

THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL AND THE *BANDIDO*: THE *PERIFERIA* AS A SITE OF BLACK CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN FERRÉZ'S *MANUAL PRÁTICO DO ÓDIO*

Eliseo JACOB*

- **ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I argue that Ferréz's novel, *Manual prático do ódio*, functions as an alternative public sphere, or black counterpublic, where the problems *periferia* youth face are addressed and critiqued through two archetypal figures: the *bandido* and the organic intellectual. These two archetypes represent a dichotomy of responses to the unjust world surrounding *periferia* youth: the temptation of money and power through drugs and violence versus the possibility of social engagement through cultural projects that celebrate their African ancestry. The illusion of power embodied in the *bandido* raises questions as to the durability of crime as a quick solution to social inequity. Functioning as a foil to the *bandido* and his crew, a figure that seems out of place suddenly emerges: the organic intellectual. This figure has a minor role, but his *fora de lugar* (out of place) positioning allows him to see his community's self-worth through his ancestors' culture and history, thereby embodying what Paulo Freire defines as critical consciousness. The tension, therefore, between these two figures functions as a debate within the counterpublic of the *periferia* as to what is the best course of action in terms of providing urban youth with legitimate options to empower themselves.
- **KEYWORDS:** Black counterpublic. Civic engagement. Criminality. Critical consciousness. Organic intellectual.

*“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.”*¹

Ferréz.

* Howard University – Washington – DC – United States of America. eliseo.jacob@howard.edu.

¹ “We are in the streets man, we are in the favela, in the fields, in the bar, in the overpasses but before anything else we are literature, and you all can deny that, you can shut your eyes, turn your backs,

In his essay, “The Poor Old Woman and Her Portrait,” Roberto Schwarz (2001) focuses on the character of Dona Plácida from Machado de Assis’ novel *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. What is interesting is that Dona Plácida is a rather minor character in the novel, appearing briefly, yet it reveals much about misfortune, illness and labor. In other words, her inclusion in the novel provides important insights into the social dynamics tied to race, gender and class. Schwarz argues that the intense realism surrounding her description gives her historical relevance and rescues her from obscurity. His analysis of Dona Plácida drew my attention because even though she may be a minor character, her appearance provides a sharp contrast to the elite, bourgeois world of the late 19th century Machado typically describes in his literary works. Similarly, in my reading of Ferréz’s novel, *Manual prático do ódio*, written at the beginning of the 21st century about a group of gangsters from São Paulo’s *periferia*, I was drawn to a figure that, like Dona Plácida, appears briefly and seemingly at random, but provides a different view of the world being described in the literary work. This character that Ferréz introduces, Paulo, can be seen as a kind of organic intellectual figure (using Gramsci’s term) that reveals much about the social-political-literary activism taking place in the *periferia* that goes beyond the typical portrayals of crime, drugs and violence. Like Schwarz did with Dona Plácida, I will examine Paulo’s impact in *Manual prático do ódio*, despite being a minor character who is not the central focus in Ferréz’s novel.

My examination of Paulo’s role in Ferréz’s novel is part of larger argument that I am proposing regarding the relationship of the public sphere to marginalized communities of color, such as the one described in the novel. As noted by Michael Hanchard, Afro-Brazilians “have been accorded partial and contingent access to the public sphere, a domain that has been defined explicitly and implicitly as white” (1999, p. 167). Because of segregation and other forms of racial alienation, residents of São Paulo’s peripheral communities must seek out ways of addressing their needs and concerns despite their limited access to the bourgeois public sphere, as defined by Habermas. The creation of alternative public spheres within the broadly defined public sphere of Brazil therefore, provides a means for subaltern groups to discuss issues relevant to their social reality.

