

# The Sourmetal Smell

---

## A Study of Structural Violence in Brazil

Ana Lottis

Final Paper for SIS 322, Fall 2009

Jackson School of International Studies

“Morto ou preso, as chances dele [Sandro] ao sair dali eram muito piores do que as de qualquer outra pessoa naquele ônibus... eu disse a ele, você sabe qual é a maior vítima dessa história toda? Você.”

*“Dead or arrested, his [Sandro’s] chances once we got out of there were far worse than those of any other person on that bus... I said to him: ‘do you know who the biggest victim is in this whole story? You are’”*

~ Luanna Belmont, hostage in the Bus 174 incident, in an interview on José Padilha’s documentary *Bus 174* recounting a conversation between herself and Sandro de Nascimento.

June 12, 2000. Rio de Janeiro. A 21-year-old man boards a bus and attempts a robbery while it is in motion. An alert police vehicle soon begins pursuit of the bus, which pulls over. The hijacker lets some of the passengers off, keeping ten hostages. Television crews rush to the location and broadcast periodically as the crisis drags on for hours until the hijacker gets off the bus, using a young woman as a shield and holding his gun to her head. A policeman shoots; the hijacker loses his balance and falls to the ground with the hostage, who dies en route to the hospital. The hijacker is arrested and placed in the back of a police vehicle to be taken to the hospital as well. He struggles - enough to break an officer’s arm and the car’s windshield - and is strangled to death sometime during the trip. The officers responsible will later be acquitted (Gorita 2003 pp 91, Padilha 2002, Rocha 2004 pp 5-10 and 40-42,

Within days, investigators discover the hijacker’s name, Sandro de Nascimento, along with the fact that he was a witness to and survivor of the infamous 1993 Candelária police massacre of eight street children. Though some news agencies begin publishing this information as soon as it is unearthed, Brazil’s main news program (Rede Globo channel’s *Jornal Nacional*) waits several days before including it in their follow-up reports on the incident. It wasn’t until a 2002 documentary on the event came out that the general public discovered another traumatic element of his past: at the age of six Sandro witnessed his mother being stabbed to death by three strangers in the small store she worked at. There were reportedly another eight customers present who fled without helping her. Sandro and his four-year-old sister, effectively orphaned, were taken in by an aunt. Sandro ran away soon afterwards, and became an addition to Latin America’s infamous population of homeless children. In his late teens, he established residence for himself in the favela, or slum, of Nova Holanda, where he lived at the time of the hijacking. (Ibid.)

When I first saw the documentary cited above, I had a very difficult time getting it out of my mind, which was reeling by the time the credits rolled around. I’ve tried putting my reaction into words, but I’d rather borrow someone else’s for this pre-introduction to my thesis. What follows is a passage from the novel *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, from which I borrowed the phrase in my title. On the surface, the event it describes has very little in common with the Bus 174 incident. But the differences between the two, though unquestionably substantial, don’t detract from what the incidents share. Rather, those differences highlight the fundamental similarity between the two: both were a culmination of everyday structural violence in exceptional physical violence. For all their differences in setting, circumstances, actors, and observers, both the following and the Bus 174 episode - like so many other instances in which a plurality of social forces come together in such a way that they erupt into physical violence - did not occur in isolation. They were not deviations from everyday life, or aberrations of human interaction - neither accidental nor incidental, as Roy would say.

In fact, she and I would agree that they were – are - the opposite.

They are the direct consequences of decades, centuries, of the macroscopic and microscopic everyday ways in which that human interaction occurs. Not a pocket of chaos in history, but the making and result of history. “History in live performance.”

Estha and Rahel awoke to the sound of sleep surprised by shattered kneecaps.

They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth...

Blue-lipped and dinner-plate-eyed, they watched, mesmerized by something that they sensed but didn't understand: the absence of caprice in what the policemen did. The abyss where anger should have been. The sober, steady brutality, the economy of it all.

They were opening a bottle.

Or shutting a tap.

Cracking an egg to make an omelette.

The twins were too young to know that these were only history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal but paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear – civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness.

Man's subliminal urge to destroy that which he could neither subdue nor deify.

Men's Needs.

What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed that morning, though they didn't know it then, was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not a war, after all, or genocide) of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God's Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience.

There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning. Nothing *incidental*. It was no stray mugging or personal settling of scores. This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it.

History in live performance.

If they hurt [him] more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago. They were not arresting a man, they were exorcising fear...

They stepped away from him. Craftsmen assessing their work. Seeking aesthetic distance.

Their Work, abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor. He was semi-conscious, but he wasn't moving.

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which made him bleed from the mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in the abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in the loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his kneecaps were shattered.

Still they brought out the handcuffs.

Cold.

With the sourmetal smell.

## Introduction

“The sociological imagination is the capacity of men to understand what is happening in themselves as minute points of the intersections of history and biography.”

~C. Wright Mills, in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959:8)

My purpose in the pages to come is to, through Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination, investigate three of the dimensions in which history shaped a single biography: Sandro’s. His life story – particularly the event it culminated in - in turn shaped history through the incident that came to be known as “the Bus 174 tragedy.”

In order to do achieve this goal, I’ve chosen to model my approach after that presented in the conclusion of Martha Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros and Philip Zimbardo’s 2002 book Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities. Though there are those would (not unreasonably) chafe at the thought of referring to modern-day democratic Brazil as an atrocity environment, I would argue that it’s rather difficult to justify *not* viewing Sandro’s circumstances as being, at least, similar to one. Under democracy<sup>1</sup>, the Brazilian state could hardly get away with directly persecuting certain sectors of society, a phenomenon we tend to associate with atrocity. And yet, as so many of us know well, atrocity can occur in democracies as well as in authoritarian regimes. One might say that it is facilitated in such cases by omission, lack of resources, and misguided attention more than a conscious attempt to do harm. Even if this is so, it is obvious that such violence rarely chooses its targets indiscriminately.

