

# Life in the Favela

"Poverty and hunger, family dysfunction, no father in the home, low self-esteem, and neighborhood violence born out of drug trafficking are some of the salient characteristics of these kids. It is not uncommon for poor people to not register the birth of their children, rendering them as **official nonentities**, unable to enroll in school or to register for a job. Initially, many of the poor never registered their babies because they didn't have the money to do so. Now, I believe, there is no fee, but they either are not aware that the fee has been eliminated or it is just hard to change old fears and habits. When kids reach adolescence, they are particularly subjected to the siren call of entering the drug trade as drug runners and look outs for easy money. Once they enter the drug trade, they have **absolutely no future**, and in fact, their life expectancy has been dramatically diminished."

- Recent e-mail from Bob Crites, Director of SHSKI  
(Students Helping Street Kids International)



Raquel

"The exact number of street children in the cities of Brasil is unknown. Some of these children have families

that live in the slums while others are orphans. Most of them are 'roaming vendors,' selling odds and ends on a day-to-day basis. Other children resort to begging. When interviewed, a thirteen-year-old stated, 'I don't have any other future, so I sell candy. I'd like to work at a real job, like being a doorman, a guard in a bank, or carrying boxes of olive oil.' However, other children who were interviewed sometimes would, admit reluctantly that they sporadically engage in illegal activities - stealing, drug trafficking and prostitution - in order to 'make a little extra'."

Pfanni, Emilia R. *Poverty and Violence in the Slums of Brasil. The Other War Zone.* May, 2004

O Movimento Pró-Criança tem como missão promover a melhoria da qualidade de vida e a conquista da cidadania de crianças, adolescentes e jovens em situação de risco ou abandono, na Região Metropolitana do Recife.

Esse resgate acontece através de um trabalho interdisciplinar composto por atividades que integram família e comunidade na busca da inclusão social. As atividades são desenvolvidas em quatro segmentos que envolvem artes, apoio pedagógico, esporte e profissionalização.



## a vida na Favela

of all deaths of 15 to 19 year-olds, 72 percent were due to causes such as homicide, suicide, and traffic accidents; approximately 85 percent of the victims had been sexually exploited. Homicide was the leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14, and only 1.9 percent of their murderers served prison sentences. Released by the Country Reports on Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. February 25, 2004.

*Amar é viver, viver é ser real.  
Realidade é ser infeliz  
e felicidade é querer morrer.  
A morte é fim de tudo.  
Mas a vida é tão bonita e bela  
pra quem sabe viver.  
É uma coisa que eu não sei fazer.  
Por isso devo sofrer até morrer,  
acabar com tudo,  
esquecer o mundo e nunca mais  
choarar. - Margarete, 19*

Hecht, Tobias. "At Home in the Street.  
Children of Northeast Brasil." Cambridge  
University Press. 1998.

**"Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything - that they are sick, lazy and unproductive - that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness."**  
**Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.***

The Movement for the Children has a mission to promote the improvement of the quality of life and the conquest of citizenship for children, adolescents and youth in situations of risk or abandonment in the Metropolitan Region of Recife.

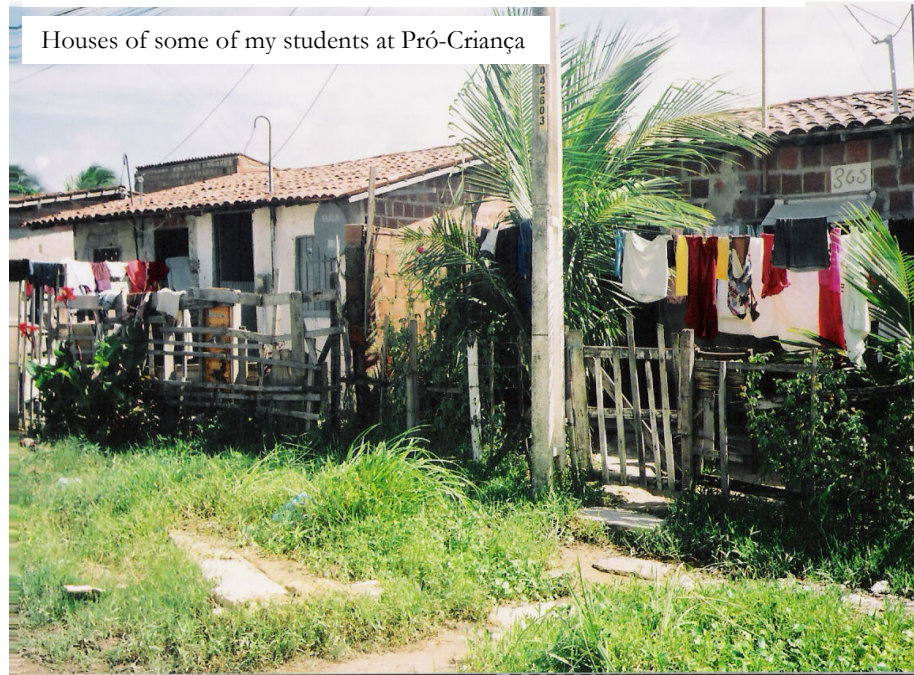
This salvation happens through interdisciplinary work composed of activities that integrate family and community in search of social inclusion. The activities are developed in four segments that involve arts, pedagogical support, sports, and the development of professional skills.



# As Caras da Piedade ~ Faces of a Favela ~



Eduardo and I



Houses of some of my students at Pró-Criança



My walk to Pró-Criança



Interviewing students at Escola Sequinha Baheto (Piedade's Public High school)

While living in **Recife, Brasil** I spent the majority of my time at the community school called **Movimento Pró-Criança** in a favela neighborhood called **Piedade**. Aside from interning as the English and Spanish teacher, I also created an adolescent girl's discussion group, and collaborated with older students on several projects to **reflect upon and improve their neighborhoods and public schools**. At the end of my five month internship Eduardo (another teacher at Pró-Criança who was formerly a student at the school and grew up in the community of Piedade) offered to guide me through the Favela to photograph and interview a variety of the local youth, students, elderly, parents, and public school teachers. The following is my attempt to capture the community's views on aspects of life which **discourage positive youth development in the favela today**.



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(10)



Aqui sou eu, eu estava estudando. quem bateu esta foto foi minha irmã. tenho 15 anos e sou Evangelica.

## *My work in the Community of Piedade*



As the rickety public bus rumbles across a bustling bridge into Recife's city center, I glance out a dingy window pane to watch the sun set over the picturesque *Bacia Portuária*...and am startled to see that I am not the only one enjoying the ride. On the other side of the glass a small child is clinging to the side of the bus, carelessly facing into the screaming wind as the unsteady vehicle flies around a corner and merges onto the freeway. "This *cannot* be safe", I thought to myself, "Where is his mother?"

"Deixe, menina – deixe isso, deixe as coisas como são para ver como ficam" (Scheper-Hughes 363). These words, "Leave it be, girl; leave things alone, and see how they turn out for themselves", were frequently used by women in Alto do Cruzeiro (a Favela near Recife) when facing hard times. Could it be that this little *menino* had come to fearlessly roam the perilous streets because his mother simply, 'let him be' in this attitude of resignation? Or could it be that the fate of her son was ultimately out of this mother's hands? What was the community's role in all of this? The intention of my research for this thesis was to uncover the answers to these questions affecting the daily lives of poor youth in Recife.

Located on the Northeastern coast of Brasil; Recife (pronounced *HEH-SEE-FEY*) is a rough and lively city, proclaimed by the endless reverberations of music and people that fill its streets. Its broken down shacks speak of incredible struggle and diversity as they remain undefeated in the most precarious of circumstances, forever enduring harsh urban conditions, and huddling shamelessly in the midst of the luxurious skyscrapers looming above. Signs of social exclusion and resource deficiency adorn the city in predictable patterns of generational poverty and social neglect. The word "favela" is what Brazilians use to describe the shantytowns that the rural poor have haphazardly constructed on unused land in city centers, creating places where they can survive and build their families.

The conditions that Favela communities experience on a daily basis are enough to make life *complicado*, but the dreams of my students at Movimento Pro-Criança went far beyond their physical limitations. When I asked them about what they would like to change in their community, older students were enthusiastic about the thought of writing a proposal to redistribute funding in their local schools. They wanted better training for the *vestibular* (equivalent to the America SATs); they strived to learn professional skills and dreamt of finding a job that would help them support their families. Twelve year olds told me that they wanted theater, computer, and language programs in their public schools. Other students simply wished that their teachers would express enthusiasm for their education, or even simply show up to class. It is clear that these students are begging for someone to invest in their talents, their goals, and their futures.

I arrived in Recife with the intention of teaching Spanish and English to the students of Pró-Criança in the Favela of Piedade, located on the urban outskirts of the city of Recife. Instead, my role in the community took on a depth and a life which I could never have imagined. Over the five months that I was living and working in Recife I observed, reacted to, and caused reactions to a wide variety of social issues. These reactions and observations resulted in waves of inspiration, frustration, and my own overwhelmed comprehension; which still only brushes the edge of understanding a world of unrestrained emotion, struggle, and beauty. The photographic biographies that my students created, the interviews and pictures I helped capture inside the community of Piedade, and the research I conducted prior to landing in Brasil sparked unforeseen revelations. In addition the Government meetings I attended in Recife's city center as well as the actual teaching experience created a colorful wealth of knowledge and emotion, which I hope to convey in the pages that follow.



# The History and Work of Movimento Pró-Criança in the Community of Piedade



## \*Movement in Favor of the Child\*

Established on July 27<sup>th</sup> of 1993 by D. José Cardoso Sobrinho, **Movimento Pró-Criança (MPC)** is a non profit organization, which aims to bring the arts to poor communities and schools as a strategy to minimize the difficulties experienced by needy youth in the Metropolitan Region of Recife. The implementation of the MPC was motivated by the great number of children and adolescents in situations of misery and abandonment, and by the need to join these efforts to change this reality.

Recife is an important center of music, dance, and culture in Brasil, and Movimento Pro-Criança uses this culture to serve children living in the streets and in Favelas. With the help of the Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife, individual donors, several local businesses, and Dutch and German foundations, the MPC now runs community cultural centers, vocational and academic training programs, and a brilliant pre-professional arts and music studio. The school teaches students to be artists, but claims that it's most important role is to train good people. Though the artists who originally volunteered to teach classes didn't feel like they understood the social conditions of the students, they felt as if their presence had a real impact, so they looked for ways to expand their work in the community. Those students who haven't become professional dancers or musicians still have their artistic skills to give meaning and happiness to their lives. In the loving and nurturing environment that Pro-Criança has created, young people learn how to take chances, how to fail and get up again, and how to persist in the face of obstacles.

According to the Interuniversity Center of Latin America Studies (CIELA), the work done by the Pró-Criança has contributed to a reduction in the number of crimes committed by adolescents in the State of Pernambuco. As indicated by the CIELA, between 1992 and 1999 the number of crimes committed by adolescents in Pernambuco fell from 1,649 to 314, while the rest of the country suffered a considerable increase. The correlation between this data and the success that MPC has had in their work with at-risk youth illustrates the impact of the ideas and action that Movement Pró-Criança continues to take in partnership with society. In 2004, MPC attended to a total of 1,056 youth coming from various communities, through its four separate school units: Coelhos, Recife Antigo, Piedade, and most recently Abreu e Lima, which was inaugurated in February of 2006. After 12 years of realizing these objectives, Pró-Criança is now one of the main institutions in Brasil promoting the socio-educational development of marginalized children and adolescents in situations of social exclusion (Second study of KANITZ & Associates carried through in 2002).

The Piedade Unit of Movimento Pró-Criança was created in 1998, through a promotion from the Cultural Offices and a partnership with SENAC (Brasil's National Commercial Training Service). In 2004, MPC's Piedade unit provided vocational and artistic training programs and social services to 371 at-risk youth (ages 7 to 21) and their families living in socially vulnerable situations around Recife. This accounts for only a fraction of the students hoping to attend the school; many remain on the waiting list and hope to see continued expansion in Movimento Pro-Criança, **"Movement in favor of the child"**.

## *Introduction*

This thesis reflects upon several aspects of life in the Brazilian favela of Piedade which discourage positive youth development in the community. The five specific issues this project focuses on are chosen based on the frequency and intensity with which they were discussed and experienced by residents of Piedade and others involved in the community. These aspects are: Quality of Public schools; The history of the Favela and its life threatening conditions; Effects of institutionalized violence and political corruption; History and causes of violence against women in Brazilian Favelas; and The Role of Favela Youth in an Everyday Cycle of Hardship, Violence, Exclusion, and Neglect. Below I will outline how each of these five aspects of life are present in day to day situations for the youth of Piedade, and how each issue both directly and indirectly discourages investment into positive youth development.

The first section of my thesis describes the poor quality of public schools in the favela and how this ineffective education system heightens the disparity between poor and rich Brazilians, while perpetuating a lack of opportunities for youth in the Favela. I chose to include this issue because public education is a part of many students' daily lives in Piedade. Their experiences with school affect not only how they think of themselves in terms of their immediate academic success, but of their chances for success and survival in the future as well. The quality of education a student receives in Brasil strongly influences whether or not that child will succeed academically, pass the vestibular, attend a federally funded college, and eventually have access to the social and financial opportunities available to a university educated citizen. Children who have no chance of paying for private school education generally feel little is invested into their educational lives or their futures.

Following the public school section is a brief description of the history of the Favela and the life threatening conditions which continue to affect its youth. I chose to include this because the process in which Brasil's favelas came to be illustrates the background and burdens of many parents of favela youth; dictating the situations in which they live now. In this section I describe the conditions of daily life in the favela; an environment that continually breeds desperation, scarcity, and generational poverty. My paper illustrates daily interactions and decisions many people make in response to these conditions, and how this way of life affects youth development. Also described are the ways that these economic restraints and deficiencies, such as a lack of nutritional food, sanitation, or basic health care affect the quality of life for youth living in the favela.

Grinding poverty and scarcity experienced by youth in the favela are intensified by institutionalized violence and political corruption. The way that the poor classes in Brasil have been treated and excluded for generations has perpetuated a culture of poverty and oppression which continues to affect the youngest generation of favela residents. An immediate way that youth are affected by this institutionalized oppression is poor quality of public education that eliminates opportunity for them to enter into the federal university system. This lack of educational support combined with daily discrimination against those coming from favelas results in poor youth being viewed as valueless to Brasil's economic powers. Therefore, like their parents, they have little opportunity to build stable and supportive careers. This economic deficiency contributes to a home life which bears the scars and struggles of poverty. Poor youth encounter structural violence in a very frightening way through their interactions with police officials, who frequently assault and even murder adolescents they find working or living in the streets. This disreputable law enforcement has substantial backing from a corrupt judicial system; Brasil's independent judiciary is under funded, inefficient, and the officials are often poorly trained and subject to intimidation and political and economic influences—particularly at the state level. The underprivileged often have little voice when they actually do stand up against



political and social injustice. This corruption of the privileged few to oppress the impoverished majority finds its roots in Brasil's history of colonization and slavery.