Within Ferréz’s novel an alternative public, or I would argue more specifically a Black counterpublic emerges in which the author introduces two archetypal figures, the bandido (bandit or gangster) and the organic intellectual, as a way to discuss how youth respond to exclusion to full participation in Brazilian society. These two archetypes represent a dichotomy of social responses to the unjust world

but, like I already said, we will continue to be here, just like the invisible social wall that divides this country.” (2005, p. 7). The translations of excerpts from Ferréz’s novel into English used in the article were completed by me.

that surrounds *periferia* youth: the temptation of money and power through drugs and violence versus the possibility of social engagement through education and cultural projects that celebrate one's ethnic heritage. By examining the lure of crime as a quick solution to social inequities, Ferréz recognizes the challenges *periferia* youth face in their daily experiences. Social exclusion and institutionalized racism shape their relationship with the public sphere in Brazil, which are characterized by experiences of racial profiling, police brutality and cyclical poverty. Social mobility, then, seems possible through crime and its promises of quick wealth. Ferréz explores this illusion of money and power through the bandido Régis as he attempts to circumvent the stigma of being poor and non-white. While a life of crime has a strong appeal to the main characters who experience crushing poverty in the *periferia*, Ferréz questions its viability by offering an alternative path through the intellectual figure of Paulo, an individual with a strong interest in education, the arts and his African roots. Ferréz, therefore, reimagines the *periferia* as a site of civic engagement instead of one based solely on violence and desperation,² which ties back to Michael Hanchard's observation that Afro-Brazilians have created territorial and epistemological communities for themselves to recover and celebrate their heritage as a response to their subordinate status in Brazilian society.

The *Bandido*

Published in 2005, *Manual prático do ódio* chronicles the experiences of a group of *bandidos*, or gangsters who live in São Paulo's *zona sul*. The novel's hyper-realist aesthetic communicates the brutality and uncertainty that defines the lives of Régis and his crew as they seek out ways to get ahead. While it could be argued that such a heavy focus on realist portrayals of poverty and violence serve to reinforce the public's interest in sensationalized narratives of crime, as noted by scholars such as Flora Sussekind, I would argue Ferréz's novel provides a space to examine at a deeper level the larger social mechanisms (racism, segregation to the periphery, cyclical poverty) that led these characters down a certain path. I do not see Ferréz advocating for a life of crime, but rather doing the opposite, providing a stark narrative as a way to show urban youth that this option, while seemingly flashy and more lucrative, will never have a lasting and productive outcome. The novel's social function, therefore, serves to provide discussion and debate within the alternative public of the *periferia*, in which ideas and solutions to inequity are forged among residents as a way to regain their sense of humanity and to overcome their oppressed status (FREIRE, 2000).

² See Nelson de Oliveira's introduction, "Infinita falas" in the anthology *Cenas da favela: as melhores histórias da periferia brasileira* (2007) for additional commentary on the multiplicity of views and experiences found in the *periferia* and *favela*. The *periferia* is not only a space of violence and crime; other experiences transpire in this location.

The desire for alternative socio-economic systems due to chronic poverty and few opportunities for social ascension characterizes the novel *Manual prático do ódio*. The main character of the novel, Régis, looks to drug trafficking and petty crimes as a means to escape the poverty of the *periferia*. Régis and his crew believe that crowding onto the buses at dawn to work for the elite classes as maids, doorman or gardeners is just another form of slavery: “trabalhar para os outros hoje em dia era ser escravo moderno...” (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 18). His observation that his neighbors are trapped in a cycle of oppression is powerful, evoking the legacy of slavery (and I would say the legacy of clientelism). Régis is outraged at the conditions *periferia* residents face, and to desire an alternative option/solution is valid. Later on the novel, Régis is determined to never be broke: “o que interessava para ele no final de toda a história era que o bolso estivesse sempre cheio” (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 53). Working outside the limits of the law through drugs and violence offers the possibility of a better life that cannot be achieved by following the rules of the system. Many *periferia* youth experience powerlessness in relation to the existing hierarchical structure in Brazil that does not allow them to have access to the same educational and financial opportunities as the upper classes. The criminal figure struggles between feelings of “*revoltado*”, or being disgusted with the system’s inequities and “*marcado*”, or engaging in illegal activities for personal profit (ZALUAR, 1985). Despite the high risk of incarceration and death, banditry becomes an attractive option that comes with a feeling of control. Ferréz provides an example:

