

Invited Authors

Grupo OPNI graffiti and urban violence in present-day Brazil

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Abstract

São Paulo is the largest city in Latin America. In addition to its metropolitan and peripheral regions, there are more than 22 million people. All kind of reality is in the 1.520 km² that extends its territory. From super millionaires who own huge houses of 10/20 million euros with 10.000 m² of built area, with helipads and Ferraris in the garage, to wooden houses with 20/30 m², without connection to the light and water network, with open sewage to your door. Nothing more violent and aggressive than this veiled socioeconomic segregation. Often this is observed within a radius of 5 km away, exposing and depicting a glaring inequality. The vast majority of this poor and excluded population is black. In this context, the Brazilian Hip Hop movement emerged in the 1980's, in the central region of São Paulo, which gave voice to the latent social problems of the metropolis. This is how the São Paulo graffiti, that spans the walls and concrete of the grey city is born, an ideal platform to express social problems and portray the colours and concepts of the new born musical movement. In this context, in 1997, in São Mateus, the far east of the city, the collective of urban art and graffiti Grupo OPNI was born, which remains alive and active, contradicting all unfavourable statistics.

Keywords: São Paulo, Violence, Graffiti, Inequality, Hip Hop, Periphery

* with 18 years of experience in the Brazilian market, has a wide network of contacts built in front of the cultural market, mainly linked to urban culture, music and Hip Hop. Graduated in International Relations from Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP), has managed several cultural projects, acting as an interlocutor between people, cultures and realities that are often opposing and conflicting, improving the relationship between groups and working groups with sponsors, contracting agents and the media. Acted in partnership with cultural producers from other countries such as: England, Portugal, Spain, Japan, France, Germany and the United States.

"Negro drama, between success and mud, money, problems, envy, luxury and fame. Negro drama, curly hair, dark skin, the wound, the sore, looking for a cure Negro drama, try to see, and see nothing, except a star, far, half obfuscated"

("Negro Drama" - Racionais MC's - Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia - 2002)

To sew a lot of sociological, geographic, economic concepts in the same article, and to portray a society as complex as the Brazilian, it requires a certain line of central reasoning. Based on a historical model of exploratory and slave development, Brazilian society today still reproduces and perpetuates customs, approaches, acts and thoughts typical

of its historical past not too distant. Because the graffiti is very associated with the Hip Hop movement, be it in the United States, be it in Brazil, that imports and copies a lot of culture of the great North American brother, I will use in this article references, phrases and pieces of lyrics of the biggest Brazilian rap group, Racionais Mc's, who have helped to form and corroborate a musical and social movement of resistance and survival through their political struggles and their fiery lyrics and verses that accurately, incisively and beautifully, depict the harsh reality of urban violence in the peripheries the OPNI Group can easily be identified as one of the many characters that inhabit the imaginary of these rhymes. The Black Drama (Negro Drama) portrayed here is the same as the OPNI Group expresses in a very particular

and unique way in its traces, in murals and walls by Brazil, and that now it initiates a trajectory of taking to the world its ideas of resistance and denouncement against the injustices and racism that occur systematically in Brazil today.

Feel the drama, the price, the charging, in love, in hate, the insane revenge Negro drama, I know who plot, and who's with me; The trauma I carry, Not to be a just another fucking black man ; The drama of the jail and favela, tomb, blood, siren, cries and candle. Passenger of Brazil, São Paulo, agony, that survives, between honours and cowardice.

("Negro Drama" - Racionais MC's - Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia - 2002)

1. Brazilian violence data

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Unfortunately and contrary to this phrase, initially attributed to the North American writer Mark Twain, the statistics of the urban violence of the current Brazil are sinister, worrisome and at the same time absurd. I will use these numbers to contextualize the social and economic environment and the reality that all Brazilians live in the moment, but mainly to illustrate and create the necessary conscience to the readers of how difficult and dangerous was the trajectory of the OPNI Group until arriving saved and surviving of its art, to the year of 2018. Again, it is worth using one more visceral and surgical verse of Racionais Mc's, which portrays exactly the current paragraph and the statistics below.