The history and causes of violence against women in Brazilian favelas and in popular culture is another aspect of daily life that has maintained for generations. High levels of domestic and structural violence have resulted in immeasurable suffering of girls, women, mothers, and the children they care for. Intertwined with the powerless role that women often play in favela culture is the high frequency of sexual promiscuity portrayed in today's media, and the increasing level of early sexual activity and teen pregnancy. I also found that little education is available to teenagers in Piedade regarding puberty and sexual education. In response to this I formed an adolescent girls' discussion group to cover issues of adolescent health for those who might otherwise remain uninformed. This section covers the historical role women have played in sexual relationships, in families, and in the political and economic arena. I discuss how a lack of power in communal and financial affairs perpetuates levels of domestic and physical violence against women. Whether it is structural or domestic; physical, sexual, or psychological; directed at the mother or at her child, violence against women is still deeply rooted in the structure of Brazilian society. The psychological impacts of violence against women are severe; as mothers and the central figures in many favela households, this brutality resonates deeply in the lives of their children.

The final section of my thesis addresses how the powerless position that mothers in the favela may be forced to assume often influences the role that their children accept in the cycle of hardship, violence, exclusion, and neglect. The psychological effects of domestic violence on both the victims as well as their witnesses can be irreversible. Beyond obvious physical violence against women, many children are born to malnourished and neglected mothers; condemning them to marginal health and a greater probability that they will not receive the nurturing attention they need to thrive in their first years of infancy. As children grow older, they may be forced to assume the role of a provider in the family; working on the streets to earn money to support their families. Not only can this life in the streets be dangerous, but it frequently deters children from focusing on their academic achievement and nurturing their individual interests and futures. It is in this context that children become exposed to drug trafficking, and resulting crime and violence. They may become perpetrators of violence and assume a role in which, instead of being ignored or neglected, they "...are held up almost as the public face of violence and urban disorder, as the undoing of the nation" (Hecht 213). It is in acknowledging such condemnation that one can recognize how truly great the struggle for positive youth development is in the community of Piedade.

# Poor public school quality creates institutionalized disparity between poor and rich Brazilians, and a lack of opportunities for youth in the Favela community

*“...si chegue na frente sabe ni que colegio e... porque na frente da colegio ni um nome tem.”*

**“...If you come to the front, you won't even know what school it is... because on the front of the school there's not even a name...” – 16 year old Student at Escola Sequinha Baheto (Public High School in the Piedade Community)**



*As dificuldades da Escola Joseo do Barrio?- um trocante, a ensinho, falta dos professores que as vezes alazam subsituicao que nao afeta mediate quando entram de ferias. Bancas pra os alunos que faltam. Ou quadro que faloza nao pega hem a tinta ja se gasto, certo. A agua perto da escola e precario porque as ruas sao tomadas por aguas, certo, neste tempo da chuva, a ruas sao, elas agulam muita agua no tempo no dischoe certo. Vamos dizer... Estao faltando algumas colecoes que o professor pode ter um pouco mais de acesso a informacoes, certas. Uniforme caro.*

*- Sergio, Funcionario da Escola Joseo do Barrio (Escola primaria publican a comunidade de Piedade)*

**“The difficulties of Escola Joseo do Barrio?- there are a ton; the teaching, lack of teachers who, at times, go on vacation and hire substitutes who don't immediately start. Desks for the students who don't have them. The blackboard that chalk won't stick to is already too old... ok? The water near the school is worrisome because the streets are filled with water; during this season of rain, the streets fill up with a lot of water. We are missing some textbooks because professors don't have enough access to information. Expensive uniforms.”**

**- Sergio, Faculty member at Joseo do Barrio (Public Grade School in Piedade)**

**“we are leaving our positions as directors extremely frustrated because we are going to leave the school just as we found it, with little improvement; almost nothing.”**

**- Director of Escola Sequinha Baheto (Public High School in Piedade)**



## Public school quality heightens the disparity between poor and rich Brazilians; perpetuating a lack of opportunities for youth in the Favela community

Sitting amongst other high school students in a classroom in Escola Sequinha Baheto one summer night in Piedade did not strike me as being a particularly orderly event. Paint chipped away from the remaining tiles haphazardly lining the walls around me. Graffiti decorated almost every surface, including the colorful Brazilian flag, gleaming from the back of the room. Students brushed past a giant rendition of Homer Simpson that had been spray painted onto the door, as they casually wander into a classroom where the lesson was already halfway over. The teacher seemed not to notice the new arrivals, much less be annoyed with their late entrance; many of them had probably just arrived from work. The students carried on with their playful chatter, seeming oblivious to the fact that there was anything going on besides a social engagement. And so carried on the mindless hour of English verb conjugations; as if the mere presence of this group sitting in a room together was enough to celebrate, and call it an education.

Sadly, the event of this class actually taking place was in fact truly a remarkable affair. I later found out from my friend Jaqueline, who had brought me to her English class, that on the occasions in which the community's public high school was not on strike, this particular teacher had a tendency to miss class. Teacher absence is not an uncommon trademark of Brazil's public schools according to several students and community members I spoke with. Sergio, a faculty member at Escola Joseo do Barrio, the public grade school in Piedade, says that, at times, teachers go on vacations and hire substitutes who don't start immediately. Director of Escola Sequinha Baheto explains one of the reasons for this trend,

Its like this... the public schools don't pay any better than private schools, so they [the teachers] give priority to who ever is paying more; with whoever it is possible to survive. This results in them diminishing their class time, because the professors can reduce their stresses... because they have troublesome students, they have the hardest students. They prefer to work more in private schools because the students want to talk, to learn faster. And no matter what happens, there are psychologists, there is someone to help the professor; so they are not alone.

In Brazil's school system, students generally attend classes for four hours a day, in one of morning, afternoon, or evening sessions. The director explained that because of the low income that teachers earn; in 1995 it was only about \$160 US per month, they have to work at two or more schools each day (Hecht 232). This leaves them strained and exhausted as they enter their classes. The absence of teachers also results in prolonging the time it takes for students to fulfill their credits. Lidien Vega Santana de Omeda, who has been attending Escola Sequinha Baheto for the past 6 years, complained that Piedade's high school hasn't had a chemistry professor for the last two years. Lidien is one of many students taking more than four years to finish their high school degrees. In

1999 some 73 percent of students were behind in their studies had to repeat years; a practice which not only increases costs by 30 percent and slows down school progress, but undermines children's self-esteem as well (Hall 272). According to UNICEF, slightly more than thirty percent of enrolled high school students are currently above the age that officially corresponds to their grade level. Unfortunately, these overworked teachers may be setting the precedent for class attendance; UNICEF found that only about 42% of boys and 50% of girls actually attend their high school classes (Statistics 1).

To a certain degree, this considerable lack of attendance is understandable. During the rainy season in Recife (March - June) it can be impossible to travel anywhere in the city. The favelas become especially hazardous as the dirt roads transform into rivers, flooding homes and prohibiting anyone's passage with deep pools of stinking sludge. I actually missed several days of teaching because of this very predicament. One morning, after gathering my courage to face the torrential rains, I stepped down from the public bus to discover that all the streets of the favela had been flooded. Luckily, I had arrived at the same time as a woman who taught at Escola Joseo do Barrio (the community's public elementary school). She guided me through the menacing territory, explaining that it was vital that the muddy waters not touch my skin. In fact, we took every precaution to prevent this; from throwing large stones into the swamp to make pathways, to hitching rides with a boy passing on his bicycle through the deepest sections of water. Apparently, the danger of this mud, is known throughout the favela, as the waters are prime terrain for rats, insects, and disease spreading bacteria. My guide's cautions were quickly reinforced when I arrived at school and my coworkers immediately made me wash down and rub bleach over all areas of my skin that might have touched the mud. Though it seems like a simple reality, these months of rain have a significant impact on the presence of teachers and students in the favela's public schools. When I asked Lidien what he thought were the biggest challenges for youth in the community, the first thing he said was, "Well, painfully basic is that every time it rains, the streets fill with water and it's real difficult to get to school".

Aside from deterring the attendance of students and teachers, this flooding is one source of damage to public school property. Eduardo, a teacher and former student of Pró-Criança took me to Escola Joseo do Barrio, to illustrate the biggest challenge that this school faces, which is that because of the prolonged periods of time that it rains in Piedade, the water surrounds the school and begins to seep into the classrooms. As a result, classes are often canceled. Escola Joseo do Barrio has fifteen classrooms; it operates during all four terms of the year, and serves 1,983 students. Yet despite the large population this public grade school is responsible for, the institution has trouble providing even the simplest necessities for its students. When I interviewed Juliana, a young student of both Pró-Criança and Escola Joseo do Barrio about the biggest challenges at her public school, she told me, "The school doesn't have enough desks... there has to be a place to study, to learn something..." In addition to desks, Sergio from Escola Joseo do Barrio admits that most of the school's materials are substandard, including old and worn out chalk boards, missing textbooks and a lack of information for teachers. At Escola Sequinha Baheto, the director also complained of the poor quality materials that teachers have to work with,



... the reading materials are very scarce, good professors generally don't have the means to give exams, or make Xeroxes... they have to do something real outdated. The only method they have to give an exam without losing a lot of time in the classroom is by mimeographing. Even now in 2005, they still have to use mimeographs in public schools. In our school, for example they still use a mimeograph. Even with the fact that we already have a copy machine; up to now it still isn't working. But we are hoping that it works, that things get better, aren't we?...

Many community members also mentioned the physical deterioration of their public schools. When I asked students at Escola Sequinha Baheto what needed to change at their school, Lidien and his friend both initially focused on the need for renovation and a new structure in the school building. During my interview with Janeca, a student at the public High school, she commented, "I guess the school here needs a new structure, since its pretty deteriorated." The first thing that the Director of Escola Sequinha Baheto said to me in my interview with her is, "We are talking in respect to improvements in the school? First, we are receiving a grant to improve the structure of the school; the structure of the building that's here now." My experience teaching in a school that also had limited access to resources affirm the negative effect that this has on the productivity of the education process.

This lack of investment in the physical condition of the public schools and the materials that they provide access to diminishes not only the student's abilities to learn, but the faith that the community has in the school's ability to improve these student's chances of being successful in life. In a situation where the people are in desperate need for a means of rising above the economic and social disadvantages of their daily existence, public education becomes merely another source of disparity between the rich and the poor (Pfannl 4). When asked about what could improve the difficulties of life in the *Favela*, Doce Maya, a single mother of 7 years in Piedade exclaimed, "A high school, more like the private ones. I don't have the circumstances to pay how much they ask for. [We need] no more than a public high school that is a lot better for us folks – A LOT better." Today it is almost unheard of for a child educated in Brasil's state schools to be admitted to a university. Families with any resources at all send their children to private schools. In 1994, a full 63 percent of schools in Recife were private (Hecht 232). The disparity between public and private school quality is not a new topic for the locals,

Middle-aged people in Pernambuco speak of a time when the public schools were viable, and it was even possible for children to study only in state or municipal schools and gain access to universities. But education has never been a political priority in Pernambuco. In the early 1890s, Governor Barbosa Lima complained that Pernambuco invested more in prisons and barracks than in schools. Today the public schools are in a state of perpetual crisis. (Hecht 232)

The government's lack of attention to public schools has been clearly illustrated for years through the blatant academic struggle that has been experienced by much of the country. In the early 1960s Brasil's system of basic education matched or surpassed that of other

countries with a similar income range, yet by 1990 the quality and access was poor and uneven. Thirty years earlier Brasil's primary school completion rate stood at 60 percent, by 1980 it had fallen to 19 percent. By the early 1990s Brasil had one of the worst performances in education in all of Latin America. Only Haiti had a lower primary school completion rate, while Brasil fell last in terms of the percentage of children completing primary school without repetition. In 1992 Brasil was ranked as having the most inefficient schooling system at the primary level, taking an average of eight years to put children through five years of basic education (Hall 273). In a recent press conference with twelve reporters from the Child Friendly Journalists project, Brazilian president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva acknowledged that the challenges in getting a quality education in Brasil need to be faced, "If 49 percent of the children in the fourth grade cannot understand what they read, what are these children doing in school?" he asked (The Big Picture1). Though high student enrollment is an achievement, it is obviously not enough. With 97 percent of students enrolled in primary school, the challenge is that of educational quality: 11 per cent of children are completing eight years of primary school by age fifteen, and 1.1 million children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 are still unable to read and write. Lula emphasized that Brasil needs to invest more in teachers' training. President Lula has committed to approving the Basic Education Fund (FUNDEB) until the end of his administration (The Big Picture1). Despite Lula's promise, opportunities for Brazilian students in the public school system remain bleak. Schools are often on strike due to a lack of funding, and when schools are in session, many children are too hungry to concentrate or too bored to sit still (Hecht 232). It is hard to feel compelled to participate in something which seems to be so unproductive in the context of their lives. The lack of educational quality for poor Brazilians only aggravates social and economic inequalities among the country's citizens. The poorest 24 percent of the urban population has completed less than four grades of schooling, while the wealthiest 25 percent have completed an average of ten years of schooling (Pfannl 2). Yet Lula's enthusiasm for change must be met with the determination of students, teachers, community members, and administration to improve the state of Brasil's public school system. In my eyes this possibility remains close at hand.

