspire fear in residents, but since traffickers became well-armed and can defend the favela against police violence, officers now enter favelas more cautiously. As the audience watches the documentary they can see that the blame for violence cannot simply be placed on favela residents whether they are traffickers or not, because, "O grande vilão aqui é a nação enquanto totalidade...é o lado institucional do país que aparece acusado" (Ramos 157). Not only do residents accuse police of being corrupt and violent toward honest residents as well as traffickers, but they also accuse the government and privileged classes of society for not allowing them equal opportunity in the country's prosperity, which makes their acts of violence come across as a fight for survival instead of rebellion for the sake of rebellion.

Trafficking to Survive

As many traffickers feel abandoned and forgotten by their government, some argue that their illegal activities involving drugs, theft, and weapons are merely means for them to take by force what society will not give them the opportunity to gain in an honest way. Bentes explains the mental and emotional state of these ignored people:

The favelas and the outskirts of the cities were the settings of important Brazilian films in the late 1950s and early 1960s...[they are] both real and symbolic lands which to a large degree invoke Brazilian imagery; they are lands in crisis, where desperate or rebellious characters live or wander; they are signs of a revolution to come or of a failed modernity... [people] become slum-dwellers and marginalized, “ignorant” and “depoliticized”, but they are also primitive rebels and revolutionaries, capable of radical change. (121)

In these cases in which modernity has failed in its obligation to integrate the poor into society, the fact that some traffickers think that they have nothing to lose makes the situation even harder to remedy, especially when viable and profitable alternatives are few, if any. Young children often enter trafficking without fear of losing their lives because their it appears to be a natural way to provide the necessities of life (as well as a little power and recognition): “Nessa luta entre possibilidades, alguns jovens preferem o poder e a fama, embora curtos, e o dinheiro, embora marcado” (*Zaluar Condomínio do diabo* 10). When two young traffickers were interviewed about their first missions, Lico (age 13) smiles and replies, “foi legal...fiquei vendendo [drogas],” and Leandro (age 14)

tells of his first street theft and the desire that it gave him to rob again. When the interviewer points out that they are at risk to die young because of what they are involved in, Lico callously reminds viewers that “*todos vão morrer um dia,*” demonstrating the way that many traffickers view drugs as a means to at least have money, food, and clothing during their lives, even though it may mean that their lives are short (*Notícias*).

The sad reality of the choice between becoming a trafficker or a an honest worker is that it is difficult to offer enticing alternatives to making a living through trafficking because otherwise the amount of work that goes into earning money is overwhelming and compensation is meager. In an interview with MV Bill, a rap singer and youth activist from Rio, he somberly explains:

It breaks my heart to say this, but crime nowadays has tragically become a great choice for those who are born with no prospects. I am not going to be hypocritical and say the opposite...I have difficulty saying to someone “Get out of the drug traffic” –because I don’t have anything better to offer. (Perlman *Favela 177*)

A young incarcerated trafficker stated that when he got out of prison he intended to return to the favela and continue trafficking because he liked his life the way it was in the favela. Although it may be hard to believe that anyone would not only agree to take part in such a dangerous lifestyle but do so happily, the documentary presents several reasons why the life of a trafficker in the favela may be desirable aside from perhaps being necessary to earn money to survive. Community leader Itamar Silva explains in

his interview that youth are often lured into drug trafficking because they see it as a means of gaining the respect and recognition that they seek. He gives the example that youth often see stories in the newspaper about young, armed boys that confront police and they long for the pride and power they think that type of life will give them over a society that does not recognize their worth (*Notícias*). A trafficker supports this statement, admitting that as a part of the drug trade he feels like the “*dono do mundo*,” and even residents see the way that armed traffickers get all the attention from women in the favela because they are powerful figures in the community, making trafficking even more enticing for young boys in the favela.