Regardless of whether Sandro did or did not grow up in an atrocity environment, I’ve found that drawing on scholarship analyzing atrocity environments as facilitated by national and international actors, as well as bystander communities in both settings, provides a holistic, straightforward, concrete methodology through which to study Sandro’s life. Huggins et. al. identify a series of conditions that facilitate atrocity environments at the three levels of international actors, national institutions and bystander communities. These include sense of emergency, dehumanization of opponents, victim blaming, and moral disengagement (Huggins et. al. 2002: 250-266). The life of Sandro de Nascimento lends itself easily to being analyzed as a snapshot through which these conditions can be identified. The

---

<sup>1</sup> I feel conflicted about using the term “democracy” in this context, because I’ve learned to question the meaning of democracy and how “free and fair” elections can truly turn out in the real world. Part of this ambivalence on my part stems from my perception that years of dictatorship, and the slow transition from dictatorship to elected government, fundamentally altered what “democracy” meant before it was gutted by the coup and after the return of elections, not only in Brazil but in several other Latin American countries that underwent similar situations. For more info on this, check Greg Grandin’s *The Instruction of Great Catastrophe: Truth Commissions, National History, and State Formation in Argentina, Chile and Guatemala* in *The American Historical Review* vol. 110, issue 1 (can be retrieved online at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.1/grandin.html>)

variety of the ways in which they can stress an individual beyond his or her coping limits can be clearly identified as intersecting in his experiences.

Huggins et. al.'s neat division between international institutions, local institutions, and bystander communities is significantly less clear-cut when one begins to look at the Bus 174 incident. Still, this paper will be divided into these categories for the sake of organization. I begin, at an international level, by examining the effects on poverty and, partly in consequence, crime rates, of the international economic situation and neoliberal strategies for coping with economic crisis. From there, I move on to a hybrid local-international level in which attitudes in the police and criminal/juvenile justice systems towards people in Sandro's social group are examined. Finally at the local-bystander level I analyze portrayals of Sandro and his social group in the media.

### Part I: International Level – Economic Conditions

“A criminalização da pobreza é uma consequência direta da exclusão social proveniente desta nova ótica neoliberal, cujo paradoxo consiste justamente na produção – junto aos grandes lucros – de um número cada vez maior de miseráveis, inaptos e portanto condenados ao ostracismo ou eliminação do corpo social”

*“The criminalization of poverty is a direct consequence of the social exclusion that derives from this neoliberal outlook, whose paradox consists precisely of the production – along with large profits – of an ever-increasing number of people living in extreme poverty, inapt and therefore condemned to ostracism or elimination from the social body.”*

~ Relatório RIO: Violência Policial e Insegurança Pública, 2004 (RIO Report: Police Violence and Public Unsafety)

“A Justiça aqui é feita à bala  
E quando a polícia chega  
Todo mundo fica com medo.  
A descrição do marginal  
É favelado, pobre, preto

Se você tiver coragem venha aqui pra ver  
A cidade dando as costas para a CDD

Traficando informação  
Diariamente convivendo com essa situação”

*“Justice here is bullet-forged  
And when the police arrive  
Everyone gets afraid.  
The description of the marginal<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> Term presumably derived from “marginalized.” In most conversations and in the media, used almost interchangeably with “criminal”. To quote a friend of mine, there's a gold-mine of social analysis in that fact. I discuss it more deeply in part III of this paper.

*Is favelado<sup>3</sup>, poor and black*

*If you have the courage, come here and see  
The city turning its back on the CDD<sup>4</sup>*

*Trafficking information  
Co-habiting daily with this situation"*

~ Mv Bill, *Traficando Informação*

At an international level, we know that the time period when Sandro's mother was killed coincides with a time when global economic crisis led to interrupted flows of foreign capital into Brazil and inflated the debt that the country had acquired in years of pursuing development. Like all other countries facing a debt crisis, Brazil had few choices but turning to international loans conditional upon structural adjustment policies (SAPs), which required strict austerity measures that caused a sharp increase in poverty in most countries in which they were implemented (Bresser-Pereira 2003: 230, Paes de Barros et al 1995: 237, Laurell 2000:307-308). At the same time, Brazil's return to democratic rule, between 1985 and 1988, meant popular pressure for social support was less easily ignored than it was under the dictatorship. Brazil differed from most other countries which faced the debt crisis in that in the latter half of the decade the proportion of GDP spent on public education, public health, food assistance programs and unemployment assistance actually increased (Paes de Barros et. al. 1995: 270). But this didn't do much for families like Sandro's. After receiving loans from the IMF in 1982, Brazil curtailed real wages – which decreased 30% between 1983 and 1985. Between 1980 and 1990 the real minimum wage decreased 46%. The value of the currency plummeted, and inflation rose from 100% in 1980 (it had hovered around 30% in the 70s) to 900% in 1988 (Bresser-Pereira 2003: 232, Caldeira 2000: 45.) Inflation targets the poor and underemployed more severely than other sections of the population pyramid because they tend to earn and save in cash, as well as because of the vulnerable nature of their employment in the face of economic recession. It is unsurprising, then, that annual per capita GDP growth went from an average of 6% in the 70s to -0.6% in the eighties, though the average income of the top ten percent of wage-earners actually increased slightly during this period (Bresser-Pereira 2003: 232, Paes de Barros et. al. 1995: 250.)