Régis sentia-se um herói, estava jogando certo no jogo do capitalismo, o jogo era arrecadar capital a qualquer custo, afinal os exemplos que via o inspiravam ainda mais, inimigos se abraçavam em nome do dinheiro na Câmara Municipal e na Assembléia Legislativa, inimigos se abraçavam no programa de domingo pela vendagem do novo CD, os exemplos eram claros e visíveis, só não via quem não queria. (FERREZ, 2003, p. 154).³

Resources and social power become the central focus, and how Régis and his crew achieve that goal becomes secondary. For Régis, criminal enterprises are no different than the strategies employed by the elite. The criminal underworld offers vulnerable *periferia* youth opportunities that they cannot attain through the legitimate means. The illegality of producing and selling drugs raises their value, which translates into the possibility of easy, quick money (ZALUAR, 1985, p.

³ “Régis felt like a hero, he was doing everything right in the game of capitalism. The game was to collect funds at whatever cost since the examples he saw inspired him even more; enemies hugged each other in the name of money in city hall and the legislative assembly; enemies hugged each other on the Sunday television program in order to sell a new CD. The examples were clear and visible, those who couldn’t see it, did not want to.” (my translation).

154). The large sums of monies exchanged for drugs reinforce the idea that criminal endeavors, despite their danger, are more lucrative than working a blue-collar job.⁴

Régis becomes a symbol of the false promises of the gangster lifestyle that will most likely lead to their death and the inability to contribute to the wellbeing of their community. As a literary character, Régis marks the shortcomings of entering the criminal world as well as the contradictions of the capitalist system. Régis wanted to escape the cyclical poverty that trapped him and his family and viewed banditry as a legitimate solution to his problems. He found himself in an ostentatious life full of champagne, cars and beautiful women, but an emotional hollowness haunted him no matter how much money and power he obtained. He lived in the shadows. His ultimate demise illustrates to the reader that a life of crime is extremely unpredictable and dangerous; therefore one can be in control today and dead tomorrow. Not all iconic representations need to be positive or to reside on a higher moral plane. What is important is the impact they have on the reader, particularly urban youth who face the temptation of entering the criminal underworld and do not think about the high risk for danger associated with crime.

The Organic Intellectual

The organic intellectual in Ferréz's works questions the viability of crime in the *periferia* by evoking his community's ancestral roots. Paulo Freire's work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, defines critical consciousness as a concept rooted in the belief that individuals and communities can replace internalized negative images with "iconic representations that have a powerful emotional impact in the daily lives of learners" (2000, p. 96-97). This consciousness building allows the individual, in Freire's words, to "read the world," which signifies the ability to question and critically think about one's surrounding environment. Ferréz reads the world of the *periferia* by questioning criminality as a viable solution to the problems of cyclical poverty and racial prejudices that plague his community.

I would further argue that this organic intellectual figure is able to read the world of the *periferia* due to his social positioning within his community. Mario Augusto Medeiros, looking at certain intellectual figures in Ferréz's novels, writes of a *fora de lugar* (out of place) positionality. After pages and pages of stories about Régis, his crew and their exploits, the sudden appearance of the intellectual figure emphasizes this outsider positioning. Ferréz himself speaks of his personal experiences of feeling out of place at times in the *periferia*: "I liked to mess around with books, to organize, to see the authors, I really liked to research the authors. Who knows: it was natural. It was natural for me, but it was different for everyone. I paid

⁴ See *Cabeça de porco* by MV Bill, Luis Eduardo Soares and Celso Athayde, which examines Brazilian urban youth's reasons for participating in the drug trade and gangs.

more of a high price for being this way, right? During that time I paid a high price because...a lot of discrimination and other things. If I sang rap, if I messed around with Samba, some other thing, it was less stigmatized. Because in the periphery it's more common those things...literature was very foreign.” (MEDEIROS DA SILVA, 2011, p. 391). Perhaps being in this *fora de lugar* position allows him to conceive of new possibilities beyond the immediate that Régis can only see. Being able to see beyond one's immediate circumstances ties back to Houston Baker's observation that imagination plays a central role within the Black public sphere.