While working at Movimento Pró-Criança I was blown away by the passion and interest of several 18 and 19 year old students I spoke with to create changes in their public schools. After several lunch hour discussions, we collaborated to write the following proposal called "Project Respect and Responsibility" addressed to the directors of their various local public High Schools,

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*We are a group of students, from the School Movimento Pró-Criança, interested in changing the conditions of our public schools. We know that every year the government invests money in replacing damaged materials and repainting classrooms. We know that these things have needed renovation because students break and do not respect the materials. Now we would like to start a new movement of respect and responsibility. We would like to make a proposal that, if we succeed in finishing this school year, leaving all materials and classrooms in their original condition, the government will buy a new computer for the school. We believe that this will give motivation to the students to learn to respect the materials and respect for things, people, nature, and ourselves is of the most importance in public education. We will succeed with your help and support. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.*



A quem possa interessar:

Nos somos um grupo de estudantes da escola Movimento Pró-Criança interessado em mudar as condições das nossas escolas publicas. Sabemos que tudo o ano novo o governo investe dinheiro em substituir as materias quebradas e pintar as salas de novo. Sabemos que estas coisas tinha presisado da renavacão por causa de que os alunos quebrava e não respeitava as materias. Agora gostaríamos de começar um movimento novo de respeito e responsabilidade. Gostaríamos fazer um proposito que si conseguimos terminar este ano na escola deshando as materias e as salas em sua condição original o governo comprara um novo computador para a escola. Achamos que isso vai a dar motivo pra os alunos aprender respeitar as materias e respeito das materias, pessoas, natureza e nos mesmos uma tema mas importante da educação publica. Vamos conseguir com a ajuda e apoio de voces. Muito obrigado para sua tempo e consideração,

Unfortunately, my last day of work at Pró-Criança was the first day that the students actually got to meet with a school director. As e-mail remains a scarcity in the favela, I have not heard news of the progress these students have made. However, I have confidence in their ability to continue to challenge the injustices that they are faced with in their daily lives and make the most of the few opportunities that they have been given. It is crucial that students such as these are invested in; not only to satisfy a current demand for improvements in education, but to increase the positive impact that they will have on the future of the community. Moving towards more equal educational opportunities will constitute a solid foundation for the reduction of the profound inequality in Brasil, and will thus promote a significant reduction in violence. Without education and other ways of abating income inequality, poverty and violence will persist through generations, leaving no hope for a better future for millions (Pfannl 4).



Flooding in Piedade



Interview with Professor Vera at Escola Sequinha Baheto



Directors at Escola Sequinha Baheto



My Spanish Class at Movimento Pró-Criança

*"An education is the key to getting out of, and staying out of, generational poverty. Individuals leave poverty for one of four reasons: a goal or vision of something they want to be or have; a situation that is so painful that anything would be better; someone who "sponsors" them (i.e., an educator or spouse or mentor or role model who shows them a different way or convinces them that they could live differently); or a specific talent or ability that provides an opportunity for them."*

*- Ruby K. Payne Ph.D., A Framework for Understanding Poverty*



DREAM

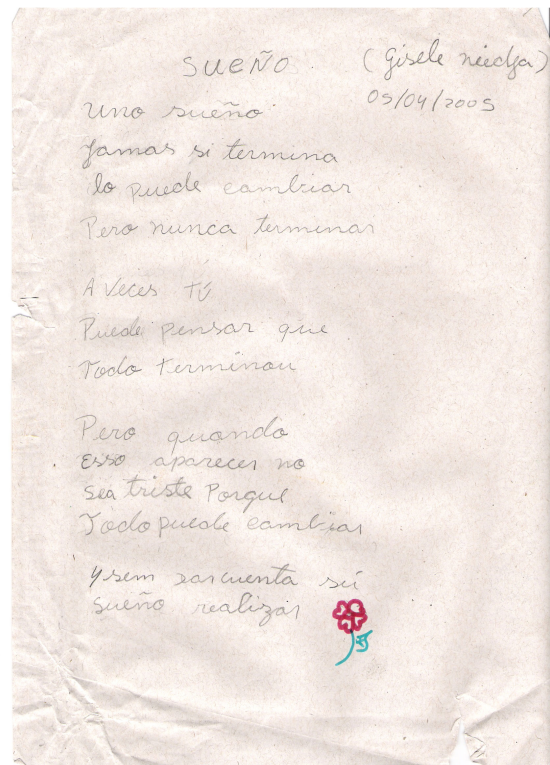
A dream  
Never ends  
It can change

But never ends  
Sometimes you  
Can think that  
All ends

But when  
it happens don't  
get upset because  
all can change

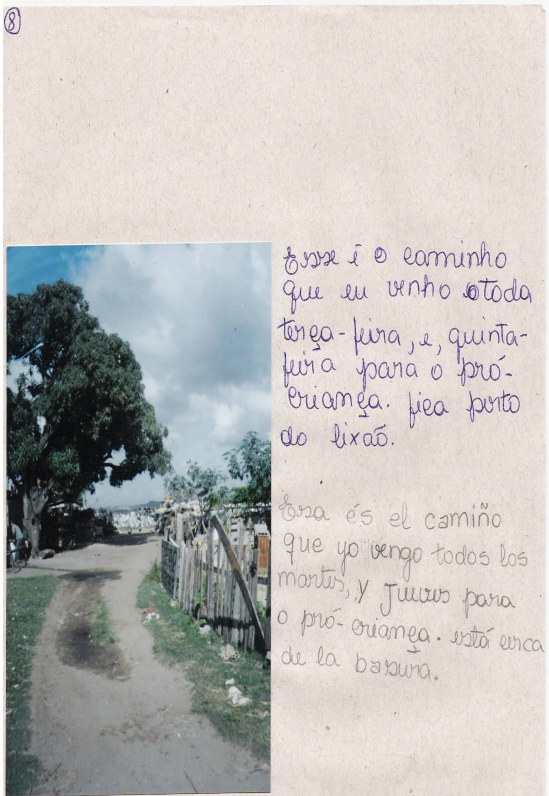
And without realize you  
Dreams become true

Gisele (16, student at Pró-Criança)





## The history of the Favela and the life threatening conditions which continue to affect its youth



Page from one of my students' *Photo Autobiographies* describing the local dump she passes each day on her way to school



Eduardo with Mama Lene and family

"Este lixo né, é dificuldade. Esta lama aqui né cevo aqui a onde mora crianças. Eu ofenda tem muito murisoca, rato. Realmente... na casinha da minha amiga entre rato aqui dentro. As barratas atraves da lama, deste lixo, né? as dificuldades. Fico esquecendo também. Muito murisoca..." - Mama Lene

**"This garbage is a difficulty, isn't it? The mud here is a nuisance; here where children live. They [annoy] me; these mosquitoes, rats. Really... in my friend's house there are rats that go right inside. The cockroaches that are here because of the mud and the garbage, this is a difficulty, isn't it?" - Mama Lene**

(Mama Lene's house sits behind Pró-Criança, and just down the road from a family owned garbage dump where local people bring trash that they've collected from the streets, in hopes of reselling it.)

**"In Brasil, healthy and sustainable treatment of solid waste is a relatively new and very complicated issue. Part of the issue is the dependence by many poor families on the collection and sale of recyclable trash for their survival. Thousands of young children and adolescents were found four years ago to be working in garbage areas in 1,956 of the country's 5,507 municipalities. They do this in a desperate effort to contribute to their families' meager income. Solutions to this problem must thus include finding viable alternatives for these children and their families, and changing the attitudes of people in the communities in which they live and work." (Maas 1)**

## The history of the Favela and the life threatening conditions which continue to affect its youth

At the edge of civilized Recife is a dusty neighborhood bar; inside a few men play cards while a couple of skinny boys hang out aimlessly in the street. As we pull away from the city, the scenery begins to change drastically. Without warning we have left behind the paved road, the buildings, and sidewalks. Indications of neglect flood the scenery. The VW bus rattles over the rugged dirt path, throwing up clouds of dust into the dried swamp grasses on either side of us. The road is now bordered by huts made from mud and brick or tattered wood; the doors are open and colorful clothes hang from above, while babies and children play below in the dirt. The side of the road is littered with mountains of trash glinting in the hot sun; a pack of hogs and a scruffy young boy are rummaging through. Up ahead the grass is matted down, revealing a burnt up soccer field and a group of vibrantly dressed teenagers. Beyond them is the Pró-Criança school, and I know that we have reached the heart of Piedade.

Months later I found myself interviewing Professor Vera, who currently teaches psychology at the public high school Escola Zaquinha Baheta in Piedade, about the history of the area and how the neighborhood came to be. “There wasn’t even one favela here twenty years ago” exclaimed Vera, who has been a teacher for longer than this,

If you were to come here 19 years ago, you would find [the government] was strict – from afar. Because [the *flagelados*] arrived; and then they were constructing these brick houses – in *invasions*. Because of this, ‘urban implantation’ exists. Much less will you see switches, circuits, electrical light; because they steal this light! Thus, these children that today are adults, and their descendants that are the children of today; these adolescents are the fruit of this invasion.

What caused this *invasion* among so many? Who *built* these primitive huts that huddle so close to the city sky scrapers? What produced such desperate conditions as to compel a young boy to search through trash piles?

In 1979, the Northeast suffered one of its worst droughts ever; a disaster which lasted four years and adversely affected the lives of ten million people. No one knows how many died. Hordes of desperate and starving *flagelados* fled to the cities. The capacities of Recife, Fortaleza, and other costal metropolises were strained to the breaking point (Page 192). At the same time monopoly of land ownership and the mechanization of agricultural production was bringing about the further expulsion of farm workers from the countryside (Ribeiro 139). Urban populations took a leap from 12.8 million in 1940 to 80.5 million in 1980, resulting in an explosion that entered into crisis in 1982. It was at this point that economic growth broke down, due to the weight of social exclusion that was inhibiting national development. One significant constraint was the archaic agrarian system, which politicians had foolishly maintained. This system, incapable of raising agricultural production to match population growth and employ the rural masses, expelled farm workers to the cities in huge numbers; condemning them to lives of desperation. Another economic burden resulted from foreign plundering, which,

protected by government policy, strengthened its dominance, making it a partner in industrial expansion, strangling the economy of the country as it sucked up all its productive wealth (Ribeiro 140). As this chaotic urbanization was triggered more by the flight of the rural population than the attraction of the city, Recife's neighborhoods grew without the urban services or opportunities for employment needed to support them, "It is a mystery, unexplained so far, how the great masses of the poor in Recife, in Bahia with all that brisk merriment, and finally the millions of inhabitants of Sao Paulo and Rio can survive without work." (Ribeiro 140) As can be seen, Brasil continues to feel the repercussions of one of the most wrenching periods of rural exodus; all the more serious because no Brazilian city was in any condition to receive such an astonishing surge in population. The consequence has been impoverishment of large sectors of the urban population and enormous pressure in the competition to survive (Ribeiro 139-140).

The first concern rural migrants had when their families entered the cities was to find somewhere to live. Professor Vera explains how the government reacted to this dilemma in Piedade, "The problem here is social, because this assembly, it was *Cohab* [the name of a neighborhood]. It was born here, there wasn't even one Favela here 20 years ago, it was the only one, understand? Then with political problems the *Political Oranis* was given so that people could [live] here indiscriminately; like a social implantation." The *Political Oranis* that Vera refers to here coined the popular expression "dar carta branca" or "to give a white card" meaning that the government was granting a specific group of people the liberty to invade unused plots of land in the city. The newcomers eagerly took these liberties, making their homes on any land that previous city residents had left unoccupied; under bridges, on hillsides, or in the case of Piedade, on swamp lands. Like the boy I saw searching through the trash pile, these people made their homes from virtually any scrap material they could find. One can find houses fashioned from tin, cardboard, plastic, wood, mud, and wattle (Hecht 223). Houses didn't have toilets and the neighborhoods lacked sewers and electricity, except for when it was stolen by rigged wiring tapped into utility company poles on the street (Levine 49). Though facing poor odds, the people in the favelas stayed and their numbers grew, "As bad as conditions may be in these urban hellholes, one must keep in mind that many of the people inhabiting them migrated to the cities to escape even worse conditions in the countryside. In the vast reaches of the interior of Brasil, wherever people live off the land, peasants survive as they always have, despite often abysmal poverty" (Page 182). In their ability to survive such adverse conditions, Brasil's destitute developed an extraordinary way of life, bringing forth a new urban existence (Ribeiro 141). In 1989 it was estimated that there were 520 favela settlements within the city limits of Recife (Page 196). Within the confines of communities like Piedade, one encounters a community of survivors. Some strive to lead honest lives, clinging stubbornly to traditional or religious values; others accept their status as social outcasts and casualties of a flawed economic system, engaging in various forms of extralegal or illegal activity. Regardless, each generation remains trapped in a society that makes upward mobility an overwhelming struggle, and in an environment hardly suitable for human habitation (Page 178).

Tremendous economic pressures are faced by the abandoned population every day. For families in the favela with one or two members earning a minimum monthly salary, survival is a constant struggle, "The poorest Brazilians do not have the luxury of



devising long-range strategies because they have to scratch to provide enough food to assuage hunger” (Levine 111). As recently as 1993, 52.9 percent of Brazilian workers earned substantially less than the poverty level in any westernized country. Many more, like the homeless youth who roam the streets, earn no legal income and therefore are not included in the official statistics (Levine 50). They have responded to this exclusion to a productive economy with creative, if not practical, solutions while continuing to successfully maintain their pre-urban culture (Ribeiro 141),

Everyday life masks the struggle of millions of Brazilians to earn enough to make ends meet. The coping strategies that the poor use are creative and diverse, but they do not always work. They include economic tactics to create and stretch income; political strategies (organizing, voting as a bloc, negotiating with politicians); economic strategies (exploiting the irregularity of work patterns, for example), and cultural strategies (adopting beliefs, symbols, and attitudes that govern behavior). (Levine 111)

Although popular wisdom among the affluent has commonly held that favela dwellers shun work, urban sociologists have found that nearly every able bodied slum resident spends most of their time dedicated to generating an income. Most women are maids or laundresses; men labor in construction, work at low-level trade occupations such as workers in restaurant kitchens, or peddle cheap goods on the street. However, few hold stable jobs; favela residents are the first to be fired and the last to earn any job security (Levine 44). Many households in Favelas such as Piedade have no family members with formal employment, but rather complete reliance on *biscates*, or odd jobs. People spend their days catching crabs along Recife’s rivers, washing clothes, and street vending in hopes of making enough money to feed their families (Hecht 231). Children commonly are a vital and acceptable monetary resource for their families, as they can beg, steal, do odd jobs, hawk various goods, and work in the home. It is not uncommon for mothers to take their infants to busy areas of the city in hopes that this will improve their profits in a day of begging (Hecht 231). In April 1994, Rio de Janeiro issued an ordinance requiring garbage scavengers to register as “professionals” so that they would be eligible to receive shovels, cans, and uniforms. Fathers and mothers were finally able to place their children in day-care centers, so that they would not have to spend their days accompanying the search for food in garbage piles (Levine 50). Often, because of the lack of options and opportunities for people living in the slums, gangs and crime such as theft and assault become a way of life. The trafficking of arms and drugs make an important contribution to the income of countless households. Regardless of their efforts to survive on the economic margin, the majority of Favela residents live in extreme deprivation (Hecht 231).