Thus, despite social spending increases that resulted from a return to democracy, inequality increased substantially in the 1980s, partly as a result of inflation, especially from 1986 to 1989 (in which

<sup>3</sup> "Favelado" means "one who is from the favela." I translate it as slum-dweller, though the term favelado is far more adept to street conversations than the term "slum-dweller" is, if less colloquial than "slumdog"

<sup>4</sup> "CDD" stands for Cidade de Deus, or City of God, one of Rio's many slums. One of the most famous (or infamous) Brazilian movies of the early 2000s revolves around drug wars in the City of God.

period Sandro's mother died, specifically in 1988, according to Padilha's 2002 documentary.) Greater inequality affected the bottom 20% of the population most severely, and problems in existing social programs targeting the poorest and most vulnerable meant that families like Sandro's were especially hard-hit (Ibid: 250, 254, 270). Ten years after the death of Sandro's mother, inequality had increased to the point at which the richest 20% of the country had a 64.4 % share of income while the poorest 20% had only 2% (Amnesty International 2005.) Households headed by women were especially hard-hit by the crisis, as were households headed by people of color. Households headed by Black women (like Sandro's,) affected by what feminist and race scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) call intersectionality, were the most hard-hit with 49% of the total living beneath the poverty line in 1989 (Caldeira 2000: 48, Lopes 1993)

The paragraphs above are all the more relevant because the increase in inequality can be correlated with increases in urban violence that also began during that decade (Amnesty International 2005, Silveira 2008: 164, ) Between 1980 and 1994, the number of homicides per year in Rio multiplied by over a factor of three from 2,826 to 8,408 (HRW 1996). Between 1991 and 2001, the amount of homicides in the entire country rose by over 50%, though population growth was merely 15% (Waiselfitz 2002:29.) According to Amnesty International (2005) "firearm-related deaths in Rio de Janeiro during the 1990s were higher than those in conflict zones such as in Angola and Sierra Leone." Victims with a profile matching Sandro's – males, old teenagers and young adults, of Afro-Brazilian or *pardo*<sup>5</sup> descent, who live in on the streets or in slums with concentrated amounts of drug-related activity, and are unemployed or underemployed - are extremely overrepresented in cases of urban violence. There are, for instance, twice as many Black or Pardo homicide victims as White, though each racial category represents around 50% of the total population (Silveira 2008:164, Amnesty International 2005.) Between 1987 and 2001 467 minors died in Israel and Palestine combined. In the same time period 3,937 died in Rio alone. ("About COAV," n.d., Zimbalist & Mochary, directors, 2005)

During the late eighties and nineties, when Sandro was growing up on the streets, Rio's importance in the international drug trade rose significantly (Amnesty International 2005, HRW 1997.) This phenomenon could be viewed as part of the coping strategy of those who had increasingly difficult times finding reliable official jobs, seeing as underemployment also soared (Soares 2001) Whatever its cause, the phenomenon increased the availability of cocaine in particular (HRW 1997), which is what Sandro became addicted to, and is reportedly what he was intoxicated with at the time of the hijacking (Padilha 2002).

Human rights organizations point out that urban violence can also be correlated with the rapid, unplanned growth of urban centers from 1970 on, when migration to escape rural poverty increased

---

<sup>5</sup> Mixed-Race with an element of Black – the politically correct version of the term mulatto in Portuguese.



dramatically (Amnesty International 2005, HRW 1997.) That migration, too, could be tied to changes in the global economic system, and probably even to increasing influence of neoliberal economics like structural adjustment on local policy. Unfortunately, I don't have the space here to do more than suggest this as a possibility.

Sandro's exposure to, and engagement in, violent acts that culminated in the Bus 174 event probably didn't arise directly from the rising poverty of those in his income group or frightening rise in violence that occurred concurrently. But we have no way of knowing whether his mother's death would have occurred if the robbery at the store she worked at occurred independently of the context of increasing poverty and crime rates. A better economic environment may have offered her safer workplace options. We cannot assume that, had she lived, he would still have ended up on the streets. Being on the street not only put him in a position in which to witness and survive the Candelária massacre, it also greatly increased his chances of experimenting with, and becoming addicted to, drugs. As I said earlier, Sandro was reportedly under the influence of cocaine when he boarded Bus 174, and several acquaintances believe his recklessness stemmed from that fact and from a desperate attempt to get money to repay drug debts. They claim that like many other street children, his first addiction was to shoemaker's glue (which is commonly sniffed by street children to offset hunger pangs.) and that he regularly engaged in petty thefts, or *assaltos*, to feed addiction as well as his basic needs (Padilha 2002.)

Even if his orphanhood was unpreventable, there could still have been some form of aid to the family to help mitigate the economic and emotional effects of his mother's violent death (Ibid). But this did not occur. A climate of rising poverty and criminal activity which disproportionately targeted the marginalized is merely one of the several external forces that exerted stress upon Sandro.