Perhaps the main representative of traffickers in the documentary, Adriano (age 29), explains that his acts of violence are not necessarily committed out of the desire to be destructive and rebellious, but that he is merely trying to survive, support himself, and have the type of life he wants and feels he deserves as a member of society. While masked to hide his identity and protect himself, he explains that there were several reasons that he joined a gang:

Se eu roubo, se eu já roubei, não foi pra cheirar cocaína. Se eu fiz, foi porque eu tive que comprar primeiramente alimentação, que era comida, que eu não posso morrer de fome. Segundo era pra ajudar minha família.

Terceiro era dinheiro pra eu me manter, pra andar arrumado. (*Notícias*)

Aside from the first two reasons Adriano gives for entering trafficking that deal with survival, Perlman explains in further detail this last reason given for entering into trafficking – the lure of the image that is associated with traffickers as they seem are

able to have highly coveted material goods: “Their role models have such prestigious items as motorcycles, gold chains and rings, designer shirts and shoes, and unending supplies of gifts for the most desirable young women in the community’ (*Favela* 176). It is not too difficult to understand how the easy money that comes from drug trafficking makes the practice enticing, especially with the contrast of the long hours and low pay that comes with the honest jobs of other favela residents. Adriano’s explanation of the reasons behind his acts of violence cast a new light on the image of what is taking place in favelas because his top priority is not power or intimidation, but family and meeting their basic needs, which may catch viewers by surprise and help them understand that although there is a lot of violence in favelas, in some cases it could be considered justified and motivated by noble intentions.

Adriano makes a comment that gives the viewer a glimpse into another complicated relationship that exists within the favela – that between traffickers and residents. He explains that aside from helping his family, he feels a certain obligation to help the residents of his own favela, either to protect them from criminals from other favelas or to help them financially since the government fails to assist them in this regard, reinforcing his previous statement that if he commits violent acts, he does it at least in part to help those around him. To prove that a somewhat cooperative relationship actually does exist between traffickers and residents, Janete gives the example of a time when she needed to fill a prescription for her daughter but did not have the money, so she asked the traffickers for help took care of it and quickly brought her the needed medicine. This helps viewers to understand that even though residents

may oppose the violence caused by traffickers within the favelas, they prefer them to the police because in many cases they are able to rely on traffickers for help, and in the common battle of all favela residents against social inequality, they feel a certain obligation to support one another. Considering the point of view of traffickers and residents, it becomes more difficult for the viewer to know where to place the blame for the violence that they see on television and in the newspapers because it is not only favela residents that admit the difficulty in finding a way to survive without somehow depending of trafficking whether it be as a participant, like Adriano, or a possible beneficiary, like Janete.

Surprisingly, a somewhat understanding view of the life of traffickers comes from Hélio Luz, the Chief of Police in Rio de Janeiro, who reaffirms the logic behind the mentality of traffickers by bringing of the question of the difficulty in earning decent wages as an honest worker. He explains: “Se eu conseguir um emprego, eu vou ter que trabalhar doze, oito horas por dia para ganhar R\$ 112,00. De repente, né? Eu me encaixo no tráfico, eu ganho R\$ 300,00 por semana. É negócio...Só não é negócio pra quem nunca...foi desempregado, pra quem nunca passou fome” (*Notícias*). He also understands what youth from the favelas are up against in terms of being rejected by society because of their living conditions: “Inseridos num contexto em que as oportunidades de inserção social são cada vez menores, o jovem do morro ou da favela vê no tráfico a chance de suprir as suas necessidades básicas como alimentação, medicamentos ou vestuário” (*Notícias*). His perspective is very different from that of Captain Pimentel because he acknowledges the difficult situation that favela residents

face and even openly admits that the police can be blamed for a portion of the violence that takes place.