As a result of this lack of economic opportunity combined with a building climate of desperation, Recife has become a city of grinding poverty. This is not only a state of existence, but an ongoing process with multiple dimensions and various complexities, rendering in its citizens a sense of vulnerability, deprivation, powerlessness and a low capacity to deal with threats; robbing them of any confidence in the well-being of them or their loved ones. Throughout time, the poor have devised strategies to mitigate and cope

with poverty in the social and economic context of their lives. Strategies and individual behavior responding to poverty can most likely be found amongst those, “living in highly densely populated areas that lack basic infrastructure and social services; being unemployed or underemployed; attaining low levels of education; experiencing high rates of early female pregnancy and male fatherhood; accumulating low levels of social capital and experiencing high levels of domestic and neighborhood violence” (Verner1). Residents of Piedade are all too familiar with this dismal reality, “*E mais complicado – a vida para a gente pobre*. It’s more complicated – life for us poor people”, explains Doce Maya, mother of 2 who has lived at 4039 Santa Clara street in Santa Felicidade for the past seven years. These *complications*, which have become a way of life for many people in Recife’s favelas, often create daily threats to the lives of families and their children. In the city this is illustrated in the rampant hunger compelling many residents to rummage through garbage to find enough food, an unemployment rate that may be the highest in the nation, and a spiraling crime rate which is primarily related to many people’s desperate need to generate an income (Page 196). Because so much of Recife is constructed at sea level, countless *Favelas*, like Piedade, are deluged for months during the rainy season. The sewage, which typically runs in open streams, merges with the flood waters, turning dry earth into thick, malodorous mud (Hecht 223).

The high population density in Favelas and the fact that large family groups often live together in a single room facilitate the spread of many illnesses, “Life in the slums like Rocinha is an exercise in social Darwinism. Health hazards are as varied as the tropical vegetation, and include assorted diseases caused by excessive humidity, deficiencies in nutrition, vermin bites, and a lack of elementary sanitation” (Page 179). The spread of infectious disease is also due to closing clinics and a steady deterioration of municipal services that were never adequate to begin. In addition, because most residents in Piedade have menial jobs that don’t pay a living wage, they need to work long hours and seldom have the time to seek proper medical attention, let alone having the money to purchase medicine. Sadly, those who do seek medical treatment must often wait in line for countless hours, only to face hellish conditions in clinics and hospitals. I remember a weekend when one of my good friends from Piedade came down with a horrible toothache and had to spend two whole days in agony, unable to do anything but lie in a dark bedroom, until she had access to pain killers from a public hospital on the following Monday. Brasil’s public health system is in a continual state of crisis; its facilities are poorly maintained, understaffed, and overcrowded. In the Favela it is well known that those who are unfortunate enough to enter public hospitals are often met with indifferent care; sometimes forced to lie on the floor when all beds are occupied, left vulnerable to infection and awaiting death (Page 180).

The glum economic state of life in the favela has consequentially forced generations of children and their families to endure life threatening conditions. Millions of people in Brasil are left with little vision for any alternative to their dire situation in society (Pfannl 2). Children in Piedade continue to be raised by parents who often come from backgrounds of little education and have limited opportunities to be financially supportive. They struggle in a community with unsanitary living conditions, insufficient medical services, and instable housing that provides little protection against natural hazards and other dangers of favela life. This struggle for day to day survival generates an outlook amongst community members that offers little investment into the positive

development of local youth. Sergio, a faculty member of Piedade's grade school, Joseo do Barrio addresses the effects of this economic and social oppression on attitudes of residents in the Favela,

People don't have perspective of a better life because everything is such a huge challenge; the majority of the people live under the poverty line. They live on minimum wage, less than this. It was confirmed in a study that was done and published in the news, that ... much of the concentration of wealth is with very few people, and there are many people with nothing, ok? This unpleasant situation is the reality encountered here in this community, by me, and inside of this school.

# Effects of Institutionalized Violence and Political Corruption on Youth Development in the Favela

“The poor contend with the hardships of their lives by using techniques that include not only innocent and ingenious ways to add income but also psychological devices and ruses to deal with individuals and institutions from the world from which the poor are excluded.”

Robert M. Levine *Brazilian Legacies* p.113



“Corruption has traditionally been a defining feature of the country’s politico-economic system, which functions for the benefit of a relatively small elite at the top of the societal pyramid, while a mass of poor people remain trapped at the base.” (Page 122)

As pessoas, so lembra daqui da comunidade, quando tipo eleção, ali lembro que aqui existe alguém. Quando não tem... morrio.

**“The people (of the government), only remember us and our community when there is some type of an election, then they remember that somebody exists here. And when there’s no election ... people die.” - Adriana (mother in the Piedade community for 10 years)**



## Effects of institutionalized violence and political corruption on youth development in the favela

Though droughts in the Northeast may have prompted the urban chaos that magnified and exposed inequalities between the rich and poor; historically shaped attitudes have prevented impoverished Brazilians from attaining wealth or social status for generations. It is important to remember that those who grow up in Recife's Favelas today generally claim ancestry in the Northeastern back lands as either slaves or the virtual equivalent; rural farm workers (Page 196). Traditionally the most destitute Brazilians have been rural families; underemployed and deprived of land ownership by the persistence of traditional property allocation patterns. These people continually lack opportunities for education, training and decent employment (Levine 35). The perpetuated impoverishment of these masses, in both rural and urban settings, can be largely attributed to the oppressive and corrupt political, economic, and social structure under which they have been forced to live and work throughout history, "It was not by chance that Brasil passed from colony to independent nation and from monarchy to republic with no effect on the plantation order and no perception on the part of the people of the changes. All our political institutions are superfetations of an effective power that has maintained itself untouched: the power of the plantation bosses" (Ribeiro 152).

Accordingly, the majority of Favela residents have had little success in rising above economic hardship, or improving their standard of living for the next generation, despite desperate efforts to integrate into an urban setting. In fact, by the 1990s, for the first time in this century and possibly at any time in history, Brazilian children reaching adulthood faced prospects of a harsher life than their parents. The urban lower classes faced deteriorated housing conditions, larger than ever squalid Favelas, and makeshift shanty towns not stable enough to be called Favelas; thousands resorted to taking shelter behind pieces of cardboard under bridges and highway overpasses (Levine 50). The disparity in income, quality of life, access to health care, education level, benefit from federal institutions, and access to government services has continued to grow between the few who enjoy privileges of wealth and social status and the millions who are born into favelas (Page 177). Today Brasil has one of the most disproportionate distributions of income in the world. According to the World Bank, one fifth of Brasil's population earns 2.2 percent of the national income (Pfannl 2). As indicated by UNICEF's most recent statistics, 8% of the earnings in the entire nation are spoken for by 40% of the poorest households, while 63% of the nation's income is accounted for by the wealthiest 20% of Brazilian households (Statistics 1).

So few poor Brazilians have managed to achieve financial success in one generation that their stories often make the news (Levine 52). Chances for upward mobility have been limited, not only by disparaging stereotypes about the lower classes, but by a remarkable lack of opportunities for training and education as well. At the height of São Paulo's 1980s industrial boom, fueling what economists call Brasil's "economic miracle", only 18 percent of São Paulo's 735,000 full-time workers in the industrial sector possessed knowledge of any particular skill. Contributing to this is policymakers' clear lack of priority for human factors, most crucially during construction of the first favelas (Levine 35). When I asked Professor Vera (the sociology teacher at

Piedade's *Escola Sequinha Baheta*) one of the reasons that the favelas have developed in such a haphazard way she explained,

Because of a lack of Governmental help. The mayors that had money in the past; they had no commitment to social change. But if they would take care of these people... wives, children, they will continue to be councilors more and more for the financial state. If they had done better planning that... neighborhood would not have been made in that place.

The explosion of squatter settlements, like Piedade, is a product of State and Federal officials' failure to provide low-cost urban housing for the vast numbers of underemployed rural migrants who sought a better life in the cities (Levine 46). By the time the government began to address the housing problem, the situation had accelerated to disaster. Even São Paulo, Brasil's "promised land" for migrants and the center of the boom, saw wages fall, infant mortality rise, life expectancy decline, and many other aspects of the quality of life dwindle (Levine 35). Officials of Brasil's cities scattered throughout the country attempting desperately and unsuccessfully to provide public housing to counter the unchecked growth of squatter settlements (Levine 47). True modernization of today's favelas continues to be compromised by the fact that no government has effectively tackled such basic matters as popular education and sanitation in the favelas (Ribeiro 141). The result of decades of neglect in these forgotten communities is tragic.

Brasil's entrenched social structure continues to produce gross inequalities despite modernizing change in virtually every aspect of daily life. Although poor and wealthy neighborhoods often stand in close proximity, Brazilian cities remain rigidly segregated according to the economic station of their inhabitants. During colonial times, genteel families occupied elevated lands, built above the stench of sea-level standing water and garbage, taking advantage of the higher elevations. When built closer to tenements and other kinds of slums, the houses of the affluent invariably were surrounded by high stone or wrought-iron fences. Nowadays these fences are often topped with jagged shards of glass. High-rise apartment complexes are surrounded with walls topped by barbed wire, or protected by electronic surveillance systems (Levine 45). However, elite Brazilians don't simply distinguish themselves with physical barriers,

The enormous social distances that obtain between the poor and those with means is not a result only of their possessions but also of their degree of integration into the lifestyle of the privileged groups – as illiterates or educated people, as possessors of popular wisdom transmitted orally or of modern learning, as the heirs to a folkloric tradition or an erudite cultural inheritance, as descendants of well-placed families or those of humble origin; these dimensions place rich and poor in opposition much more than whites and blacks. (Ribeiro 165)

This rigid and exclusive social apartheid has generated shocking incompatibilities in the country, condemning Recife's favelas to poverty. The incapacity of Brasil's majority to have the benefit of an even modestly satisfactory standard of living, combined with

corruption and indifference among the privileged few and a lack of free citizenry have resulted in little hope in the country for the establishment of a democratic way of life. Instead, the oligarchic arrangement that exists today can only maintain itself artificially and repressively; by manipulating the forces of the majority, condemning great masses to backwardness and poverty (Ribeiro 152).

As articulated by my interviews with members of the community in Piedade, the most observable form of structural violence in Brasil comes in the form of Government corruption which results in the neglect and mistreatment of its poorest of citizens, “Corruption has traditionally been a defining feature of the country’s politico-economic system, which functions for the benefit of a relatively small elite at the top of the societal pyramid, while a mass of poor people remain trapped at the base.” (Page 122) My first formal introduction to the government’s role in the Favela was not until a few months after I had started teaching there. Suzy Olivera, one of the founders of Pró-Criança, invited me to attend a meeting in the *Prefeitura* (town hall) in the office of the *Secretaria da Política de Assistência Social* (Political Secretary of Social Assistance). The *Reunião do Plan de Ação Integrado do Barrio do Recife e Boa Viagem*, or “Meeting for a Plan of Integrated Action in the Neighborhoods of Recife and Boa Viagem”, is held monthly, and convenes public officials and a variety of spokespersons from the community of social work in Recife to discuss how street kids and poor families are currently being supported by the government. Suzy introduced me to various people, but I particularly remember a conversation with a woman who held authority in public school administration. I mentioned to her the “Respect and Responsibility” proposal that I was currently writing with some of Pró-Criança’s students. She sounded less than optimistic about the progress my students would make in their endeavor. She told me that the money delegated to fund public schools often trickles through a bureaucracy where it is slowly siphoned out by various government officials, so that by the time it reaches the schools there’s almost nothing left. Unfortunately, not only is this practice of tapping into public funds criminal; the detrimental effect this lack of funding has on the quality of public education only deepens the disparity between the rich and the poor in Brasil. The federal government funds public universities, making a college level degree accessible to anyone who can pass the vestibular (Brasil’s equivalent of an SAT). However, if a student cannot afford private secondary education or formal vestibular training, they have almost no hope of pursuing the path of a college educated citizen.

Within the Piedade community, the public school system is viewed with little hope in providing upward mobility to its students. As Brazilians of African descent make up 60 percent of the poorest segment of society, their statistics in academic and social success arguably represent that of many of my students and their families. At this point it must be noted that despite the association of poverty with blackness, discrimination against Afro-Brazilians is based purely on the fact they are members of the poorer sectors. The inequalities that Brazilians create amongst themselves are almost always of a social nature (Ribeiro 164). According to the Ministry of Education, Afro-Brazilians received an average of 5.3 years of schooling versus 7.1 years for white Brazilians; in the Northeast region, the gap was even larger; Afro-Brazilians received an average of 4.5 years of schooling. In respect to this, it must be reiterated that with inadequate funding and poor educational quality, the public school system simply replicates the larger social environment faced by many poor Brazilians each day; making minor progress in

improving the lives of poor youth (Pfannl 4). Despite their large population, Afro-Brazilians constitute only 16 percent of the university population and fill between 3 and 7 percent of the openings in the country's prestigious public universities (Country 2004, 5). The predominance of white Brazilians in business, government, and academia indicate that Afro-Brazilians have not attained social and economic equality and continue to be significantly underrepresented in professional positions and in the middle and upper classes. São Paulo State Deputy Sebastião Arcanjo noted that Afro-Brazilians constituted a majority in demographic terms but a minority in terms of power. In 2004 the country's diplomatic corps included only six Afro-Brazilians, and approximately 2 percent of the executive and management positions in businesses were accounted for by citizens of African descent (Country 2004, 5). In June 2004, IBGE (*Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics*) reported that Afro-Brazilians suffered a higher rate of unemployment and earned a lower average wage than non-blacks. According to IBGE, the average monthly wage of a white wage earner was nearly double the average earned by black wage earners, a disparity that widened considerably in the upper income classes (Country 2004, 5). Studies also showed that rates of police torture, court convictions, child labor, illiteracy, and infant mortality were also higher among citizens of African descent than among whites (Country 2003, 5). I heard countless bitter remarks made in Piedade about political corruption and neglect in regards to the poor. Traditional institutions are losing all their power of indoctrination in poor communities and with good reason; the schools do not teach, the church does not catechize, and the parties do not politicize (Ribeiro 145). Adriana, who has been a mother in the Piedade community for 10 years commented during an interview, "The people (of the government), only remember us and our community when there is some type of an election, then they remember that somebody exists here. And when there's no election ... people die." It is in this context, where no one is willing to respectfully embrace a community, that responsibility and ownership is forgotten and poverty is passed on from generation to generation (Pfannl 4).