Amnesty International describes this climate as having severe repercussions in terms of how favela residents are treated in the outside world:

"in a vicious circle of discrimination, the presence of criminal gangs in the *favelas* is not only a source of danger to community members, but also feeds the discrimination and stigmatization they face. All members of the community are treated as criminals... People living in *favelas* face entrenched discrimination when looking for work or entering the education system. Time and again they described the difficulties in accessing education, the distances many had to travel, the lack of leisure activities, the contempt with which youths were treated by figures of authority, and the violence that many suffer at home." (2005)

In such a context, I wouldn't be surprised if Sandro himself drew a direct line between his poverty and exposure to violence and his ultimate status as perpetrator. Two months before the incident, he approached Yvonne Bezerra, a social worker he'd known since before the Candelária massacre, and spoke of his desire to find a steady job and get some basic schooling. Yvonne recalls his question: "*Tia*, I want to get a job, but tell me – what chance do I have of getting one? I can't read or write, I don't have a



legal work permit (*carteira de trabalho*), I don't have any experience – tell me, who would hire me?  
What can I do to survive besides what I do now?" (In Padilha 2002)

## Part II: International/Local Hybrid Level

"The Military Police is the best social insecticide there is"

- Col. Marcos Jardim, statement in response to a series of four police incursions into favelas, between January and April of 2008, which resulted in the death of a total of 31 favelados. (Quoted in Justiça Global, 2008)

"The interrogation is very easy to do  
take the *favelado* and beat him till it hurts  
Interrogations are very easy to finish  
take the *bandido* and beat him up until he dies."

- Marching song, BOPE (Special Operations Battalion) unit of the Military Police. Taken from Amnesty International 2005.

José Padilha's goal in making his documentary was to illustrate "the way in which the State, by treating the street child brutally – be it on the street by cops, be it when he is imprisoned in institutions or, once he is of age, in jails – explains in large part the behavior of Sandro which we saw on television the day of the hostage crisis" (Quoted in Rocha 2004:40.) I take this one step further in examining the ways in which Brazilian law-enforcement culture since the late 80s recycled counter-insurgency doctrines of the 1960s military regime in the war on crime which resulted in the sorts of State violence Padilha is describing. My unsurprising conclusion is that these doctrines were clearly counter-productive, especially in the cases of street children and former street children like Sandro.

Among the most prevalent themes throughout José Padilha's documentary about the Bus 174 incident is Sandro's fear of arrest. Sprinkled throughout the film are portions of interviews with hostages, all of whom refer to this fear. One hostage talks about his response to a suggestion she made on how he could leave: "*Tia*, you don't know what the life of a *bandido* is like - I can't get arrested anymore. If I do, I'll die." He then lifted his shirt and showed her his back, which was "full of stomp-marks (*marcas de pisada*)", saying "this is what happened last time I was there." Another hostage mentions that "he repeatedly said he didn't trust the cops, that he knew they would kill him, that if he got too soft they would kill him, that he would be killed and had nothing to lose." An anonymous BOPE operative states "the [criminals] who've been arrested before are the most aggressive, they become more violent. Surrender is more difficult, because they know what life is like in there and don't want to return." (Padilha 2002)

Sandro's fear of the police and juvenile/criminal justice systems went at least as far back as the massacre of Candelária, but it continued long afterwards. By the age of 16, he'd been detained four times

at the infamous juvenile detention center Instituto Padre Severino, where unclean conditions – it’s not uncommon for the boys to go for a week at a time without a bath or change of clothes – provide serious public health concerns, overcrowding is the norm, boys often receive no vocational training or education, and beatings by guards are common (HRW 2004, de M. Arantes n/a.) He also spent time, after he was no longer a minor, in adult prisons with similar conditions. His fear of law enforcement was undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that he’d recently escaped his last incarceration during a mass breakout (Padilha 2002.)

Police training and prison environments can be analyzed at both local and international levels. International-level conditions were highly influential upon security structures established during the Cold War and can be viewed as continuing to exert such influence because with the resurgence of democracy those structures underwent little change (Amnesty International 2005.)

In the past, the atrocity environment of the military dictatorship was facilitated by U.S.-imported police training methods including torture instruction and urban guerilla warfare techniques<sup>6</sup> (Huggins et. al. 2002: 69-72.) Training of security forces and political propaganda by the governing junta all upheld the National Security doctrine of eradicating Communist “infection” of the homeland (Corradi, Fagen and Garreton 1992; Godoy 2009; Huggins et. al 2002:232-267; *Memoria del Silencio* 1999: *Conclusions* point 13; Shultz 1998; Verbitsky 1996.) Though modern public safety discourses lack the political ideology of a war between legitimate Right-wing governance and illegitimate left-wing guerrillas, the National Security Ideology of the time nevertheless has several parallels with modern-day structural violence in these same institutions, which I describe below.

During the Dirty War, National Security ideology consisted of a criminalization of socialism and any political outlook which might be associated with it. Today, scholars and human rights organizations speak of a criminalization of poverty (Amnesty International 2005; Caldeira 2000; de M. Arantes 2009; Gorita 2003; Human Rights Watch 1996; Justica Global 2008; Lyra 2004, Prando 2006, Weiselfisz 2002) which shares several characteristics with the criminalization of Leftism and individuals perceived as Leftist. These include the rhetoric, by security officials and politicians, of an internal war. The following statement, by a police officer who worked for the military regime of the Cold War, illustrates the fundamental division between government and these ingrown enemies of the state: “there were two Brazils: the Brazil of the Revolutionary Government, which was the honest, pure Brazil that we should all follow, and the Brazil that belonged to criminals – dreamers who were trying to lead Brazil into chaos” (Huggins et. al. 2002:75.)

---

<sup>6</sup> It was also facilitated through funding provided for new security forces by U.S. corporations such as Ford and General Motors whose business interests were threatened by “subversive” activity in South America’s largest economy (Huggins et. al. 2002: 72.)

Back then against, the war was against ideological subversives, as described above. Today, it is waged against social subversives – that is, criminals, often referred to as *bandidos* or *marginais*, both of which are terms used consistently in media portrayals of the Bus 174 incident (Rocha 2004, Gorita 2003: 100), as well by policemen in Padilha's documentary (2002.)