"I remain alive, I continue the mystique, twenty-seven years old, contrary to statistics. Your TV commercial does not fool me, I do not need status or fame. Your car and your money no longer seduces me, and neither does your blue-eyed whore. I'm just a Latin American youngster, supported by over fifty thousand brothers. Side effect that your system did, Racionais, chapter 4 verse 3"

("Versiculo 4 , Capitulo 3 - Racionais MC's - Album: Sobrevivendo no Inferno - 1997)

Now let's get right to these statistics and terrifying numbers in Brazil. In 35 years, more than 1.000.000 million people were killed by firearms in Brazil. Yes, you read it right. More than 1.000.000 people. The records of the SIM (Mortality Information System) indicate that between 1980 and 2016,

more than 1 million people were killed by firing some type of firearm in Brazil. (HAF – Homicídios por Arma de Fogo - Firearm Homicides). As a result of such an absurd, 41.817 people suffered homicide as a result of the use of firearms in 2015 in Brazil. In further detail, we have:

- Or 71.9% of the total deaths.
- Between the years 2005 and 2015, there was an increase of 25%.
- 52.082 cases of illegal possession of firearms in 2016.
- 112.708 weapons seized in Brazil in 2016.

Obviously, to commit such crimes, people must have access to firearms. Thus, records indicate that there are approximately 15.000.000 million weapons (legal and illegal) in circulation in Brazil at this time. Just as a comparison, we have more guns in Brazil than the entire population of Portugal summed.

- 6.8 million registered
- 8.5 million not registered
- 3.8 million in criminal hands.

1.2 The Brazilian brutality

"Peripheries, alleys and tenements, you must be thinking: What you have to do with this.

From the beginning, for gold and silver, look who dies, then see you who kills"

"Periferias, vielas e cortiços, você deve tá pensando, o que você tem a ver com isso, desde o início, por ouro e prata, olha quem morre, então veja você quem mata"

("Negro Drama" - Racionais MC's - Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia - 2002)

The biggest problem of these frightening numbers is the profile of the deaths, that is, young and mostly black as we can follow in this other series of bizarre statistics. Unbelievable 318.000 young people (between 15 and 29 years old) were murdered in Brazil between 2005 and 2015.

61,619 Intentional Violent Deaths in Brazil In 2016, Equivalent To:

- 168 deaths per day.
- 07 deaths per Hour.
- 14.557 victims of CVLI (Violent Intentional Lethal Crimes) in the Brazilian Captains.
- 29.7 people / 100 thousand inhabitants.
- 2.703 people murdered in Latrocínios (robbery followed by death)

1.3 The black genocide

Receive the merit, the uniform, which practices evil, see me poor, imprisoned or dead, are already cultural. Stories, records, writings, it's not a tale, not a fable, neither a legend nor myth.

Recebe o mérito, a farda, que pratica o mal, me ver pobre, preso ou morto, já é cultural.

Histórias, registros, escritos, não é conto, nem fábula, lenda ou mito.

("Negro Drama" - Racionais MC's - Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia - 2002)

- Of every 100 homicide victims in Brazil, 71 are black.
 - 76% of victims of police intervention are black.
 - 21.897 people lost their lives in police actions between 2009 and 2016.
 - > 76.2% were blacks
 - > 81.8% were young people between 12 and 29 years old.
 - > Between the years 2005 and 2015, the number of homicides:
 - Of black people, homicide increased + 18.2%
 - Of non-black people, homicide decreased - 12.2%
- At age 21, when there is a peak in a person's chances of homicide in Brazil, blacks and browns are 147% more likely to be victimized by homicides than white, yellow, and indigenous individuals.