In the streets, poor youth often encounter structural violence in a very real and dangerous way through their interaction with law enforcement. Recife's police have a long standing reputation of abuse and corruption, and this role is particularly played out in their history with children working or living in the street (Hecht 129). Often due to a shortage of food, or the occurrence of domestic abuse in their homes, many poor Brazilian children turn to the streets as a refuge and a source of income. Just as often, children are found in the streets. This is not by their own choice but because their families rely on them to beg or work for money. This issue was brought up by Suzy during the *Prefeitura* meeting. She addressed the fact that every night several boys no more than 12 years old stood in front of the commercial supermarket next to her apartment until all hours of the night offering to carry customer's grocery bags in return for a few *reales*. Suzy was enraged that these children continually put themselves in positions of such evident danger and neglect, while the city knowingly let it happen. She suggested that police escort these children to their homes, making an impression on their parents that might deter them from continuing to let their children roam in such perilous conditions. The representative of Recife's police department repeatedly insisted that the welfare of these particular children was not the responsibility of law enforcement, but that of their parents. Unfortunately, simply ignoring children who roam the streets is the



mildest of reactions that Recife's police have to these *malqueros*. In interviews at the Juvenile detention center in Bras neighborhood in São Paulo, Rapporteur Jahangir found that 75 percent of youth reported "having been eyewitnesses of extrajudicial killings by the police" (Country 1.a. 2004). In 2003, seventy-two percent of all deaths of 15- to 19-year-olds were due to causes such as homicide. This was also the leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14 and approximately 85 percent of the victims had been sexually exploited. Only 1.9 percent of these adolescents' murderers served prison sentences (Country 2003, 5). An article in 1990 revealed that 64 percent of homicides of males aged 15 to 17 were carried out by "unknown" assailants, which were likely to be members of death squads encouraged by police to eliminate "dangerous and unmanageable" children (Hecht 119). In the article, the "known" types of assassins were listed as: public police (17%), extermination group (7%), family (5%), private police (2%), lone assailant (2%), and friend (1%). According to Huggins and de Castro, the authors of this article, a particular kind of youth – poor, male, and dark-skinned – is identified as a "social problem" and consequently labeled as a "symbolic assailant" (Hecht 121). This brutality towards street children is in records as early as 1838, when Rio's police chief announced his plan to take off the streets "the great number of boys who, barely past their infancy, wander the streets acquiring the bad habits of idleness, gambling, etc., preparing themselves for a youth that, far from being advantageous for the state, will on the contrary be harmful, due to the crimes they will probably engage in" (Levine 69). The solution he devised was to arrest the *malqueros* and detain them in the *House of Correction* where the youngsters would be taught a trade under strict prison supervision. At the time, the problem of youth working and living in the streets was considered so pressing that during the First Republic special police details were called upon to solve it (Levine 69). Today FEBEM (*Foundation for the Well-Being of Minors*), Brasil's system of Juvenile Detention, has largely taken over the reputation of committing organized violence against poor youth in the streets.

According to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2004, the legal records of several state governments was poor and there continued to be numerous, serious abuses of power. State police forces (both civil and military) committed numerous unlawful killings and killings due to excessive force, and were also implicated in killings for hire and death squad executions. These killings were directed at suspected criminals, labor activists, indigenous people, and persons considered undesirable. Research done by the Institute of Applied Economic Research noted that persons of color were five times more likely to be shot or killed in the course of a law enforcement action than were persons perceived to be white (Country 2004, 5). Police reportedly tortured and beat suspects and arbitrarily arrested and detained persons. The National Movement for Human Rights reported that police and prison guards were responsible for nearly 80 percent of the reported cases of torture and that most victims were young, poor, Afro-Brazilian men from less-developed regions (Country 2004, 1.c.). Despite its powers to do so, the federal police often fail to act in the numerous human rights violations by state authorities, and their continued failure to punish perpetrators perpetuates a climate of impunity (Country 2004, 1). What's more, this disreputable law enforcement seems to have substantial backing by a corrupt judicial system. Though Brasil's constitution mandates an independent judiciary, it is under funded, inefficient, and the officials are often poorly trained and subject to intimidation and political and economic influences—

particularly at the state level. This unlawfulness and corruption most adversely affects the lower classes. The National Movement for Human Rights noted that in 2004 courts convicted a much higher percentage of Afro-Brazilian defendants than they did whites, and in many instances, poorer, less educated citizens make only limited use of the appeals process (Country 2004, 1.e.)

When one peers deeper into the colonial history of Northeastern Brasil, it becomes clear that the conditions of oppression in the favelas today appear eerily similar to that of their poor ancestors who labored on the first plantations when the Portuguese encountered the New World. In 1549, when the system of colonization that the Portuguese had established in Brasil was no longer adequate to administer its massive territory in the new world, the king installed a governor-general in Bahia to rule as the personal representative of the Crown. The Portuguese viewed Brasil almost exclusively as a resource to be exploited and paid little heed to other aspects of colonial governance. Though the crown ruled the colony with sanctimonious dominion; being so removed from the actual enforcement of its decrees and regulations resulted in large land owners and colonial administration taking actual command. The impunity and the lack of responsibility assumed by the Portuguese crown in regards to their colony in the new world was eventually adopted first by plantation owners, then by the country's political and economic elite. This political approach in Brasil has survived to the present and continues to impede social and economic development in the country (Page 124). The attitude is most clearly described by the famous dictum of a twentieth century governor in a northeaster state, "To my enemies, the law; to my friends, facilities". Officials began to siphon off public funds and take financial advantage of their political positions; the administration of the colony became a paradigm not only of corruption, but of inefficiency (Page 125). This initial evidence of neglect and deceitfulness amongst all levels of government ruling the colony established a cavalier attitude toward legality that still exists in Brasil today; there has long been admiration amongst common Brazilians for the *malandro*, the wise guy who beats the system using quick wits (Levine 118).

The concentration of property ownership amongst a few privileged settlers fueled a demand for cheap labor; this was satisfied by the importation of huge numbers of African and indigenous slaves. The outcome of this economic decision was a society based on a philosophy of exploitation and rigid distinctions; first between masters and slaves, then eventually between the rich and poor (Page 182). Unfortunately the eventual abolition of slavery produced insignificant changes; peasants remained completely dependant to the rural upper-class. The mindset the poor remained fatalistic and passive; qualities instilled by the Roman Catholic doctrine, which taught eternal salvation through "accepting" God's will for the shortfalls of one's life on earth (Page 183). Furthermore, the corruption of "the masters" in this context seems to correspond with a deterioration in the personal dignity of those who obey, conditioned to blatant asymmetrical treatment, predisposed to assuming attitudes of subservience and compelled to allow themselves to be exploited to the point of exhaustion. As a result of the immutability of the social conditions perpetuating generational poverty in Brasil, the privileged few have created a society ruled more by castes than classes (Ribeiro 150).

# History and Causes of violence against women in Brazilian Favelas and in popular culture

*"I hope to God that I won't have anymore children," a forty-two-year-old Alto woman offered. "But I won't do anything to prevent it either. If God is willing, then I will have to be willing, too."*

*(In an interview with Nancy Scheper-Hughes 333)*

*"According to a 2001 UNICEF report based on 1999 data, over 20 million children and adolescents, or almost 35 percent of all children, live in poverty. Nationwide, the Inter-American Development Bank estimates that some 30 million children live below the poverty line and increasingly come from households headed by women." Human rights reports 2001*



"There has always been a riptide of violence in Brazilian family life, and it stems from the absolute authority vested in the figure of the patriarch, as well as from the strong tradition of machismo. These foundation stones of male domination have vested in husbands the right to beat (and, in some instances, maim or burn) their wives – a common practice in rural areas (especially in the Northeast) and in urban slums populated by migrants from the countryside." (Page 254)

"Education helps women become better informed about how to prevent HIV infections. It empowers them to defend themselves in potentially dangerous situations. Indeed, it has been shown that denying a girl access to quality education increases her vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and disease. Girls, more than boys, are at greater risk of such abuse when they are not in school. A classroom not only provides a safe haven for girls, it can instill in them a sense of their own power, and hope for the future." (UNICEF Girls' Education 1)

# The Role of Women in Everyday Favela Life

## *The Troubles of Youth Today*

*Fabrisa was a dancer for a band and in this party Fabrisa met Rafael and they began to go out. Fabrisa was 14 and Rafael was 20 years old. Then Fabrisa met doctor Rosana; she was the one who assisted Fabrisa's child labor. And Rafael met Gisele the street girl, and there Rafael asked if Gisele wanted to live with him at his house. And then appeared... Fabiana the student and the professor Juliete who helped Rafael leave the world of drugs. Today the young Fabrisa is 18 years old and the boy Rafael is 25 years old and the street kid is 16 years old and the student Fabian today is married and the professor Juliet today has a school and teaches and is 32 years old.*

### *As dificuldades dos Jovens nos dias de hoje*

*Fabrisia era uma dançarina de banda e nesta festa fabrisia conheceu Rafael e começaram a namorar. Fabrisia tinha 14 anos e Rafael tinha 20 anos. E aí fabrisia conheceu a médica rosana foi a que fez o parto de fabrisia. E Rafael conheceu gisele a garota de Rua e aí Rafael perguntou se gisele queria morar na casa dele com ele. E aí apareceu a favem Fabiana a estudante e a professora juliete que ajudaram Rafael a sair do mundo das drogas. E hoje a jovem fabrisa tem 18 anos e rapaz Rafael tem 25 anos e a jovem de rua tem 16 anos e a estudante fabiana hoje é casada e a professora Juliet hoje tem uma escola e ensino e tem 32 anos.*

This play was written by Adriana, an 11 year old Student in my English Class at Pró-Criança. The day that she wrote this, I had informed my class about the project I was doing for my American University to learn about the challenges faced by youth in their community. It is quite clear that the setting of the story is in a favela by the student's references to drugs, street children, and the fact that Fabrisa has a job at age 14. This is not surprising since Adriana and her brothers and sisters have spent their childhood living in Piedade, and this would be her most tangible referent for the experiences and struggles of youth today.

There are several interesting things to observe within this piece of writing and about Adriana's thought process on the subject of present challenges facing her peers. One important idea to notice is that the "troubles of youth" in the story are almost all suffered by female characters. This could be an indication that Adriana's subconscious view of her community is that there are many risks involved with being female, especially when there are males in the picture. This view does not go unsupported; between 2000-2001 in the City of Sao Paulo and in Pernambuco (the state where Recife is located), it was found that approximately 41% of women had suffered physical or sexual violence at some point after the age of 15 (Oliveira 5). However, it also must be emphasized that 49% of the women who reported being victims of physical or sexual aggression, did not believe that they had suffered violence during their lives, this notion has to do with the fact that only violence constituted by crimes perpetrated and suffered mostly by men in the streets are considered to be an expression of violence, not the cruelty which takes place within a domestic setting (Oliveira 4). In accordance to this, Adriana does not directly identify any type of physical or sexual violence in her story accounting the *troubles* in the lives of the youth; although this could easily be incorporated into Gisele's motive to flee her home and live on the street, the possibility that Gisele works in legal prostitution on the street, Rafael's sexual promiscuity, or either one of the girls' compliance to be sexually active.

It is interesting to note Adriana's usage of vocabulary to describe the relationship between Fabrisa and Rafael. They meet at a party and casually begin to *namorar* or go



*out*, seeming immediately to become sexually involved. In this sense, their sexual relationship appears to be more carefree than the traditional, conservative courtship encouraged by the previously widely-embraced Catholic Church. This is not uncommon; for years Brazilian youth have used the verb “ficar”, literally meaning “to stay”, as a description for the time-honored tradition of dating someone for one or two days, typically involving hugging and kissing. Nowadays students and counselors say that these brief relationships involve much more, even sex (Buckley 2). It is almost an assumed part of the story that the two young people in the story don’t use birth control, and that Fabrisa gets pregnant. This is also a growing trend in Brasil; the number of births to girls between ages 10 to 14 rose 31 percent from 1993 to 1998 (Buckley 1). Despite the difficulties of their lives and the little control they have over their destinies, many poor young women still tend to find a complicated yet sincere longing for children of their own,

For girls, the thought of having children may be a painful resignation to the realities of an inevitable adulthood, but it is also a part of an imagined way of creating the opposite of street life, of producing the most essential component of home life – the emotional link between mothers and children. In a region where children almost universally say the person they love the most is their mother, it is no surprise that motherhood and the concomitant possibility of being adored constitute a powerfully attractive hope for girls. (Hecht 209)

Many children have their first sexual experience at age 12 or 13, and only 14% of sexually active teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 use contraceptives. This has resulted in a disturbing trend; one in 10 Brazilian girls between the ages of 15 and 19 have at least two children and 50% of teenagers who become pregnant have their first baby by the time they are 16 (Buckley 2). This consequence may not necessarily be unwanted, “For young people, male and female, who literally possess nothing by their bodies, reproduction endows them with the possibility of creation. But their dreams of family life in the comfort of a home, they know, are unlikely to be realized” (Hecht 209). Forty percent of teenage girls who become pregnant abandon school; automatically condemning their children to the possibility of all health and economic risks associated with living under the care of an uneducated parent (Buckley 1).

The irresponsibility with which the young male character approaches his relationships with the women plays a major element in Adriana’s story. Immediately after the birth of Fabrisa’s baby, Rafael becomes involved with Gisele, as if infidelity is virtually an inevitable part of his relationship with Fabrisa, “For adolescent boys, parenthood, preferably with multiple women, is a means of confirming an important facet of their ideal manhood” (Hecht 209). Rafael’s embrace of sexual freedom could be interpreted merely as a reflection of his culture and what is expected of him as a young male. After all Brasil is the home of legalized prostitution, easy access to pornography, and Carnival; the annual feast of care-free sensuality (Buckley 1). Padre Agostino Leal, a local priest from Bom Jesus (a Favela outside of Recife), comments on the tradition of this casual attitude towards sexual expression,

There is also excesses in Carnival. Sexuality, which is a gift of God, is often degraded and disrespected, especially in the form of nudity. People can lose their sense of shame in Carnival. But Carnival is also an anesthesia for the people. It deadens the pain of so many problems and crises, all the hardships that our country is going through today. Carnival is, so to speak, the opiate of the people. But that is not to condemn it. For people need to play. It is a time of great joy and movement. People want to be happy. (scheper-hughes 496)

Adriana remains unclear about whether or not the female characters are unreserved participants in this sexual indulgence. The fact that Rafael is much older than both of the girls he's involved with magnifies his role of power in this story, and his willingness to pursue an 11 year-old vulnerable street child amplifies the questionability of his behavior.