In the preface to their ethnographic novel *Elite da Tropa* about the Battalion of Special Operations (BOPE), an elite subdivision of the military police infamous for its brutal crackdowns on favelas, the authors state “the BOPE was not designed to face the challenges of public security. It was conceived of and trained to be a machine of war. It was not taught to deal with citizens and control lawbreakers, but to invade enemy territory... Should we hold responsible for the chaos of war those who are trained to kill?” Immediately following this statement, they provide the full text of one of the marching songs trainees sing in boot camp, which includes the lines:

“Eu sou... herói da nação.  
Vou me infiltrar numa favela  
com meu fuzil na mão,  
vou combater o inimigo,  
provocar destruição.”

*“I am... a hero of the Nation  
I will infiltrate a favela  
Machine gun in hand  
I will combat the enemy  
And provoke destruction.”*

(In Batista, Soares and Pimentel 2006:4).

There is a disturbingly clear suggestion here that the favela is an entity that isn't legitimately part of Brazil – rather, it is an enemy territory to be infiltrated, with dangerous inhabitants who should be combated and neutralized through force. A variety of scholars write about or mention this stereotype of the favela as being separate from the rest of the country in their studies of Brazilian public safety discourse and media portrayals of the favelas (Almendra 2009; Caldeira 2000; Gorita 2003; Lyra 2004; Mello 2005; Prando 2009; Silveira 2009). It is easier to justify violent actions by a police force if they are portrayed as combating a vicious, unpredictable enemy – Communist insurgents during the Cold War, and in its aftermath criminals identified by the place in which they live - rather than fellow countrymen.

This National Security ideology of the Cold War furthers its “two Brazils” notion with a metaphor of leftist subversives as being a sickness or cancer to be eradicated, not only in Brazil but also in other Latin American regimes (Corradi, Fagen, & Garretón 1992; Godoy 2009; Huggins et. al 2002:232-267; *Memoria del Silencio* 1999: *Conclusions* point 13; Shoultz 1998; Verbitsky 1996) Such a metaphor is frighteningly present in modern-day discourses on zero-tolerance policies in the war against

crime, such as Col. Marcos Jardim's comment, above, about the police being "social insecticide." Though the term "subversive" is no longer used, it is clear that the modern-day strategy of "treating" these social issues follows the same lines of anti-insurgency operation in the past. An Amnesty International's report (2005) includes another disturbing snippet of a chant the BOPE sings, which explicitly contains such rhetoric:

"The *bandido favelado* isn't swept up with a broom  
You sweep them up with grenades  
With a rifle and with a machine gun."

Prando (2006) analyzes such instances of public safety rhetoric by arguing that the goal of the war on crime is to produce a sense of security for the middle classes by concentrating police actions on "cleansing and hygienization," with violent action directed at characters who embody fear. Such rhetoric is disturbingly similar to the discursive importance of hygiene and sanitation of the social environment present in the Brazilian eugenics movement popularized between the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (Stepan 1991: 46-62, 85-94, 153-169).

The mindset of the war on crime, like that of the National Security ideology that preceded it, explicitly reflects several of the facilitating conditions of atrocity environments Huggins et al. describe: Sense of emergency and dehumanization of opponents are initiated when favelados are portrayed as enemies of the population at large. The discourse of infection or infestation further backs this up, opening the way for victim blaming and moral disengagement (Huggins et. al. 2002: 250-266.)

### Part III: Broad trends: Expectations of and Attitudes towards Sandro and Members of his Social Group in the Media

"E quando ouvir o silêncio sorridente  
de São Paulo diante da chacina de  
111 presos indefesos...  
Mas presos são quase todos pretos  
Ou quase pretos  
Ou quase brancos quase pretos de tão pobres  
E pobres são como podres  
E todos sabem como se tratam os pretos"

*"And when you hear the smiling silence  
of São Paulo faced with the carnage of*

111 defenseless inmates...<sup>7</sup>  
 Inmates are nearly all blacks<sup>8</sup>  
 Or near-blacks  
 Or near-whites near-black in their poverty  
 And everyone  
 knows how blacks are [to be] treated”

And the poor are like the rotted<sup>9</sup>

~From the song *Haiti* by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil

The media occupies an interesting position in Huggins et. al.’s model for identifying atrocity environment conditions because its role – in particular the role of Brazil’s main broadcasting corporation, TV Globo - alternates between being the emissary of assumptions that are fundamental components of institutionalized structural violence and being the representative of bystander communities. Of the studies and investigations of Sandro de Nascimento that I read, the great majority agreed that at first sight the agitated youth was, in the words of Leonardo Rocha (2004:8) “a legitimate representative of the stereotype of the young man who is high [on drugs], violent and favela-dwelling” that the middle classes so fear (Lemos 2001: 85, Rocha 2004: 8, Mello 2005: 219, Gorita 2003: 96, Padilha 2002.)

Such stereotypes are elaborated on by a great variety of scholars, and are often synthesized in the term “*marginal*,” which the journalists and policemen in Ônibus 174 and the news coverage I saw of the event, used perhaps half of the time when referring to Sandro. Though the term comes from the same root as “marginalized,” it is used almost interchangeably with the term “*bandido*” (which is a street term for criminal.) *Marginais* are generally young adult males of the lowest socioeconomic class who engage in some form of illicit activity, often related to drug or arms traffic and use, and are not legitimately employed. They are often imagined, though never explicitly characterized, as Black or mulatto. Strongly associated with urban violence, the term firmly establishes these young men as the modern-day subversives, or enemies of the State, that I describe in Part II.

At the end of Part I, I describe several of the ways in which favela populations are discriminated against. The dehumanizing stereotype of the *marginal* is a large factor in this discrimination, and is as present in the media as it is in public safety discourses. Rocha, Gorita and Lemos all examine the ways in which media portrayal of the Bus 174 reflected such stereotypes.