In Ferréz's novel, *Manual prático do ódio*, Paulo, a young man who spends his time reading books and educating himself about his ethnic roots, functions as a foil to other protagonists who engage in criminal activities. Positioned within the *periferia*, Paulo lives among the same poverty and crime as Régis, but he chooses a different path. Replacing negative images of criminality, Paulo embodies Paulo Freire's idea of critical consciousness through the insertion of symbolic representations related to Afro-Brazilian popular culture:

Paulo era negro, sabia tudo sobre a história de seus ancestrais... mostraria a história dos oprimidos que nunca se entregaram, mas desmantelaria para os futuros filhos os mitos falsos dos opressores, os memo falso heróis que matavam índios e negros e depois ganhavam estátuas espelhadas pela cidade. (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 82).⁵

The first phrase of the passage, “Paulo era negro” (Paulo was black), is a powerful declaration, as Ferréz accentuates the racial background of *periferia* youth. Historically, the Brazilian government implemented policies that negated blackness and marginalized non-white ethnic groups.⁶ By openly adopting racial categories, such as *negro*, the organic intellectual from the *periferia* questions the social inferiority long associated with being Black in Brazil. Paulo's decision to bring attention to his racial and ethnic heritage represents the work taking place in

⁵ “Paulo was black, he knew everything about the history of his ancestors...he would show the history of the oppressed that never gave in, but would dismantle for his future children the false myths of the oppressors, the same false heroes that killed the Indians and the blacks and later on received statues throughout the city.” (my translation).

⁶ Starting in the 19th century, Brazil's elite intellectuals began to adopt Europe's ideas related to eugenics and social Darwinism. They wanted to whiten Brazil's general population, which, to them, meant racial superiority. Politicians encouraged immigration from Europe, particularly northern Europeans, envisioning a whitening of the population over several generations. In the 1930s, anthropologist Gilberto Freyre advanced the idea of racial democracy in his seminal work, *Casa-grande e senzala*, to describe Brazil's history of racial mixing and of the different races cohabitating with each other, specifically the masters and the slaves during colonial period and the 19th century. Terms such as *pardo*, *mulato* and *café com leite* became common terms to identify one's race if not white. A new hierarchy of non-white categories emerged, yet they were always below whites.

the *periferia* by writers, such as Ferréz who in the introduction to the *Caros Amigos'* special edition on *Literatura Marginal* emphasizes literature's role in bringing visibility to voices that have been silenced:

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 (FERRÉZ, 2005, p. 7).⁷

In a way, Paulo represents the “nova arte engajada” (the new, socially engaged art), which is creating a Black counterpublic where art, literature and music are used to recover forgotten histories, address relevant social issues and engage with the broader public sphere to bring attention to their experiences and needs as citizens of Brazil.

In the process of deconstructing figures, such as the colonizer who oppressed the indigenous and afro-descendant populations, Paulo also calls upon key Afro-Brazilian figures, such as Zumbi dos Palmares⁸ and Clementina de Jesus⁹:

[...] conhecia de cor as histórias fantásticas de Zumbi, de Anatóscia e era apaixonado pela rainha Nzinga, sempre se imaginava contando a história dos verdadeiros heróis brasileiros para seus filhos. [Paulo] falaria da coragem e do talento de Clementina de Jesus, e contaria para a pequena sobre todos os sofrendores que ajudaram a construir tudo o que eles estavam vendo desde que nasceram. (FERRÉZ, 2003, p. 82).¹⁰

⁷ “We are in the streets man, we are in the favela, in the fields, in the bar, in the overpasses but before anything else we are literature, and you all can deny that, you can shut your eyes, turn your backs, but, like I already said, we will continue to be here, just like the invisible social wall that divides this country”. (my translation).