Regardless of whether Fabrisa and Gisele share Rafael's eagerness to satisfy sexual desires, this seems to be the primary focus of their roles in the story. Fabrisa is described to the reader only by her occupation; a dancer for a band. Beyond this the only other significant characteristic of Fabrisa is that she becomes pregnant at age 14. Of all the youth in the story, only one of them is identified as a "student". Is this a reflection of the priority adolescents give to sexual experience when forming their identities? Adriana certainly may have had this sexualized impression of women when writing her story, considering the media that is readily available to her. I remember her retelling countless episodes of "Big Brother Brasil", the country's version of reality TV; recording the lives of young, attractive Brazilians living together in a luxurious setting. Adriana's favorite character was Grazielli, the former Miss Brasil Beleza Internacional, who in addition to managing to seduce BBB contestant Alan (despite his earlier commitment to his girlfriend) also has recently agreed to pose nude. Xuxa Meneghel, an immensely popular



Grazielli wins 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Big Brother Brasil 2005 and comments,  
*"I'm happy because I got the response that I'm not just a pretty person"*  
*"Estou feliz pois tive a resposta de que não sou só uma pessoa bonita"*

host of television programs for kids and teenagers, who made her debut in 1982 as a prostitute who entices an adolescent boy in the movie *Amor Estranho Amor*, is another example of the sensual vibrations sent to children through their TV idols (Page 436). When questioned by a reporter about the sexiness of the children appearing on her TV show, Xuxa replied, "If they're sensual, it's because they were born that way" (Page 438). In July of 1999 Xuxa was criticized by Health Minister Jose Serra for having a

child out of wedlock, saying he could “only imagine how many teenagers are influenced by Meneghel’s decision”, adding that such influence “stimulate 12 and 13-year old girls to have children”(Buckley 1). *Telenovelas*, or Brazilian Soap Operas, which have become an integral part of National culture, also have seemingly adopted an “anything goes” attitude in the interest of winning the highest ratings. In July 1990, the magazine *Veja* revealed that in the course of a single week Brazilian television recorded 1,145 scenes of partial or total nudity, 23 incidents of torture, and 1,940 gunshots (Page 463). Complementing these influences is a genre of music called “Brega”, which originated in the Northeastern region of Brasil, and has recently become popular in the less rural parts of the nation. In Portuguese the word *Brega* means “fight”, which a friend explained is apparently what commonly occurs amongst the lower classes who first embraced this music. With highly sensual dance moves and particularly explicit lyrics, *Brega* is wildly criticized by everyone I know who lives outside of the favela; several of my Evangelical friends refuse to even dance to it. However, *Brega* music continues to be embraced by many of my friends in Piedade for its addictive dance rhythms and the fact that they’d grown up hearing it on the radio and throughout their neighborhood. I remember the initial shock the first time I heard a 6 year-old boy singing “Toma Pihaya, Toma Pihaya...”, the popular *Brega* hit, “Take it girl, take it!...” while he trotted down the road. At least on a surface level, Brazilians seem to embrace an exhibitionist attitude when it comes to sex and sexuality (Page 438).

During my third month working at Pró-Criança, I went with a group of students to see an interpretive dance performance in downtown Recife called “O Mundo Perfumado”, or *The World, Perfumed*. We were well into the performance before I realized that the theatrical dance actually represented the role women have assumed throughout the history of Brasil. The motivation I found in their feminist message combined with my own experiences with *machismo* both in and outside of Brasil convinced me that women around me as well as myself were in need of a context where relationships, sex, their bodies, and love could be openly discussed in a positive and informative context. The next day I presented my ideas to the staff at Pró-Criança, and the reaction was explosive. Stories surfaced amongst other females about the underlying cultural battles of *machismo* in daily life. *Machismo* is described as a “cult of virility” whose prominent characteristics are “exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships” (Soong 1). Male co-workers were reluctant to consider my proposition as they felt we were being dramatic. Female co-workers retorted that they were tired of accepting mistreatment. One teacher claimed, “You have to either put up with the macho attitudes, or be single all your life!” I found her argument to be thoroughly convincing, considering the fact that all of my friends were either single or divorced, and the majority of my younger friends had a strong insistence on maintaining their virginity. In hopes that girls at Pró-Criança could create options beyond this relationship ultimatum, I began digging through the school’s pile of donated books. The resources I found regarding puberty and sex education were brief fragments in considerably outdated biology books; quickly confirming my speculation that students in Piedade generally did not receive any formal instruction on the subject. Though the youth appeared to embrace a certain sexual freedom, their parents generally did not seem to approve of or speak to them about topics even as basic as puberty. This only amplified

our enthusiasm as the two psychologists at Pró-Criança and I planned the information we would cover over the following months. About a week later, 13 year-olds Fernanda, Tercia, Rayanie, Simone, Ana Lucia, Ana Karla, Natalia, Karla, Vanessa, and Maria gathered for their first session of a weekly discussion group the students named, “O Mundo Melhor” (*A Better World*).

As the discussion group progressed, I discovered that the exposure these youth had to sexual and violent experiences was more than I had anticipated. So much so, that the psychologist who co-lead the group decided that we should not cover domestic violence as one of our discussion topics as it was too prevalent in the home lives of the students, and would potentially be painful if brought up in a group setting. Though my friends in Piedade were too old to participate in the group, it’s formation still managed to stimulate conversation on similar topics outside of school. In later conversations with my peers I discovered that all three of my closest friends in Piedade had experienced sexual assault during their youth, and all very close to home. Sadly, this is not uncommon; according to the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2004, the most pervasive violations of women's rights in Brasil involve sexual and domestic violence; both of which remain widespread and underreported. In 2003 a study carried out in the greater São Paulo region found that 61.1% of women who had ever had a partner during their lives reported suffering from psychological, physical or sexual violence. In addition, 44.8% of women reported experiencing psychological violence committed by someone other than their partner; most commonly a family member (Oliveira 3). A national study of rape cases carried out by a group of São Paulo academics in 2002 indicated that family members committed roughly 70 percent of rapes (Country 5 2004). In a survey conducted by the World Society for Victims and used by the Senate in its 2004 Report on the Condition of Women, 23 percent of women in the nation were subjected to domestic violence; in about 70 percent of the occurrences, the aggressor was the victim's husband or companion; 40 percent of the cases resulted in serious injuries. In only 2 percent of the complaints was the aggressor actually punished (Country 5 2004). Thousands of women have been murdered in unpunished “crimes of passion” by husbands, lovers, fiancés, fathers, or brothers who believed that the victim had committed adultery or other sexual impurities (Levine 63). Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime punishable by 8 to 10 years' imprisonment; however, men who commit such offenses against women, including sexual assault and murder, are unlikely to be brought to trial. The Penal Code in Brasil allows a convicted rapist to escape punishment if he marries his victim or if the victim marries a third person and does not request or require an investigation or criminal proceedings (Country 5 2004). A 1999 study indicated that 70 percent of criminal complaints regarding domestic violence against women were suspended without a conclusion. Lack of legal protection, particularly within the sanctity of the home, is a strong factor in perpetuation violence against women (Innocenti 8). In 1998 the National Movement for Human Rights (NMHR) reported that female murder victims were 30 times more likely to have been killed by current or former husbands or lovers than by others, a rate that the NMHR believed still continued (Country 5, 2001).

There are several historical factors which help shape the structural violence that Brasil maintains against females today, and which still lays enormous burdens onto the shoulders of women, while expecting them to play a submissive role both sexually and socially. According to the widespread pattern of patriarchal households among the



upper-classes during Brasil's colonization, women were relegated to the home and to raising her children, obliged to be submissive, and was dominated by a powerful husband who was often more sexually interested in his slave mistresses than in his wife (Levine 60). Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Mulatto women who lived in a state of servile dependence were forced to accept the white men who imposed upon them in order to breed more slaves. Once free, a woman could only hope for more egalitarian relations or to work temporarily as a concubine. Similar to past social rules, the Brazilians of the ruling class today still uphold a duplicity of standards in regards to their sexual relations with women: one for women within their social circle and another completely opposite for women of the poorer classes. Affairs with poor women are still distinguished by the casualness in the establishment of sexual relations, generally lacking in any romantic tie and moved purely by sexual interest, "Attachment, love of a lyrical character between people of unequal social levels, is a rare and exceptional occurrence" (Ribeiro 166 -167). With the woman remaining servile or dependant as a result of her unbalanced social position, sexual relations under these unequal circumstances often brings forth no intimacy at all. Only when a woman rises up out of poverty to a certain economic level does she attain the minimal standard of respect, where she can aspire to lead an independent love life, give her sexual relations dignity by sensing the spirit of a co-participant, and have the opportunity to build a stable family life endowed with the religious and legal symbols of social recognition. Though this new practice has been adopted by the integrated modern base of national society, it remains a distant ideal for the large groups of socially marginalized Brazilian women (Ribeiro 167). As a result, many women give birth to children by different men and assume full responsibility for these offspring, frequently out of touch with the various fathers (Ribeiro 167).

This matriarchal family structure has been maintained throughout history, as poor Brazilian children today still frequently regard the father as a somewhat transient figure in the household. A common saying among Favela children is, "pai e' qualquer um, mae e uma só - your father can be anyone, but your mother is like no other". For impoverished children in Recife, whom they designate as their "mother" is crucial despite the fact that they often find themselves shifting from one house hold to another (Hecht 91). Unlike the established nuclear family system, the practice of informal adoption has been deeply rooted in the history of poor Brazilian families for generations. What is known in Portuguese as *crianças in circulação*, refers to the relatively common practice of poor Brazilian children being shifted among distinct matriarchal households and often growing up under a maternal figure other than the biological mother (Hecht 89-90). According to a study done in Fortaleza in the Northeastern region of Brasil, youth in poor urban neighborhoods, are at considerable risk of growing-up without their father in the household. Only 7 percent of the youth in these favelas are growing up with their biological father and a mere 57 percent with their biological mother (Verner 13). When I asked Sebastião, director of Movimento Pró-Criança why children in Recife turn to the street, his reply was, "It is a consequence of familial disintegration. This disintegration is caused by economic exclusion, teenage pregnancy, and working women who are no longer able to watch over their children for the entire day". Nationwide, the Inter-American Development Bank estimates that some 30 million children live below the poverty line and increasingly come from households headed by women (Country 5 2001).

Beyond their intimate and reproductive relationships with men, Brazilian women have a long history of being isolated from economic and political power. After 1940, Dictator Getulio Vargas, issued a large number of new laws and policies claiming to protect and elevate women, but instead effectively subordinating women's individual interest in the areas of marriage, reproduction, family life, and employment (Levine 63). Among the elite, most women never pursued careers. However, they often hired poor women as their maids, establishing deep rooted family networks for the less fortunate. Women form a vital part of extended-family groupings, sometimes working inside the home but often seeking out additional work as well. In recent years, changing attitudes and economic conditions have made it easier for skilled females to work in the formal economy (Levine 63). The majority of Brazilian society made absolute gains between 1960 and 1980 in wages and education, but the economic rewards of these gains were not distributed equally. Women who assumed important positions or achieved institutional success within the Roman Catholic Church were often widows, no longer consumed with the tasks of managing a household (Levine 68). Though women in cities made most significant gains, the majority continued to suffer relative disadvantage. In the present day women enjoy the same legal rights as men, and a cabinet-level office, the Secretary for Women's Affairs, who oversees the Special Secretariat for Women's Affairs, has responsibility to ensure these rights are upheld. Women who migrate still face significant challenges, since they invariably have to care for their families, normally under difficult circumstances. A mother's daunting responsibility to protect and educate her children as well as contribute to family income, usually in unregulated and therefore unprotected ways, causes hardships even greater than those faced by men who migrate in search of improved lives (Levine 68). The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender in employment and wages; however, there were still significant wage disparities between men and women in 2004. In June, the Chamber of Deputies' Commission on the Feminization of Poverty reported that women generally earned 30 percent less than men and in households headed by single woman; the female worker earned less than half the minimum wage. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), white Brazilian women earned on average 40 percent less than white men, and Afro-Brazilian women received 60 percent less earnings than white men. Afro-Brazilian women continued to be particularly disadvantaged by discrimination (Country 5 2003). In addition to poor wages, poor women are discriminated against when applying for jobs. Although the Maternity Leave Law provides 120 days of paid maternity leave to women and also prohibits employers from requiring applicants or employees to take pregnancy tests or present sterilization certificates, some employers still seek sterilization certificates from female job applicants or avoid hiring women of childbearing age (Country 5 2004). When I asked Irmadriana, a mother who has lived in Piedade for 10 years, what some of the challenges were in the community, she responded, "Jobs for the moms, no?" All Brazilian women, but especially underprivileged women in society, remained outsiders within national culture (Levine 63). One can see how a single mother in Piedade, would be overwhelmed in the midst of this web of social, economic, and political restraints.

Unfortunately, not only does this structural oppression leave women at a disadvantage for political and economic gains, but it also re-encourages the incidence of violence against them on a domestic level; creating a vicious cycle (Innocenti 8).

Manifestations of historically unequal power relations between men and women result in institutionalized and interconnected social and cultural factors that keep women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them. According to UNICEF's Innocenti Research center, the factors that often contribute to these unequal power dynamics between genders include, "socioeconomic forces, the family institution where power relations are enforced, fear and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of males, and legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status" (Innocenti 7). Women who lived in isolated communities also may experience increased violence, particularly if women have little access to family or local organizations that provide relief and support. Accordingly, women's participation in social networks is noted to be a critical factor in decreasing vulnerability to aggressive behavior and strengthening women's abilities to resolve domestic violence. Excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs amongst males has also been noted as a factor in provoking aggressive and violent behavior towards women and children (Innocenti 8).

In addition to these social factors, studies have linked a rise in violence to the destabilization of economic patterns in society. Macro-economic policies, globalization, and the growing inequalities these trends have created, have been linked to increasing levels of violence in several regions (Innocenti 8). These economic systems profoundly affect the psychological health of males of the poor classes, who are forced to endure patronizing behavior of the affluent, and are required by employment to hide their emotions behind a servile demeanor, assuming "postures of deference and docility in the workplace and casting off these masks on returning to their own world" (Levine 113). This way of life has the potential to create a circular effect with brutal consequences, "built-up stress of servile behavior day after day can lead to drinking, or to the abuse of women and children at home, especially when men frustrated by forced demeanors of servitude take their feelings out on those psychologically subservient to them" (Levine 113). A lack of economic resources for women also increases their vulnerability to violence and their difficulty in extricating themselves from a damaging relationship. In this way, the correlation between violence, dependence, and a lack of economic resources tends to be circular. On one hand, the threat and fear of violence and abuse keeps women from seeking employment, or, at best, compels them to accept and submit themselves to low-paid, home-based exploitive labor. And on the other hand, without economic independence, and often with the burden of children in the home, women have little power to escape from harmful situations (Innocenti 7-8). Violence in society has been proven to encourage more self-destructive and risk-taking behavior among women; including more alcohol and drug abuse, the breakdown of social support networks, and the economic dependence of women on their partners (Innocenti 8). Adolescent girls who have been sexually abused during their childhood are more likely to engage in early sexual intercourse, and failure to use contraception; often leading to adolescent pregnancy and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (Innocenti 9). This pattern of violence perpetuating self-destruction particularly reminds me of a 14 year-old girl in my English class at Pró-Criança. She often complained to me of how anxious she was to move out of her house; whether this was in response to domestic violence was left unspoken. Ironically, the solution my student chose to seek refuge from her home life was romantic involvement with a man twice her age. Every day in class she would tell

me how excited she was to have her boyfriend; how they would soon get married, and then she would permanently move in with him.