---

<sup>7</sup> Reference to the infamous crackdown at São Paulo’s prison of Carandiru in the early nineties in which 111 inmates died.

<sup>8</sup> Word choice here carries a strong message about the difference (or lack thereof) between popular attitudes towards people of color and popular attitudes towards prisoners and criminals. The writer is merely switching one letter to go from the word “inmate” (preso) to the word “black/n\*gger” (preto.) Note: my choice not to capitalize the term “black” stems from the fact that the term it translates, “preto,” is derogative.

<sup>9</sup> The same poetic device is used here: “pobre”, poor, is switched for “podre”, rotting or rotted

Gorita's is an in-depth investigation of portrayals in the written media of the Bus 174 tragedy, in which he combs through coverage of the event by several of Brazil's main newspapers in the 45 days that followed its occurrence (2003.) He highlights Sandro's portrayal in the media as an agent of chaos. The only portions of Sandro's speech that are constantly quoted in the newspapers are, according to Gorita, "One, two, three, I'm going to shoot" and "You might be scared, but I'm not – I've got the Devil for company" (2003:91.)

Rocha analyzes the event's portrayal in the country's main television news program, which is broadcast by TV Globo - the Jornal Nacional (2004: 61.) He summarizes the media's role as having demonized the figure of Sandro (2004:8.) Instead of contextualizing Sandro's action and trying to investigate what might have led him to engage in such violent action, he argues, the focus was on the terror he inspired (2004:10.) and the police's inadequate response to the situation with which they were faced (2004:71.) Interviews with hostages, emotional portrayals of their reunions with their families, and even the rumour that the young woman who died was pregnant are featured at length during the first three days of TV Globo coverage. But on the fourth day, when policemen invade the hospital where Sandro's body is being kept with the intent to shoot it and disguise the cause of death, there are no interviews with witnesses and coverage is quick, followed by another in-depth retelling of the events that transpired on the bus. Despite the fact that during the event itself, the young man tells both policemen and hostages that he was at Candelária, and that this had been verified and discussed in other news sources within two days, the program does not refer to this at all (Rocha 2004: 70-74, Lemos 2001:89.) Media coverage at the time evidently reinforced Sandro's portrayal as the perfect *favelado* enemy of the state.

## Conclusion

"el hambre y la abundancia que se juntan,  
el mal trato con su mal recuerdo...  
Todo está escondido en la memoria,  
refugio de la vida y de la historia.

La memoria estalla hasta vencer  
a los pueblos que la aplastan  
y que no la dejan ser  
libre como el viento.

La bala a Chico Méndez en Brasil,  
150.000 guatemaltecos,  
los mineros que enfrentan al fusil,  
represión estudiantil en México.

Todo está cargado en la memoria,  
arma de la vida y de la historia.

América con almas destruidas,  
los chicos que mata el escuadrón,

" Hunger and abundance coming together  
Harmful treatment with its harmful legacy  
All is hidden in memory  
The refuge of life and of history

Memory explodes until it defeats  
The peoples who crush it  
Who don't allow it to be  
Free as the wind

The bullet to Chico Mendes in Brazil  
150.000 Guatemalans  
The miners who face down machine guns  
Student repression in Mexico

All is loaded into memory  
The weapon of life and of history

America with souls destroyed  
The children killed by the firing squad

suplicio de Mugica por las villas,  
dignidad de Rodolfo Walsh.

Supplication of Mugica for the slums  
Dignity of Rodolfo Walsh

Todo está cargado en la memoria,  
arma de la vida y de la historia.

All is loaded into memory  
Weapon of life and of history

la memoria apunta hasta matar  
a los pueblos que la callan  
y no la dejan volar  
libre como el viento.”

Memory sharpens until it kills  
The peoples that silence it  
That don't allow it to fly  
Free as the wind”

~ León Gieco, from his song *La Memoria*

I could finish on a positive note. I could speak of the myriad of social movements created by and for favelados, such as the Afro-Reggae group featured in the inspiring, award-winning documentary *Favela Rising*. I could bring up the growing power and influence of Afro-Brazilian mobilization for Black consciousness, which has resulted in everything from legislation mandating the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian history in all school curricula to Carnival celebrations and an explosion of literary production, both revolving around explicitly Black themes (Anderson 1996, Lei No.10.639, Souza 2004.) I could discuss the significance of music condemning social norms of marginalization and exalting Afro-Brazilian heritage cropping up in bands as varied as the heavy metal Soulfly and the popular rap Racionais MCs. I could point out the gradually decreasing poverty and illiteracy under a government a bit more willing (or more vulnerable to pressure from below) to reject free trade agreements and loans from the World Bank.

There is incredible variety in the examples of favelados and non-favelados who have chosen to actively resist circumstances like those enabling Sandro's tragedy in creative, vibrant, hopeful and hope-inspiring ways. It is because of their efforts that Sandro's fate is not shared by a greater proportion of Brazilians. It follows that I would do them a disservice if I ignored their courageous, often successful quests for a more equitable Brazil, and by extension a more equitable world, in a paper devoted to analyzing the profound impact of inequality on one young man's life.