1.4 The femicide

Marielle Franco, the former deputy from Rio de Janeiro, was killed, shot dead with 4 bullets last March 2018. In the head. With a high probability that 4 heavy armed men, from militias, committed this awful crime. She is the tip of the iceberg, unfortunately. The femicide is another huge problem that Brazilian society is facing now. And that's why OPNI GROUP

pays homage in every single piece of art, to symbolize the struggle, the strength, the power of resistance of all the black women of Brazil, being that Marielle represents their mothers, sisters, aunts, nieces, wives and girlfriends scattered throughout the black communities of Brazil. One of the details of the "Contras as Injustiças" mural (picture 1A/B/C), made on the occasion of the Loures Public Art Week in Lisbon, Portugal - 2018, contemplates a simple homage to this woman who was fighting for a fairer Brazil. 4.657 women were murdered in 2016 in Brazil.

- 01 Woman dies every 02 hours in Brazil.
 - 65% of the femicide victims are black.
- Between the years 2005 and 2015, the number of homicides:
- Of Black Women, increased + 22%
 - Of Non-Black Women, decreased - 7.4%

2. War for territory

São Paulo is a huge agglomerate of concrete and steel, people, buildings, cars, smog, a typical third world chaotic metropolis. Below are some numbers and statistics that help you better understanding the urban chaos in which your citizens live.

2.1 São Paulo facts

- 12.2 million people
(Without counting the metropolitan region and the peripheries)
- 6 million cars
- About 5 million people, or half the population of São Paulo, live in irregular housing, which:
 - 2.5 million lives in illegal settlements.
 - 2.0 million lives in slums and 600 thousand lives in tenements.
- The city produces 17 thousand tons of garbage per day
- There are 15 homicides and 300 assaults a day.
- Traffic kills on average (per day in the city):
02 pedestrians / 1.3 motorcyclists / 0.8 driver -passenger/
0.2 cyclists

2.2 São Mateus background

It's where the OPNI Group was formed in 1997. It has a territory of 13 km² and has a population of 155,000 people, and is 22 km east of the city centre of SP. It is one of the 96 districts that make up the city of São Paulo, city with about

22.3 million people. (picture 1D) São Mateus was first a large forest inhabited by Indians, then a farm located in the east side of the capital, São Paulo. In 1946, the Italian immigrant Mateus Bei decided to create a noble neighbourhood. Bought 50 alqueires of land and parcelled the area. In the same year avenues and streets were opened. At first, the idea of the immigrant did not give much result, because no one wanted to live four hours from the centre of the city. The way was to create facilities to attract buyers: each family that acquired a land earned 500 roof tiles and 2,000 bricks. The result is there: 70 years later, a large part with family income of two to three minimum wages; disordered growth; clandestine subdivisions; areas invaded; and more than thirty favelas. This is compounded by the lack of everything: health, safety, transportation, housing, employment and everything else the community needs.

To contextualize the power of survival and the importance of urban art practiced by the OPNI Group in the region of São Mateus, below are the numbers of urban violence that literally surrounds the daily life of the group and its activists, exactly in the neighbourhood where they were born and raised, and they live until today.

2.3 Numbers of Violence in São Mateus (only in the year 2017)

- 28 homicides
- 15 homicide attempts
- 51 rapes
- 05 loots (theft followed by death)
- 734 corporal Injuries
- 112 prisons for drug trafficking
- 4.739 robberies
- 1.551 vehicles robbery
- 02 bank robbery
- 402 theft of cargo

3. GRUPO OPNI - A 20 year Afro-Brazilian activist graffiti collective.

After portraying the panorama and the scenario of social struggle and cultural activism in which the OPNI Group fits, we will tell a little more of the history and trajectory of our collective. We were founded in 1997, originally with 20 people from the neighbourhood of São Mateus. OPNI Group reproduces everyday situations in their art,

protesting against homicide, especially that of black people. They encourage self-assertion which results in new forms of social dialogue. From the point of view of those who experience the exclusion of basic human rights, the OPNI Group inserts reflection of these violations through their art encouraging self-knowledge, education and entrepreneurship as a mean for development.

Despite the setbacks, between days of hard work selling candies at the traffic lights, between choices like working with low wages or joining the world of crime, the OPNI Group resisted and keeps their initial goal alive. A goal that has become legacy, aiding the 'development' of several graffiti artists under their watchful eye, who today, represent the ideal of resistance. The OPNI Group has also made international artistic interventions in countries such as Chile, Canada and the USA, and more recently in Portugal.