Unsurprisingly, the impact of physical, sexual and psychological violence on the mental health of women and girls often has severe and even fatal consequences. UNICEF's Innocenti Research center found that, "victims of abuse have a high incidence of stress related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, elevated blood pressure, alcoholism, drug abuse, and low self-esteem". For some, depressed and degraded by their abuser, suicide can seem like their only escape from the violence (Innocenti 9). One must remember that the effects of violence on an individual absolutely do not cease when or if the perpetrator is no longer present. The incidence of pregnancy, poverty, and low health and education levels among single mothers in the favela are proof of this reality. Tobias Hecht describes the despair and anxiety of being a poor single mother with a quote from a women living in Recife,

My husbands were all no good. Every one of them left me with a kid to lug around. I depended on the garbage dump [where I rummage for food], the traffic signal [where I beg]. Some days my kids eat, sometimes they don't. I get home, I put one hand on my head and say, "Lord, my kids ain't got a drop of milk today." Sometimes I feel like stealing, killing... killing everyone in sight. Then I think, "Who would take care of my kids? No, I'll hold on. No one is mightier than God..." I ask God to help me, to look my way so I'll have a normal life. What I want is for my children to have their food. [with tears streaming down her face] They suffer so much! I only ask God that they have bread, then I will sleep in peace. I would like to wake up every morning and find that my children have bread instead of them waking up hungry, crying "Mommy, I want bread! Mommy, I want milk!" (Hecht 83)

It must be reemphasized that in all of their misery, mothers continue to be the center of many households in the favela. Their suffering and fear shapes the lives and priorities of the youth that they raise. Before mothers of Piedade can encourage positive development in their children, the community must first examine how they too can be relieved of the suffering that they endure. After returning home, a former student from Pró-Criança forwarded me an e-mail that someone had created to celebrate the importance of women. It is a heartbreaking reminder of the burdens that women are still expected to silently bear today,

Women have strength that impresses men.  
They tolerate difficulties and carry burdens,  
But maintain happiness, love and contentment.  
They smile when they want to scream.  
They sing when they want to cry.  
They cry when they are happy  
And they laugh when they are nervous.  
They fight for what they believe.  
They rise up against injustice.



*The prevalence of poor, unsupported single mothers in the Favela, and the suffering they endure*



**“The only thing that keeps that house standing is God...” – Eduardo**

“O que precisam?... ai tantas coisas... a vida e mais complicado não?... complicado mesmo ... e difícil. Tem gente que já não tem assim emprego, qualificação certo. Anda para as crianças. E mais complicado - a vida para a gente pobre. E mesmo se eu te viu uma crèche legal, e também dexe para trabalhar. Aqui estou ela e ele... porque camina sete anos que pega mãe, de sete anos. Mas eu não vou dar para uma coisa certa... mas assim uma coisa que e media duvida não da, a gente tem que confiar?... a gente que e mãe acontece muitas coisas.-- Tem que ter uma coisa certa mesma. Uma coisa pra a gente pode sentar ali e pode trabalhar tranquilo.” - Doce Maya

**“What do we need?... aye, so many things... this life is more complicated, isn’t it?... truly complicated... it’s hard... There are people who don’t have jobs; skills, understand? They live for their children. It’s more complicated – life for us poor people. Really, if I could find good daycare, I also would start working. Here am I [with my daughter, and my son]... because it’s been seven years since I became a mother – seven years. But nothing right has come around... because [daycare that’s] not quite right is not ok with me, we have to trust in it... a lot of things happen to us mothers. It has to be something really right. Something where we can sit and work calmly.” - Doce Maya (Pictured above)**

***“If it is a sin to say this, forgive me, but I think that for a poor woman to raise a child only so that it will suffer and go hungry, I think it would be better if that child had never been born”. - Claudinette. (Interview with Scheper-Hughes 338)***

## **The role of favela youth in an everyday cycle of hardship, violence, exclusion, and neglect**



**“The perception of street children as a threat is rooted in the contradiction between the desire to keep children socially marginal, docile, and out of view, and the existence – precisely at the center of urban social life – of street children who often exercise violence, something normally deemed the province of adults. Street children are a reminder, literally at the doorsteps of rich Brazilians and just outside five-star hotels where the development consultants stay, of the contradictions of contemporary social life: the opulence of the few amid the poverty of the majority, the plethora of resources amid the squandering opportunities. They embody the failure of an unacknowledged social apartheid to keep the poor out of view. At home in the street, they are painful reminders of the dangerous and endangered world in which we live.” -Tobias Hecht 214**



Awareness of child rights in Brasil has grown: the annual number of newspaper articles countrywide focusing on the issue climbed from 10,000 in 1996 to 75,000 in 2001. Prior to this, the media tended to focus on children as perpetrators of crimes, reinforcing existing prejudices and fuelling campaigns for reducing the age of criminal responsibility. – UNICEF, Brasil owes its children 1

**“His early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the ‘culture of silence’ of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination – and of the paternalism – of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were “submerged” in a situation in which such critical awareness and responses were practically impossible. It became clear to him that the whole education system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence.”**

**- Richard Shaull, Foreword to Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”**



## The Role of Youth in Everyday Favela Life



This Pró-Criança performance was inspired by an African slave dance depicting struggles for freedom in the midst of oppression and daily violence; experiences not so far from those of the students who perform the dance today.

It was the first Friday of Carnival and Pró-Criança vibrated with anticipation. The student's annual parade around the neighborhood was about to take off. Skinny kids with colorful masks practiced their dance moves behind the school; keeping rhythm to a constant drum beat in the air. As Pró-Criança's Maracatu group was well-respected in the community, the traditional African-influenced drumming performances never failed to send Brazilian hips into gyration. Though still early morning it threatened to be another smoldering February day, and the students filled bottles with water so that later they could dump them on each other. In this moment, the Maracatu drummers pulled away into the road, and roughly three hundred students and teachers paraded into the dusty streets of Piedade. It was only my second week as a teacher and the event proved to be an exciting introduction to the community where I would be working. We passed an open field marked by a single leaning shack, and littered with garbage and puddles of mud. We then moved into an area of stucco and brick houses, where mothers and children smiled and watched as Pró-Criança students passed through, yelling and spraying each other with silly string. The parade continued like this for more than two hours, pausing occasionally in different areas of the neighborhood so that the Maracatu band could seize the occasion to beat their drums especially loud. Finally we made our way back to the school; though still projecting wild drum rhythms and shouts of excitement, it was almost noon and the children were getting hot and tired. As we reached the gates to Pró-Criança I heard five gun shots ring out down the road. Chaos erupted and kids went running and screaming in every direction. The teachers flew into action in a protective panic; herding their students inside the front doors of the school. Lost in confusion, I followed the commotion inside and anxiously began asking anyone I could what was going on. My efforts were unsuccessful, but within a few minutes the staff had managed to guide students into the cafeteria and everyone was seated. The director of Pró-Criança announced that there had been a shooting outside the school; no one had been hurt, but everyone needed to stay inside until they knew we were safe. About half an hour later, it was declared that students were free to go home. I was

shocked by the fact that such a dramatic event warranted only thirty minutes of assessment before the children were casually set out onto the streets again. Later it was explained to me that shootings during carnival are not uncommon; people's emotions come out during the festivities and poor people in the Favelas tend to get aggressive.

Carnival or "the dance against death" is a fascinating expression of Brazilian culture. Though it originated from the Roman Catholic tradition that Portuguese brought with them upon their entrance to the new world, Brasil has embraced the celebration and transformed it into a month-long extravaganza of street parades, costumes, pranks, fireworks, dancing and drinking. The pre-Lenten festival gives Brazilians permission to play, to disguise themselves, and to express what is normally hidden. It is a time to forget the socioeconomic contrasts, hunger, infant mortality, and the chronic absence of political liberties that permeate the background of daily life (Scheper-Hughes 480). At the same time it can be a moment of critical reflection for the poor; songs and costumes comment on AIDS, inflation, foreign debt, the new constitution, and other social and economic realities. In addition Carnival is an occasion for the poor to embrace their heritage, to dance and perform in the street parades; the one time during the year when they can stand out and feel valued for who they are in society (Scheper-Hughes 496). Though the celebration comes only once a year, the social and economic issues that Carnival responds to are a very real part of daily existence for many Brazilians. The fear and violence I experienced on the day of Piedade's carnival parade is a way of life for many adolescents and for their families. In a survey assessing the violence experienced by youth in the favelas of Fortaleza (a city far north of Recife) 59 percent of youth considered the rate of violence or tension to be high in their neighborhood, and 73 percent claimed that their community had experienced gang fights within the last 12 months. As mentioned earlier, seventy-two percent of all deaths of 15- to 19-year-olds in 2003 were due to causes such as homicide. This was the leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14 and approximately 85 percent of the victims had been sexually exploited. Only 1.9 percent of these adolescents' murderers served prison sentences (Country 2003, 5). I vividly remember the night that I spent with my friend Luciene after she had witnessed a young neighborhood boy being shot in front of her mother's house in Piedade. Her friend had the misfortune of encountering a particularly jealous boy in the favela who happened to be in love with his girlfriend. In their brawl her neighbor was shot several times. Luciene remained uneasy that evening as she recounted the bloody details to me. She was particularly jumpy at the sound of gunshots in the distance; a familiar background noise in the favela night that would have easily gone unnoticed on any other occasion.

In addition to the violence experienced in the streets, almost half of the favela youth of Fortaleza said that they did not feel safe within their own home (Verner 20). This outlook is painfully familiar to many poor children who consider their homes to be sites of brutality and danger; more perilous than the mayhem outside (Hecht 85). However, adolescents often seem to normalize and accept the violence in their homes as something they deserve as the offspring of their poor mothers,

It is not merely the frequency with which poor, nurturing children speak of being beaten that draws one's attention, but the moral content with which they often imbue tales of their own castigation. Frequently, children will



discuss the beatings they suffer and then lament how difficult they are for their mothers. (Hecht 87)

In interviews with Tobias Hecht, one boy replied, ‘she hits me because she’s a mother (Hecht 86). This reality of normalized domestic abuse is particularly distressing when one considers the significant impact that a violent home life has on a child’s well-being, “Children, who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been victims of abuse, exhibit health and behavior problems, including problems with their weight, their eating and their sleep. They may try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies” (Innocenti 12). The director of Piedade’s public high school, Escola Sequinha Baheto, also claimed that students have a hard time valuing their education because they, “... bring all of the baggage of violence, of no love in their home to school”. Equally disturbing is the fact that witnessing and experiencing cruel treatment as a child can result in them internalizing violence and recognizing it as a form of conflict resolution. Girls who witness their mother being abused may be more willing to accept violence as a customary part of marriage than those who do not come from a background of abuse. While many children from violent homes do not grow up to engage in aggressive behavior, those who have witnessed violence during their childhood are more likely to be perpetrators of violence both inside as well as outside the home (Innocenti 12). When researchers inquired favela communities surrounding Fortaleza why youth engage in violent activities; forty-seven percent of those interviewed said that family problems are the main reason (Verner 20).

The effects that violence and poverty have on the daily lives of many mothers in Piedade threaten the survival of their babies long before entering the world. As is true in every part of the world, an infants’ potential to thrive relies heavily on the health and well-being of his or her mother,

Poor nutrition and ill health on the part of a mother can lead to low birth weight in her children, putting them at much greater risk of developmental delay, malnutrition and death. Moreover, poor health and nutrition multiply the risks that women will die of complications related to pregnancy or childbirth. The consequences are doubly tragic because children’s chances of survival and well-being drop dramatically when deprived of a mother’s care. (Early Childhood 1)

Likewise, the first three years of a child’s life, which have been proven to be the most crucial for their growth and survival, depend largely on the nurturing of the caretaker and the situation into which the child is born. Unsanitary environments, frequent illness, and poor nutrition can rob a child of their potential to thrive. Unfortunately, overburdened families may not have the information or time to spend in stimulating development in their child, “If the extraordinarily receptive brain of the child lacks the stimulation for which it is primed during the first three years, the possibility for various types of learning may be substantially reduced – during key developmental periods, some parts of a child’s brain can nearly double in size in a year” (Early Childhood 1). On the other hand, it has been discovered that infants who are well nurtured are more likely to have good self-esteem as adolescents, and have a better chance of becoming creative and productive members of society, “When well nurtured and cared for in their earliest years, children

are more likely to survive, to grow in a healthy way, to have less disease and fewer illnesses, and to fully develop thinking, language, emotional and social skills” (Early Childhood 1). In the adversity of Favela life an infant’s life is especially vulnerable, and survival depends not only on the mother’s health and ability to care for the child, but to a great extent on her *willingness* to care for the child in a context where she is already heavily burdened. While researching in Northeastern Brasil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes found that among mothers in the Alto do Cruzeiro (a favela near Recife), “the birth of a child is hardly a time of rejoicing, and mother love follows a tortured path, often beginning with a rocky start and fraught with many risks, dangers, separations, and deaths” (Scheper-Hughes 359). Born themselves into a background of scarcity, loss, and disappointment and raised in an environment where child mortality was far more frequent than it is today, mothers approach pregnancy and birth warily, “On the Alto do Cruzeiro infants, like husbands and boyfriends, are best thought of as temporary attachments. Both tend to disappoint women” (Scheper-Hughes 410). One strategy that women use to arm themselves against the frequency of disappointment and loss is a much more gradual process of maternal attachment to their newborns. Poor women who have experienced repeated pregnancy and infant death tend to respond to their babies with much less concern than do middle-class women, who are privileged with both a greater control over their fertility as well as a higher expectancy of child survival, “In a context of high infant mortality a woman must be fairly well convinced that infants are, at the very least, replaceable, or she would be disinclined to attempt pregnancy at all” (Scheper-Hughes 410). This contradiction of a mother creating, yet also so easily surrendering her infant to death is explained by author, Sara Ruddick who notes that, “mothers, while so totally in control of the lives and well-being of their infants and small babies, are themselves under the dominion and control of others, usually of men” (Scheper-Hughes 354). Viewed and treated as being simultaneously powerful and powerless, it is no wonder that so much controversy exists in deciding whether mothers are the primary agents or victims of various domestic tragedies (Scheper-Hughes 354). A study done by Rosales Ortiz in 1999 found that the children of women who are physically or sexually abused by their partners are six times more likely than other children to die before the age of five. A similar study found that women who are beaten experience significantly higher rates of miscarriage and stillbirth. One explanation for this is that infants of mothers who are abuse are more likely to be underweight, and thus carry and higher risk factor of dying in infancy or childhood. Another possibility is that women in abusive relationships “suffer from lower self-esteem, weaker bargaining position, less access to food and resources, and are therefore less able to care for their children” (Innocenti 12). It is certain that in the vulnerability of early human life, maternal indifference and the neglect of proper care (whether it is intentional or not) exaggerate the risks and expose infants in precarious urban slums to premature death. However, one must be careful not to isolate the role of maternal neglect in an infant’s health from its origins in social and economic conditions. When examining family relationships in the favela, one must recognize, “...the reality of maternal thinking and practice grounded in specific historical and cultural realities and bounded by different economic and demographic constraints. Maternal practices always begin as a response to ‘the historical reality of a biological child in a particular social world’” (Scheper-Hughes 356). Too much attention given to specific mothering practices

can obscure the fact that the greatest threats to child survival have always proven to be exploitative female wage labor and extreme poverty (Scheper-Hughes 356).