According to Alves & Evanson, the theoretical structure of the Brazilian police force may be sound, but there is a huge rift between what the officers are theoretically supposed to do as opposed to what they actually do when they go on duty. In their interview with a public security expert in August, 2008, these researchers were told: “We have to have good training courses that are practical, from real life and not disconnected from real life: how to arrest a bandido, how to question a prostitute or an older person. But the principle is oversight...The police can go out on the street and do what they want” (158). This lack of organization and rigid protocol allow for police corruption to continue despite its obvious presence in the favelas, and police corruption allows for continued violence with traffickers as well as continued casualties and mistreatment toward favela residents. Chief Luz validates this accusation as he confirms police corruption in the city: “[Ele] afirma ser a polícia corrupta e que a repressão serve apenas para manter uma sociedade injusta” (*Notícias*). Souza clarifies that the corruption that Luz speaks of includes the selling of weapons by state officials to traffickers, which can then be used in disputes against rival gangs or even used against police officers (128).

The Crossfire

In the war that rages in the favelas, the peaceful residents are caught in the crossfire of two different battles, a situation complicated by the fact that they are

theoretically supposed to abide by the laws of two opposing groups: “Os favelados, em particular, se veem entre dois fogos: a violência ilegal dos traficantes e a violência oficial das forças policiais” (Leeds 235). The relationship developed between police and traffickers around drugs and gun trade gives rise to a paradoxical situation in that those who should be protecting the people have become contributors to the violence in favelas. Chief Luz confesses that the police department may be failing to fulfill its duty in the eyes of the poor class as police protections seems to be a privilege of the upper classes: “Eu faço política de repressão. Em benefício do Estado pra proteção do Estado. A polícia foi feita pra manter a segurança do Estado, né. A segurança da elite...É manter a favela sob controle” (*Notícias*). This blatant statement of purpose sets the stage for the understanding of the complicated relationship between police officers and favela residents as it proves that residents have been labeled as a threat rather than as citizens with the rights to be protected by their city’s police force.

While Chief Luz’s confession that his work is one of repression of the lower class certainly applies to the current levels of violence in favelas, it is not a new scenario. Alves & Evanson describe the important moment in which the organization and original purpose of the police department were put aside, giving rise to the sense of fear and repression that the poor class have towards law enforcement officers even today. They suggest that it was during the time of the military dictatorship in Brazil that the role of the police changed: “the dictatorship in effect kidnapped the police for its own purposes and did away with any notion of neighborhood police forces. The main tasks of the police were to discourage and suppress opposition and to protect the regime

rather than to safeguard the people” (118). In the decades since the 1980s when the military dictatorship ended the police have turned from capturing political prisoners to capturing criminals involved in the organized crime of drug trafficking. During this time “The state police forces...have ended up killing more people, including many innocent people, than drug traffickers. This explains why favela residents almost always say that, while they do not like drug traffickers, they like the police even less” (117). To confirm this proposition, in the documentary a child is asked if favela residents trust the police or traffickers more, to which the young girl quickly responds that most are on the side of traffickers (*Notícias*).

Donna M. Goldstein adds her conclusions about the difficult position that residents find themselves in caught between the laws of the country as opposed to the laws of the favela. She found that the police often treat favela residents as criminals simply on the basis that they are poor and live in marginal communities. She explains:

Most residents are not involved in the trafficking or in any other illegal pursuits. The residents do, however, have to cope with the gangs’ presence and with the absence of the rule of law, which is inextricably tied to the police’s routine treatment of the poor as criminals. This process is cyclical. The presence of gangs in the favelas has provided legal and moral justification for the government’s use of excessive force...The government, backed by popular sentiment, attempts to capture the traffickers and to return these neighborhoods to the state. From the perspective of residents,

however, the prospect of being returned to the state is not necessarily any more attractive than remaining under the control of the gangs. (180-1)

Thus, while residents' living conditions are far from ideal, they are trapped between a bad situation and a worse one, which is why they have entered into unwritten agreements with the traffickers so as to have some sort of protection and assistance that is not offered to them by the rest of society.