Important as that recognition is, I do not judge it fair to Sandro or the many others in his situation, in Brazil and across the globe in the past, present, and years to come, to conclude this paper with a feel-good ending. In my mind, doing so would simply put the bullet of Sandro's memory back in the gun from which it was fired, ready to be aimed at someone else. León Gieco's text about the importance of freeing memory or history, of becoming intimate with it, is an articulation of the driving force behind this project. I don't want to undermine that so that my readers can come away feeling good about the world. The



flexible, creative resilience evidenced in the resistance I describe briefly above is in itself wondrous, but the forces that make it necessary are horrific, and as a WASP (but also as a person) I feel that to lose sight of that fact would be the ultimate offense. I therefore conclude this study with the reaction I had when I first saw Padilha's documentary. Though I've attempted to answer a select few of the questions that follow in the project above, most are not so easily answered and remain with me today.

"What leads to these abuses? What leads to such dehumanization, such loyalty to stereotypes and ideals as destructive as those held by the BOPE?

Was this Sandro's *escrache*<sup>10</sup>, the closest he could get to advocating his right to justice?

Do problems of police brutality and structural violence truly lie solely within a brutal Brazilian society, a chaotic legacy of a chaotic military rule and the historical chaos which preceded it for centuries? A mystery of third-world bestialism, the birthright of a continent dominated by Márquez' "mustached men sitting on footstools, making their wives do all the work, with a guitar in one hand and a pistol in the other"? Do the centuries of indigenous genocide and African subjugation, of prioritizing first commitment to Portugal, then to Britain, then to structural adjustment and international trade laws figure in?

Why are the prisons backfiring as much as they do? Why was Sandro illiterate, without hope of ever getting a legal job? Why was he unable to break free of his cocaine addiction (one drug leads to another, and glue-sniffing, his first, is used to induce satisfaction of hunger pangs by young street children)?

To paraphrase my senior year history teacher, what could he have been if social spending were a priority, if education and healthcare were accessible, if criminals were not driven to desperation by the fear of returning to dehumanizing prison conditions, if the structural causes of Sandro's mother's death had been solved long ago?

What would Sandro be, in a more just world? Would he be dead? Would he be in prison? Would he be worthy of a legal trial, and of condemnation? Would the cops who killed him be? Would he have been killed at all? Would he have committed crimes at all? Would he be the artist he dreamed of being, the agent of change he so desperately wanted to be? Would he be a quietly industrious son helping his supportive, loving mother make ends meet? Would he be an abusive father, a loving uncle, a doting grandfather, a widow's fond memory, a child's ambiguous role model?

All we know is that he loved, feared, struggled, doubted and hoped. That he continued to put one foot ahead of the other, though the pain he faced is unimaginable to most of us. That he went down fighting. That he died by asphyxiation in the back of a cop car, having bitten the officers holding him down, broken one's arm, and kicked a hole in the vehicle's windshield. And that the officers who strangled him were tried and declared innocent by the jury. That human rights movements didn't pick up his case, that he was considered perpetrator, violator, murderer, that before being dragged into the cop car he was at serious risk of being lynched. That he was twenty-one years old, one of the 72 survivors of the police massacre of seven street children at the church of Candelária; that unlike thirty-nine of those survivors, he made it alive to the year 2000 – but not beyond."

(All previously unmentioned facts of Sandro's life in Padilha 2002)

<sup>10</sup> Escraches, of funas as they're called in Chile, are a social phenomena that arose in response to *indulto* and *punto final* laws mandating legal amnesty for all government officials and military personnel that committed human rights violations during Chilean and Argentine dictatorships. Groups of activists who discover the identity of any of these perpetrators organize demonstrations outside the perpetrators' workplaces or homes to make their crimes public knowledge. Their slogan is "si no hay justicia, hay escrache" ("if justice never comes, an escrache will") For more info, check Martín Abregú's section *Human Rights After the Dictatorship, Lessons from Argentina*, in the NACLA Report on the Americas of 2000. Interpret my use of the term to speak of Sandro's actions as you will.

### Works Cited

- Almendra, D. (2009). Os mundos do crime: práticas e representações da violência urbana em múltiplas escalas de análise. *XIV Congresso Brasileiro de Sociologia, July 28-31*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from [http://starline.dnsalias.com:8080/sbs/arquivos/15\\_6\\_2009\\_23\\_49\\_0.pdf](http://starline.dnsalias.com:8080/sbs/arquivos/15_6_2009_23_49_0.pdf)
- Anderson, R. N. (1996). O mito de Zumbi: implicações culturais para o Brasil e para a diáspora. *Afro-Ásia, 17*, 99-119. Retrieved April 30, 2010, from [http://www.afroasia.ufba.br/pdf/afroasia\\_n17\\_p99.pdf](http://www.afroasia.ufba.br/pdf/afroasia_n17_p99.pdf)
- Brazil: Human Rights Abuse and Criminality in Rio de Janeiro. Human Rights Watch Publications. (1996, January). Retrieved December 14, 2009, from <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/summaries/s.brazil961.html>
- Brazil: "They come in shooting": Policing socially excluded communities. Amnesty International Report published Dec 2nd, 2005, Code AMR 19/025/2005. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR190252005?open&of=ENG-BRA>
- Caldeira, T. (2000). *City of walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-167. Retrieved May 10, 2010, from HeinOnline database.
- Chapters 1-5, 7-8, 13. (1996). In H. Verbitsky (Author), *The flight: confessions of an Argentine dirty warrior* (pp. 91-133). New York: New Press. (Original work published 2009)
- De M. Arantes, E. M. (n.d.). Aos adolescentes o inferno: que direito é este? Retrieved May 15, 2010, from <http://casadajuventude.org.br/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=328&Itemid=0>
- Godoy, A. S. (Fall 2009). *Human Rights in Latin America*. Class lectures for LSJ/SIS 322 at University of Washington, Seattle. Presentation slides retrieved May 15, 2010, from <http://faculty.washington.edu/agodoy/Human%20Rights%20in%20LatAm.html>
- Goldani, A. (1994). Retratos da Família em Tempos de Crise. *Estudos Feministas*, (Special Issue), 305-335.