3.1 Our social works

Currently, the OPNI Group is also responsible for several projects carried out in São Mateus which creates a continual dialogue with similar communities around the world.

We founded a Non-governmental organization (NGO) called São Mateus em Movimento (picture 1E) in 2008 which is seen as the region's greatest cultural articulator. The NGO currently works in partnership with several social groups, offering in addition to support for artists, free courses and workshops, for children and adolescents.

We also created the Favela Galeria (picture 1 F/G), which the main objective is to paint, to 'graffiti' the whole region, transforming the community into a public art gallery. Development of the Favela open-air gallery is to promote the use of public spaces for local interests, human development and articulating ideas. The Favela Gallery is composed of a series of graffiti covered houses, shops and entire streets, forming a long route of artistic interventions. In addition to colouring the alleys, the project also offers opportunities for young people who want to learn the art of graffiti.

Many are inspired by the designs seen from their windows and take an interest in art. To help develop the talent of this public, the OPNI Group offer free graffiti initiation workshops, which are taught by the members themselves. This inspires the youth to strive for more than street crime whilst building their self-esteem and encouraging them to pursue more constructive futures.

4. Conclusion

There are only two social classes, those who do not eat and those who do not sleep in fear of the revolution of those who do not eat. (Santos, Milton – Brazilian, writer, professor and doctor in Geography)

The historical past of slavery reproduces latent structural sequels to the present day in Brazilian society. It is worth mentioning that we fled and avoided the label of victims, despite the undeniable proof that the statistics point and prove. Thus, we continue in our struggle and our daily mission to seek through urban art to create opportunities, to colour and occupy public and private spaces, to stamp the traces of our African and Brazilian ancestors, in the urgent attempt to create awareness about our history. Through our actions, especially those with children and adolescents, we envision a better and milder future for the next generation. Respect and dignity as an instrument of struggle. Peace as the ultimate goal.

Unbelievable but your son imitates me. in the midst of you, he is the smartest. Ginga and speak slang, not slang, dialect. This is not yours, look, it's gone up. I went through your radio, I took it, you did not even see it. We are this or that, what? Did not you say? Does your child want to be black? Rááá !!! How ironic Stick the 2Pac poster there. What about? That you say? Feel the black drama, go, try to be happy.

("Negro Drama" - Racionais MC's - Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia - 2002)

References

Data and Statistics Sources

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Núcleo de Violência da USP (Universidade de São Paulo)

<http://nevusp.org/>

Sistema de Informações Sobre Mortalidade (SIM)

<http://datasus.saude.gov.br>

Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública

<http://www.forumseguranca.org.br/>

Atlas da Violência 2017 – Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA)

<http://ipea.gov.br>

Secretaria de Segurança Pública de São Paulo (SSP SP)

<http://www.ssp.sp.gov.br/Estatistica/Pesquisa.aspx>

Musical links and Publishing information for Racionais MC's songs.

Nego Drama Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foGobzj163E>

"Negro Drama"

Canção de Racionais MC's

Album: Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia

Lançamento: 2002 / Gravação: 2001

Gênero: Rap, R&B

Duração: 6:52

Gravadora: Cosa Nostra Fonográfica CD

Composição: Mano Brown, Edi Rock

Capítulo 4, Versículo 3 Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TITRneC6jLU>

"Capítulo 4, Versículo 3"

Canção de Racionais MC's

Album Sobrevivendo no Inferno

Lançamento: 1997 / Gravação: 1997

Gênero: Rap

Duração: 8:06

Gravadora: Cosa Nostra

Composição: Edy Rock, Ice Blue, Mano Brown

GRUPO OPNI Social Media pages

GRUPO OPNI

<https://www.facebook.com/grupoopni/>

<https://www.instagram.com/grupoopni/>

FAVELA GALERIA

<https://www.facebook.com/favelagaleraopnicomvida/>

<https://www.instagram.com/favelagalera/>

SÃO MATEUS EM MOVIMENTO NGO

<https://www.facebook.com/saomateusemmovimento/>

<https://www.instagram.com/saomateusemmovimento/>