This somewhat positive representation of traffickers helps outsiders understand the difficult position that favela residents are in as they have come to trust the protection of the traffickers more than the trust the police. Zaluar explains the dependence that traffickers and other residents have on each other as they are all inhabitants of a marginal community:

São [os traficantes] que efetivamente impedem a entrada de outros bandidos, pivetes, ladrões ou estupradores que não só ameaçariam a segurança dos trabalhadores como manchariam a honra e a dignidade dos moradores daquele local...Um bandido 'formado' não mexe com o trabalhador de sua área, mas o respeita e o defende nesse vácuo deixado por uma ação policial e judiciária ineficiente e perversa. É precisamente isso que cria a simbiose entre eles, esse infeliz mas necessário casamento.

(Zaluar *A máquina* 138)

However, as the last phrase of this quotation reveals, even though favela residents have learned to build a cooperative relationship as they can with traffickers for their own safety, this does not necessarily mean that they support the way that the traffickers

maintain their power. This complicated situation is the only thing that offers some sort of justice to favela residents, who may have different moral code than traffickers but have developed a somewhat cooperative relationship with so that both groups can go about their business in the best way possible, as difficult as it still may be.

Perhaps the most compelling point of view presented in the documentary is that of the favela residents that are merely trying to dodge the stray bullets in the war between traffickers and police officers: “The testimony of community residents was of paramount importance. Media reporting largely looks at warfare between police and drug gangs through a lens of the state repressing and killing bandidos. Favela residents have become double casualties in this story” (Alves & Evanson 4). Favela residents are caught in the crossfire in two specific ways – first in a literal sense as they try to avoid the use of weapons, and secondly in the sense that because of the portrayal in the media, favelas are seen as a place solely as a place for criminals and violence, which is not only a false accusation, but also greatly complicates the process of trying to gain support from members of the upper classes.

The popular image of the favelas carries with it many stereotypes that come because of the drug trafficking and high homicide rates as mentioned in the opening commentary of the documentary, so the favela residents also must deal with discrimination from other members of society. *Notícias de uma guerra particular* combats some negative stereotypes of favelas because it explains why those that are involved in trafficking have chosen to do so, but also presents the story of favela residents that do not wish to be involved in it in any way:

Temos um trajeto vídeo-cinematográfico argumentativo, narrativo e artístico, mediante a sequência por associações de depoimentos de diferentes sujeitos. Estes, pertencentes a um universo sócio-cultural específico e determinado, em uma interação sobre a violência urbana, revelando com total credibilidade, suas participações neste contexto.

(Surian 231)

One of the representatives of favela residents that appears in the documentary and takes no part in trafficking is Hilda, a hardworking woman who wakes up every day at 2:30 a.m. to deliver newspapers before returning home to get to her kids to and from school, cook meals, and take care of the house. Even though she works so much that she only gets a few hours of sleep every night, she expresses her satisfaction in setting a positive example for her children and encouraging them to attend school and be successful by honest means so that they do not end up like other children she sees around her that enter the dangerous world of drug trafficking (*Notícias*).

Hilda's determination to earn an honest living as well as take care of her home and children represents a view of the favela that is often ignored, no matter how common it is. Researchers Alves & Evanson offer a perhaps shocking statistic that proves that the level of violence in the favela is disproportionate to the actual percentage of residents involved: "According to social science research, fewer than 1 percent of favela residents belong to drug gangs or engage in violent crime. The testimony [of the residents] was therefore important in combating perceptions that residents have somehow gone over to the side of the bandidos" (4-5). This statistic calls

for a more in-depth look at the lives of favela residents so that their voices may be heard and their perspective can be presented, without the bias or exaggeration of media, which in most cases merely propagates the long-established stereotypes. Even though it cannot be denied that there are criminals (and violent ones at that) living in the favelas, they are not the majority but unfortunately are the group that calls the most attention to the favela and therefore has become its representative in popular news media.