- Gorita, M. (2003). *Notícias do Crime, Relatos de Insegurança: Os Discursos da Violência no Rio de Janeiro* (doctoral dissertation). Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Retrieved December 12, 2009, from <http://www.necvu.ifcs.ufrj.br/arquivos/MarcosAlan.pdf>
- Huggins, M. K., Haritos-Fatouros, M., & Zimbardo, P. G. (2002). *Violence workers: police torturers and murderers reconstruct Brazilian atrocities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Laurell, A. M. (2000). Structural Adjustment and the Globalization of Social Policy in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2)(June), 306-325. Retrieved December 13, 2009, from [http://club.fom.ru/books/Laurell00\\_2.pdf](http://club.fom.ru/books/Laurell00_2.pdf)
- Law 10.639, Diário Oficial da União, with summary published at [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/Leis/2003/L10.639.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Leis/2003/L10.639.htm) (2003) (enacted)
- Lemos, C. R. (2001). *Seis questões sobre o jornalismo: Uma leitura da imprensa brasileira nos anos 90 a partir de Ítalo Calvino*. (doctoral thesis). UFMG, Department of Comparative Literature.
- Lyra, D. (2004). *Relatório Rio: violência policial e insegurança pública*. Retrieved November 17, 2009, from [www.global.org.br/portuguese/arquivos/relatorio\\_rio1.pdf](http://www.global.org.br/portuguese/arquivos/relatorio_rio1.pdf)
- Mello, C. B. (2005). Mancha no acontecimento: imagem e subjetividade no caso do Ônibus 174. In *Livro de Actas do 4º Congresso da Associação Portuguesa de Ciências da Comunicação, 4º SOPCOM* (Vol. 4, pp. 215-224). Aveiro, Portugal: Comissão Editorial da Universidade de Aveiro.
- Memoria del Silencio* (Rep.). (1999). Retrieved May 15, 2010, from <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/toc.html>
- Os custos sociais do ajuste neoliberal no Brasil. (2001). In L. T. Soares (Author), *Ajuste Estructural En America Latina Costos Sociales y Alternativas (Ariel Historia)* (pp. 171-186). Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from CLACSO database at <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/sader/cap08.pdf>.
- Padilha, J. (Director). (2002). *Ônibus 174* [Motion picture on DVD]. Zazen Produções.
- Pereira, L. C. (2003). *Desenvolvimento e Crise no Brasil: História, Economia e Política de Getúlio Vargas a Lula* (5th ed.). São Paulo, SP, Brasil: Editora 34.

- Política de Segurança Pública no Rio de Janeiro é Extermínio, Reforça Relatório da ONU. *Justiça Global*. (2008, May 29). Retrieved December 14, 2009, from <http://global.org.br/programas/politica-de-seguranca-publica-no-rio-de-janeiro-e-extermínio-reforca-relatorio-da-onu/>
- Prando, C. C. (2006, September 9). Sobre a Paz e o Estatuto do Desarmamento. *Revista Âmbito Jurídico*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from [http://www.ambito-juridico.com.br/site/index.php?n\\_link=revista\\_artigos\\_leitura&artigo\\_id=1297](http://www.ambito-juridico.com.br/site/index.php?n_link=revista_artigos_leitura&artigo_id=1297)
- Repression and State Security. (1992.) In J.E. Corradi, P.W. Fagen, & M.M. Garreton (Authors), *Fear at the edge: state terror and resistance in Latin America* (pp. 39-71). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. (Original work published 2009)
- Rocha, L. (July 2004). *O caso Ônibus 174: Entre o documentário e o telejornal* [Scholarly project]. In *Biblioteca Online de Ciências da Comunicação*. Retrieved December 8, 2009, from <http://bocc.ubi.pt/pag/rocha-leonardo-documentario-telejornal.pdf>
- Chapters 17 and 18. (1998). In L. Schoultz (Author), *Beneath the United States: a history of U.S. policy toward Latin America* (pp. 141-175). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 2009)
- Silveira, A. (2008). A Prevenção de Homicídios: A Experiência do Programa Fica Vico no Morro das Pedras. *Educação e Realidade*, 33 (Jul/dez), 2nd ser., 163-176. Retrieved December 13, 2009, from <http://www.seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/educacaoerealidade/article/viewFile/7070/4386>
- Soares, L., Batista, A., & Pimentel, R. (2006). *Elite da Tropa*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from <http://www.visionvox.com.br/biblioteca/Luiz-Eduardo-Soares---Elite-da-Tropa.pdf>
- Souza, F. (2004). Solano Trindade e a Produção Literária Afro-Brasileira. *Afro-Ásia*, 31, 277-293. Retrieved April 30, 2010, from <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/770/77003108.pdf>
- The Promise. (1959). In C. W. Mills (Author), *The sociological imagination*. (pp. 3-24). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 2008)
- Viva Rio. (n.d.). About COAV. Retrieved May 15, 2010, from [http://www.coav.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?sid=55&UserActiveTemplate=\\_en](http://www.coav.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?sid=55&UserActiveTemplate=_en)

Weiselfisz, J. J. (2002). *Mapa da Violência* (Published by UNESCO, ISBN: 85-87853-50-3). Retrieved December 13, 2009, from:

<http://www.observatoriodeseguranca.org/files/Mapa%20da%20Viol%C3%Aancia%20III.pdf>

Zimbalist, J., & Mochary, M. (Directors). (2005). *Favela Rising* [Motion picture on DVD]. Brazil, U.S.A: Sidetrack Films.