⁸ Zumbi represents a non-conciliatory approach towards ideologies like *cordialidade* that silence any identity or history that challenge the image of the homogenous state (BUARQUE DE HOLANDA, 1997). Zumbi, the leader of the *quilombo* Palmares, a settlement founded by escaped slaves in Brazil during the colonial era, was known for leading his community to the height of its power and notoriety in northeastern Brazil. He was recognized not only as an important political leader, but also as a warrior who would fight against oppressors, like the slave traders. While Zumbi and the settlement of Palmares eventually fell to the Portuguese crown, his legend lives on in the present day through Brazil's official Black Consciousness Day, which is celebrated on his birthday (November 20).

⁹ Clementina, considered one of the greatest singers of samba during the 20th century, is known for her ability to show the connection between Africa and Brazil through music. Brazil's link to Africa reveals to the reader that the artistic practices found in the *periferia* belong to a larger historical trajectory that reaches beyond the boundaries of the *periferia*. References to Clementina point towards a larger musical tradition rooted in the African Diaspora.

¹⁰ “[...] he knew by heart the fantastical stories of Zumbi, of Anatóscia, and he was enchanted with

Mario Augusto Medeiros da Silva argues that Ferréz and other peripheral writers call upon the image of the quilombo and Zumbi dos Palmares as a form of Abdias do Nascimento's notion of *Quilombismo*, thereby creating an ethics of political-literary activism. (MEDEIROS DA SILVA, 2011, p. 401). This becomes clear in an interview Ferréz had with Caros Amigos:

It seems that we learned to live in shacks (malocas) since Zumbi. This here is a quilombo (he is referring to the favela/periferia)...That's why I say: Zumbi started the revolution three hundred years ago, bringing together people through liberty. And it's us that will finish that revolution. (AMARAL, 2000, p. 45).

This is a revolution, not with weapons, but with ideas that has the potential to change the future. In the passage, Ferréz uses the future preterit, or conditional tense, insinuating new possibilities.

Referencing these cultural and political leaders may not change the institutionalized racism that *periferia* youth encounter in their daily lives, but Paulo challenges the perception of crime, violence and economic despair as the primary historical legacies of marginalized communities of color. These examples are meant to invoke pride in *periferia* residents' ethnic heritage. The intellectual figure does not change the racial and class hierarchical structure in Brazil, but his knowledge of the *periferia*'s racial past can provide ways to rethink the urban periphery as a space where new possibilities are forged within the Black counterpublic.

Conclusion

The tensions that unfold between the two archetypal figures in Ferréz's novel, the *bandido* and the organic intellectual, create an interesting debate that unfolds in a space typically not recognized by the larger national public sphere of Brazil: the counterpublics of the *periferia*. Returning to Michael Hanchard's observations that Afro-Brazilians are creating alternative publics through community organizations rooted in cultural productions that celebrate Afro-Brazilian history and culture, Ferréz's literary productions represent a part of that trend as he brings attention to the experiences of Black youth in São Paulo's *periferia*.

The daily challenges *periferia* youth face are presented in a more complex manner through these two figures in Ferréz's novel. By providing the illusion of wealth and power, crime becomes an attractive option for *periferia* youth to

the queen Nzinga. He always imagined himself sharing the history of the true Brazilian heroes with his children. [Paulo] would speak of Clementina de Jesus' courage and talent, and he would tell to his little girl about the sufferers that helped to build everything that they had seen since their birth." (my translation).

overcome social inequality. Ferréz cautions against crime's false promises of escape from poverty due to the high risk of violence, death and incarceration connected to it. He introduces the organic intellectual figure to serve as a foil to the negative image of the *criminoso* by replacing crime with historical references that evoke the *periferia's* rich cultural history. The intellectual represents the recent emergence of Afro-Brazilian cultural and political organizations that strive to increase the visibility of the social problems that afflict their communities.