Despite the way that residents of the favelas are often indiscriminately lumped in with traffickers even though they do not participate in any way in the trade, many residents are often discriminated against simply because of where they live. Perlman described the way that the media plays a large part in this type of stigmatization: “Not a day passes when Roberto Marinho’s media empire, Rede Globo, does not add to the panic over safety and security, whipping up public sentiment against the ‘bandidos’ who are often conflated with law-abiding, hard-working favela residents” (*Favela* 185). The unfortunate consequences of this representation is that it turns the situation into a type of self-fulfilling prophecy because of the way that the rest of society learns to treat all favela residents as traffickers, and even though most of them are not, it still makes it very difficult for them to get honest jobs: “No one wants to let favela residents into their home or shop or office – it’s ‘just too dangerous.’ The cycle is self-reinforcing, since the fewer jobs there are, the stronger the temptation to enter the traffic” (185). The fact that in many cases favela residents cannot find stable work outside of the favela simply because of their address proves once again the repercussions of the representation of

the favelas presented by the media – that all living in the favela are criminals, or at the very least, not hardworking or trustworthy – which is simply not true.

Even though Chief Luz offers a somewhat understanding view of favela residents that turn to drug trafficking, neither he nor Captain Pimentel speak of the consequences that rival gang and police violence have on the other favela residents. The fact that those representing the police do not discuss this third group represented in the documentary reinforces the fact that perhaps they still see the favelas as places where most residents are armed and violent, which is demonstrated by their indiscriminate violence toward favela residents, whether they are proven to be involved with traffickers or not. Even though this documentary presents the first-hand accounts of police, traffickers, and honest favela residents, it appears that the focus is still placed on the two groups at war – police officers and traffickers – and the voice of honest residents makes up a smaller portion of the film. When favela violence is discussed, the most compelling testimonies may be the ones from people who do not participate in violence but are constant witnesses and victims of it, whether by stray bullets or experiencing the death of friends and family members at the hands of traffickers or police.

The various perspectives given in the documentary, especially those of favela residents, explain in a detailed way the web of complications caused by both traffickers and police officers that make the problem of violence in the favelas hard to resolve, but more importantly, offer the perspective that in spite of stereotypes, the blame for the violence does not lie with one group of people, and does not include all members of the

favela as is commonly portrayed in the media. In the words of Souza, this documentary created by Salles and Lund, was made at an important time, at the height of trafficking: “revelando a urgência da discussão dessa temática no campo audiovisual. Sendo assim, *Notícias...* funciona como uma espécie de ‘abre-alas’ para que outros documentários pudessem mais adiante abordar questões relativas à violência urbana” (115). Among other documentaries, an important successor of *Notícias de uma guerra particular* is the film *Cidade de Deus*, which had a purpose similar to that of the documentary – an attempt to show the reality of the marginalized living in the favelas. In her article, “*Cidade de Deus*’ promove turismo no inferno,” Bentes explains the importance of the realistic and fair portrayal of the marginalized in film, while at the same time cautioning against the inadvertent reinforcement of stereotypes:

É claro que os discursos “descritivos” sobre a pobreza (no cinema, TV, vídeo) podem funcionar tanto como reforço dos estereótipos quanto abertura para uma discussão mais ampla e complexa em que a pobreza não seja vista somente como “risco” e “ameaça” social em si. Esse talvez seja o viés político, extracinematográfico que o filme pode provocar.

(“Turismo no inferno”)

After a long history of misrepresentation in Brazilian film, *Notícias de uma guerra particular* presents first-hand accounts of several distinct and often contradicting perspectives on the causes of the violence that currently exists in the favelas with the hope that when all arguments are presented that some stereotypes of favela residents can be dispelled.

Raquel de Medeiros Marcato analyzed *Cidade de Deus* in terms of the possible reinforcement of stereotypes and concluded that while the film may portray the actions considered consequences, there are not motives offered to explain the reason that trafficking is appealing to some favela residents: "Since the things that are lacking (housing, education, food, a national health service) are not made evident in the film, the incentives to become a drug dealer, a criminal...aren't made explicit, and neither does the film provide a compelling reason for why things should be as they are" (90). On the other hand, in *Notícias de uma guerra particular*, these reasons are explained in detail and from different points of view, solidifying the validity of the documentary as a means of portraying perceived reality from different angles.

The final scene of the documentary leaves the audience with a feeling of urgency after they have seen the reality of the favelas and thus become accomplices in it, making them responsible, in a way, for the information that they have received:

O final do filme é simbólico. Apresenta-se uma sequência de nomes, de traficantes, policiais e meninos de rua mortos, onde as letras se sobrepõem, até não mais haver espaço, ocupando toda a tela, até ficar negra...De acordo com o diretor João Salles, na faixa comentada do DVD *Notícias de uma guerra particular*, o fim assume um desencanto. O documentário não propõe e nem dá nenhuma solução ao problema, pelo contrário, é cético sobre a situação...reflete o resultado da nossa estrutura social, no tocante é violência e ineficiência do sistema de segurança

pública do país, fazendo com que o espectador aprofunde a reflexão sobre as questões sociais, hoje existentes. (Surian 232)

Although the documentary does not offer solutions to the social problems that exist, it serves as a revelation of the consequences of these problems that the government and society have not yet addressed in a constructive way. The fact that it presents the raw reality of the conflict between favela residents (including traffickers) and police to viewers of all social classes opens the door for understanding encourages viewers to reflect on social problems in hopes that understanding will eventually lead to a solution.

A current and pressing question in Brazilian cinema is one of explaining the reality of the social problems between classes, which *Notícias de uma guerra particular* attempts to present. Through the testimonies of police, traffickers, and honest, hardworking favela residents, the viewer is presented with the arguments of the three sides and to new suggestions as to who is responsible for growing amounts of violence and the reasons behind it, thus becoming an accomplice and a judge to reevaluate stereotypes often presented in popular media that the favelas are merely criminal hideouts and sources of the violence in Rio's society. If the marginalized are portrayed in a way that provokes discomfort to the audience so that they feel pressure to address social problems, then this type of filmmaking will be a step in the right direction in the long journey toward a solution that begins with accurate representation and understanding.

Conclusions

In the discussion of the representation of favela violence and its perpetrators, the question arises of who is speaking for whom and how this affects the interpretation of the presented portrayal. *Quatrocentros contra um: Uma história do Comando Vermelho* (1991), *Capão pecado* (2000), and *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999) do not deny the existence of high levels of violence in favelas, but serve as examples of testimonies of members of the marginalized community sharing their perspective on the causes of the violence that takes place. While an outside perspective presented by popular news media may rightfully include stories of violent acts committed in poor communities, such stories are often sensationalized and place the blame on the favela residents, which encourages stereotypes and prejudice. Testimonial accounts of favela residents are essential in understanding the chaos surrounding drug and weapons trade because the marginalized are able to explain that they are the victims of a discriminatory social structure and educational, economic, and political inequality and that illegal activity is a means to combat these injustices.

Since it is clear that violence exists in favelas, the question then turns to the reasons behind it and the ability (or lack thereof) of people explaining those reasons to offer an authentic explanation. Since only favela residents actually live amidst the violence that is presented in the media they are the only ones who can give a completely accurate representation of it, but unfortunately the voice of the lower class is often ignored. Ettore Finazi-Agrò describes this situation in the following way:

Porque se existe a realidade da violência, existe também a questão de como a testemunhar, de como fazer com que a representação dela fique na margem impossível entre participação e complacência, entre a simpatia e a morbidez. Basta olhar como os lutos e as vítimas, as atrocidades e as misérias são representados pela mídia, para se dar conta de que aí desponta uma questão fundamental, que tem a ver com a aporia própria de qualquer testemunho: ou seja, uma possibilidade de dizer fundada numa impossibilidade de falar. (79-80)

Although the marginalized are more than capable of explaining the violence going on around them, because of the great social division that keeps the poor at a distance from privileged classes, they are often not allowed to present their side of the story, which in reality is the most relevant perspective of any.

All three of the works analyzed mention in some way the false image that higher social classes and popular news media have created of the favela and its inhabitants. William da Silva Lima pointed out specific ways in which the media presented stories blaming members of the Comando Vermelho for violence within the prison on Ilha Grande when what the group was actually trying to do was combat abuse and repression of prison guards and government authority. Ferréz demonstrates the difficulty that favela residents face if they try to make a living by honest means and the way they suffer from violence taking place around them involving traffickers and police. Another important part of his work is his call for reform through art, music, and

literature so that all members of society place more value on the creative potential of the favelas and focus on non-violent inhabitants' contribution to society.