Ultimately, Paulo plays a central role in novel since he serves as a symbol of the extra literary activities that Ferréz and other *literatura periférica* writers engage in to offer *periferia* youth options to engage socially and politically with their communities through art and literature. The novel therefore, where we see two options, Regis and Pauo, is a literary treatise on the real world dilemmas of *periferia* youth, and how Paulo seemingly random insertion in the novel is actually the Black public sphere at work, circulating discourses that raise important questions as to how to best address social issues and concerns relevant to the residents of São Paulo's *periferia* that commonly would not garner sufficient attention in Brazil's larger national public.

JACOB, E. O intelectual orgânico e o bandido: a periferia como local de engajamento cívico negro em *Manual prático do ódio*, de Ferrés. **Itinerários**, Araraquara, n. 46, p. 139-148, jan./jun. 2018.

■ **RESUMO:** Neste trabalho, argumento que o romance de Ferréz, *Manual prático do ódio*, funciona como uma esfera pública alternativa, ou uma “contra-pública” negra, onde os problemas da juventude periférica são abordados e criticados através de dois arquétipos: o bandido e o intelectual orgânico. Estes dois arquétipos representam a dicotomia de reações a um mundo injusto que rodeia a juventude periférica: a tentação de dinheiro e poder através de drogas e violência versus a possibilidade de um engajamento social por meio de projetos culturais que celebram a ancestralidade africana. A ilusão do poder incorporada no bandido levanta dúvidas sobre a permanência do crime como uma solução imediata à desigualdade social. Funcionando como um atrapalho ao bandido e sua gangue, de repente uma figura, que está fora de lugar no romance, aparece: o intelectual orgânico. Esta figura tem um papel pequeno, mas seu posicionamento num espaço fora de lugar dentro da periferia a permite ver o valor de sua comunidade através da cultura e história de seus ancestrais, assim incorporando o que Paulo Freire define como a consciência crítica. Portanto, a tensão entre estas duas figuras funciona como um debate dentro do contra-público da periferia acerca do que é a melhor linha de ação em termos de oferecer à juventude urbana opções legítimas para se empoderar.

■ **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Consciência Crítica. Contra-público Negro. Criminalidade. Engajamento Cívico. Intelectual Orgânico.

REFERENCES

- AMARAL, M. Literatura de mano. **Caros Amigos**, São Paulo, n. 39, p. 45, 2000.
- BUARQUE DE HOLANDA, S. **Raízes do Brasil**. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia das Letras, 1997.
- FERRÉZ. **Manual prático do ódio**. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2003.
- _____. **Literatura Marginal: Talentos da escrita periférica**. Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 2005.
- FREIRE, P. **Pedagogy of the Oppressed (30th Anniversary edition)**. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- FREYRE, G. **Casa grande e senzala**. São Paulo: Global Editora, 2014.
- HANCHARD, M. **Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil**. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- MEDEIROS DA SILVA, M. A. **A descoberta do insólito: literatura negra e literatura periférica no Brasil (1960-2000)**. 2011. Tese (Doutorado) – Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas.
- MV BILL; ATHAYDE, C. **Cabeça de porco**. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2005.
- OLIVEIRA, N. **Cenas da favela: as melhores histórias da periferia brasileira**. Rio de Janeiro: Geração Editorial, 2007.
- SCHWARZ, R. **A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism: Machado de Assis**. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- SUSSEKIND, F. Desterritorialização e forma literária: Literatura brasileira contemporânea e experiência urbana. **Sala Preta**, São Paulo, v. 4, n. 1, p. 11-29, 2004.
- ZALUAR, A. **A máquina e a revolta**. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1985.