Even though *Notícias de uma guerra particular* presents the testimonies of several traffickers that admit their callous attitude toward committing acts of violence, it includes many more examples of traffickers explaining their involvement in the drug trade as a means of survival for themselves and for their families. In addition, residents demonstrate somewhat sympathetic attitudes toward traffickers because residents are often protected and benefited by them, and even the police chief admits the near impossibility of surviving on wages earned by honest means. The interviews with traffickers and favela residents are a reflection of feelings of abandonment and abuse by the government that have caused the marginalized to rely on their own system of law enforced by traffickers so that they can have the basic necessities of life. When evaluated from the perspective of the marginalized, violence is not merely a struggle for power but is understood as a means of survival.

Many of the complaints of favela residents presented in these testimonial works are based on the fact that since the first favelas were formed the government did not take responsibility to create a social structure that would assist and integrate the poor. The problem with the solution to now try to integrate the marginalized into the rest of society is that the privileged classes are the ones who stereotyped the poor in the first place, as Janice Perlman explains: "Paradoxically, the characteristic way to handle the dread of these masses is to profess a desire to 'integrate' them into the very system which is producing the social and economic situation called 'marginal'" (*The Myth of*

Marginality 92). Since testimonial accounts correct many misconceptions propagated by popular media about favelas, they could be a powerful tool in removing social stigma surrounding peaceful favela inhabitants and facilitate their eventual integration into the rest of society. As Ferréz explains, favela residents' production of literary and other artistic works not only demonstrates to other social classes the creative and positive forces that exist in marginalized communities, but give such communities pride in themselves and reason to ignore images produced by popular media.

In *Capão pecado* Ferréz also points out the beauty that exists in favela residents themselves and their relationships with one another – an observation confirmed by several favela residents interviewed in *Notícias de uma guerra particular*. Anthropological researchers have concluded that favela residents, for the most part, are peaceful, honest people who are doing their best to support their neighbors and families: “além de estarem dotados de forte sentimento de otimismo, teriam uma vida (...) rica de experiências associativas, imbuídas de amizade e espírito cooperativo e relativamente livre de crimes e violência” (Zaluar & Alvito 15). While testimonial accounts of traffickers include acts of violence, the motives for them are explained, and the accounts of peaceful favela residents demonstrate their efforts to avoid violence, protect their families, and lead happy lives.

Based on her research among favela residents, Alba Zaluar states the following questions in an attempt to call the rest of society to examine the way that favelas and their inhabitants have been treated while more privileged classes have closed their eyes to the situation:

Sempre foi tão mais fácil falar da vida panorâmica e do colorido da favela do que entrar dentro dela...E o que temos nós a ver com tudo isso? Teremos o direito de criticar os valores dessa ‘cultura marginal’ ou de mexer no *modus vivendi* de trabalhadores e bandidos protetores encantados no chão de estrelas da pobreza romantizada? No meio de tanto horror que a miséria nos evoca não é melhor aceitarmos um *apartheid* disfarçado em radicalismo avançado e garantirmos apenas para os nossos filhos os direitos da cidadania, aí incluídos a paz e a tranquilidade? (*Condomínio do diabo* 50-51).

The accounts of favela residents that have participated in or been affected by the violence associated with drugs, guns, and police brutality show the rest of society that those outside the favela do not have the right to criticize favela residents, especially without listening to their side of the story. Testimonial accounts make accomplices of readers and viewers from other social classes and remind them that the government’s responsibility is to offer educational and economic opportunities to the marginalized as equal citizens and not simply protect the interests of the elite. Since much of the violence taking place in Brazil’s largest cities is attributed to the favelas, it stands to reason that such violence is best understood and explained by residents themselves—the true voice of the favelas.

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