It is not uncommon for mothers responding to harsh economic realities to recognize a potential for income in their offspring, “Rather than being a bottomless pit of expenditure for their parents, poor children in Northeast Brasil are expected from an early age to contribute to the production and income of the household. And the children see supporting their mothers and nurturing the household as a virtue” (Hecht 81). As mentioned earlier, desperate mothers frequently take their infants to busy areas of the city in hopes that this will improve their profits in a day of begging (Hecht 231). Suzy once told me of a conversation she overheard between two mothers she had seen sitting on a street, begging in Recife. As they spoke of their financial burdens, ignoring the screaming infant lying beside them, one pointed to her swollen pregnant stomach, announcing smugly, “this is my investment for next year”. Outraged, Suzy scolded the young women for so willingly exposing their fragile infants to the hot sun and danger of the streets as a way to get more money from people. As they grow older, it is not unusual for poor children to beg, steal, or live on the streets to as a way to “help their mothers” (Scheper-Hughes 240). Tobias Hecht illustrates this with the example of Eufrazio, a 14-year-old boy extremely stunted from malnutrition, who explained to him that bringing home money was expected behavior on the part of a child (Hecht 81). In Olinda, a 38 year old mother of 12 children told Tobias Hecht, “My luck in life is my children, who bring me money and food. I can’t work with so many little ones around. Where would I be without them?” (Hecht 82). This responsibility and contribution to the household (and especially to their mothers) can be viewed as positive from a child’s eyes, “Faced with a political economy that offers them little of a material nature beyond mosquitoes and mud and scant hope for the future, poor children in Northeast Brasil appeal to a moral economy that highlights the importance of their nurturing position within the matrifocal family” (Hecht 196).

The exploitive attitudes that some desperate parents have towards their children significantly impact the self-esteem and priorities of these youth. During an interview at Escola Sequinho Baheto (Piedade’s public high school), I asked the director of the school if she thought her students felt valued. She responded,

Valued? I don’t think so. No. For them to feel valued, to have self-esteems –value their self-esteems, they have to have a lot of things... we have problems... up to family problems that extend all the way to the school, Ok? And we don’t have a psychologist, so it’s difficult. I went to be a director; I studied to be a professor of psychology. In truth we even try in the best way possible to provide a day for students and for families. But sadly it is difficult to accomplish this reality. This is a great difficulty also because the parents are pre-occupied; they need to eat. Therefore the mother and father have to work, and many times the students also have to work outside of school hours; to be able to have something. Therefore, when they aren’t in school, they are working. As a result; where is the learning? How do they compete with students who have a more financially balanced life like this; who have a father and mother working outside the house, but have a maid... to care for them?

Lifetime academic achievement is strongly influenced by direct and indirect parental investment. Parental time input, particularly the mother's, is a critical and often underestimated determinant of children's attainment. There is much evidence that growing up in a single-parent household has a negative impact on child education attainment, suggesting that the level of educational attainment of children in single-parent households is lower than in two-parent households. This lower achievement of children in single-parent households is consistent with single parents' smaller voluntary time endowment (Horowitz 4). When life is full of hardships, a child's education may not be the family's first priority. I remember when I inquired two of my students (a brother and a sister) about why they repeatedly missed English class. They told me it was because they had run out of water at their house and their mother expected them to go get it (residents in the favela rely on gallon sized jugs bought in the city as their prime drinking water source). Beyond this expectation to help support the family, many children in the Favela find that they are expected to be fully responsible for themselves. This was illustrated to me by one of my closest friends in Piedade who lived on the streets from age 8 to 15. Her mother, who had gone through the pains of starvation and poverty multiple times and had produced more than 12 children over the years, did not work and had little means of providing for the children who still depended on her. My friend told me that the first and only time she ever felt the pangs of starvation was at the age of eight. She still recalls the day there was just no food in the house. After two days of waiting in hunger, she finally left her home and went out in the streets to find something to eat for herself. From that point on my friend relied on the generosity of local businesses, bakeries, community members, and other "mothers" and "aunts" to feed and care for her, while she still spent most nights sleeping in her mother's home. She dressed like a boy, with a heavy hood around her hair and face to discourage harassment and assault. She said her salvation was that she avoided opportunities to work as a runner or become involved with drugs. When she was 15, my friend and a group of other street kids were approached by a worker from *Pró-Criança*. The woman told them that the school was a place where they could get free lunch everyday. From then on my friend went to *Pró-Criança* everyday, and soon she began to attend classes. She told me that the first time she ever felt love was from the *Pró-Criança* teacher who taught her how to read and write. Though she still sends money to her impoverished mother, my friend has found success in following the examples of those outside of her home.

Like my friend at *Pró-Criança*, many favela children turn to the streets as a way to survive the violence, neglect, scarcity, and exploitation of their home lives, "It is, after all, only the oppressive structural conditions of urban poverty in Brasil that make living in the street a materially rational alternative for some children – an unthinkable choice on those grounds for most children in the First World" (Hecht 196). In a survey assessing the violence experienced by youth in the Favelas of Fortaleza, 23 percent of participants claimed that youth are violent mainly due to a lack in opportunities (Verner 20). To many children, fending for themselves may be an attractive alternative to the treatment and poverty they experience in their home situation,

Poverty and hunger, family dysfunction, no father in the home, low self-esteem, and neighborhood violence born out of drug trafficking are some

of the salient characteristics of these kids. It is not uncommon for poor people to not register the birth of their children, rendering them as official nonentities, unable to enroll in school or to register for a job. Initially, many of the poor never registered their babies because they didn't have the money to do so. Now, I believe, there is no fee, but they either are not aware that the fee has been eliminated or it is just hard to change old fears and habits. When kids reach adolescence, they are particularly subjected to the siren call of entering the drug trade as drug runners and look outs for easy money. Once they enter the drug trade, they have absolutely no future, and in fact, their life expectancy has been dramatically diminished. (Bob Crites, Director of Students Helping Street Kids International)

Though they may be fending for themselves, children who spend their days on the street are often still emotionally and socially attached to a larger family unit and surprisingly sentimental about their mothers. As was stated earlier by Sebastião de Araújo Barreto Campello, the director of Movimento Pró-Criança, children turn to the street not solely because of a lack of family relationships but more due to a lack of structure at home and as "... a consequence of familial disintegration. This disintegration comes from economic exclusion, early pregnancy and working mothers who can't supervise their children the entire day." Sebastião comments on the potential of his students with a mixture of hope and sadness, "A child is always an idealist. They want to save the world. Today this desire has been diminished with the appeals of a modern, materialistic society that stimulates attainment of wealth, sex, and the use of drugs and alcohol." A child's escape to life on the streets may simply be a response to the confusion and destruction of the only reality that is familiar to them,

Street life is marked by a double-ethic or rebellion and remorse. On the one hand, street children tend to be haughty and defiant: they are dismissive of those who seek to instill discipline in them; they perpetrate violence; they reject schools and other aspects of home life; and they defy the rules of spatial segregation that dictate where poor children should and should not be. But they are also torn by a moral conflict over who they are and what they do. Their violence is projected by not only outward but inward. (Hecht 146 - 147)

While some adolescents may reject the toil and obedience expected of "home children", the alternative of starting a life on the streets may launch them into a path of violence and self-destruction with little chance of survival. They are viewed as disposable and dangerous, little is done to protect them (Hecht 148). Sebastião emphasized that once living in the streets, children are victims of an even greater social prejudice and that, "They are despised by the population, provoking a great rebellion in them." He maintained that people view children in the streets with great fear, but remain indifferent to the drama of their lives, and do little to make any improvements, "The government loses itself in inefficiency and political disputes. The family is in crisis all over the world with the sexual promiscuity of the modern world. Businesses have awoken to the problem and are beginning to help to solve it." As they are so visible and yet so difficult to control, street children are often readily recognized as menaces to society and symbols



of violence, “Street children are not only held responsible, they are held up almost as the public face of violence and urban disorder, as the undoing of the nation” (Hecht 213). It may be easy for Brazilian elite to ignore hungry children hidden away in the favelas, but they cannot avoid a child who might hold them up at gunpoint “as they ferry their own progeny to private schools”. In a world where youth face multiple layers of neglect and abuse experienced from a variety of sources, poor children often internalize the violence they experience, letting it resurface as a form of rebellion as well as survival. This ferocious violence of which youth in Piedade are both perpetrators and victims is born precisely out of their struggle to integrate into a world which, from birth, fails to invest in their positive development as individuals. It is in this violence that they voice their anguish; in their neglected existence they are often not heard any other way. In the words of a young boy living on the streets near Recife, “We ask people for money and they say ‘I don’t have anything.’ You point a thirty-eight at them and then you see how fast they come up with some” (Hecht 214). It is precisely in this violence that we may recognize how truly great the struggle for positive youth development in Piedade is; that these adolescents feel so forgotten in shadows of violence, neglect, oppression, and poverty that this is their last attempt to regain their right to be human,

Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or early always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human. As the oppressors dehumanized others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. (Freire 42)

Sebastião suggests that to help children seek a life away from the streets, “it is necessary to raise their self-esteem with sports and artistic activities and afterwards to give them professional training...starting from this, they will succeed to be reintegrated into school and family.” Movimento Pró-Criança has responded to the despondent and violent role that many of Piedade’s youth have assumed by investing in the critical consciousness and personal initiative of adolescents and the women in their lives. The many issues discussed in this thesis; from the distant repercussions of political corruption, to the heartbreaking intimacy of a mother abandoning her child, justify a conscious investment in the youth of Piedade. Improving the resources that young people have to foster healthy lifestyles and pursue their individual talents is imperative to insuring the future development of this vibrant and soulful community.

## Dependence in the Midst of Suffering



*"Si Deus quizer" - A popular Brazilian expression, literally meaning "If God wants it". I often heard it in response to a desire that someone had for the future.*

"It is a child's right to have every chance to survive and thrive. Moreover, ensuring optimal conditions for a child's early years is one of the best investments that a country can make if it is to compete in a global economy based on the strength of its human capital." Unicef Early Childhood 1

**"Street children are not only held responsible, they are held up almost as the public face of violence and urban disorder, as the undoing of the nation" - Tobias Hecht 213**

*"Abandoned children today come from among the families of the 40 million people who moved from rural to urban areas between 1960 and 1980: usually they are runaways who have been abused, or simply driven from their families. Half of Brazil's 60 million children survive on less than \$1 a day, a contingent of children equal to the entire population of Argentina or Columbia". Levine 69*

For **the oppressors**, however, it is always the oppressed (whom they obviously never call "the oppressed" but – "those people" or "the blind and envious masses" or "savages" or "natives" or "subversives") who are disaffected, who are **"violent"**, barbaric, "wicket," or **"ferocious,"** when they **react to the violence of oppressors**. Yet it is – paradoxical though it may seem – precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that **a gesture of love may be found**. Consciously or unconsciously, **the act of rebellion by the oppressed** (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) **can initiate love**. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is **grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human**. As the oppressors dehumanized others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to **dominate and suppress**, they restore to the oppressors **the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression**.

***Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed 42***



Esta foto mostrando três menino  
que o nome deles é menino que  
esta subindo na árvore e Genison  
e o menino que esta descendo da árvore  
doze e o menino que está de calção verde  
o nome dele é Thiago. ELE está no jardim da  
igreja.

Esta foto demonstrando três niño  
que o nome deles é ~~menino~~ <sup>niño</sup> que  
está subindo en el árbol y Genison  
y el niño diciendo del árbol y Thiago y  
El nombre del que está de los vestido pantalón  
esto vundes éi esta ~~em~~ el jardín da  
igreja

Não chorro porque você me ensinol a sorrir  
Não soffro porque você me ensinol a amar  
Não morro porque você me ensinol a viver.

Mas se um dia você deixar de existir eu choro soffro  
e ate morro pois a unica coisa que você não me  
ensinol foi viver sem você. te adoro D+

I don't cry because you taught me to smile  
I don't suffer because you taught me to love  
I don't die because you taught me to live

But if one day you cease to exist I will cry, suffer  
Until I die because the only thing you didn't  
teach me was how to live without you.

- Pró-Criança Student



## *About the Author*

The first day I entered a classroom at Pró-Criança I was carrying my guitar. After introducing myself in the little Portuguese I could manage, I sat down and sang a little greeting song that I had written in Spanish and English for my students. The kids loved it and several of them sang it to me for months afterward. I am a heartfelt musician and have played the piano all my life; I take my guitar with me everywhere I travel, and my passion for singing, composing and sharing music has kindled some of the strongest friendships and connections I have experienced. I am most attracted to climates where people weave a romantic and artistic passion for life into their daily interactions, and music is an easy way to do this. Recife captivated me immediately because of the music vendors who roamed outside my apartment window, blasting rhythmic tropical melodies each morning. I can honestly say that this ability to be touched by, and communicate with such a powerful tool has been the most gratifying and enriching gift that I have discovered.

I began writing my application essay for the Internship in Recife, Brasil from a small café in southern Spain. The previous day I had been in Portugal, and I would soon be venturing to Morocco, where I walked through ancient streets and city markets, followed a family of nomads and their camels across the Sahara desert, and was honored with invitations from the locals to drink tea in their homes, eat tagine with their families, explore the surrounding country side, play in a neighborhood drum circle, and spend the afternoon in a community bathhouse where the women, rituals, and architecture appeared as if they had not changed since their formation more than 500 years earlier. I had spent the past year studying Spanish and Social Anthropology at the University of Granada in the southern province of Andalusia in Spain. Since finishing school in June I had been on my own traveling Western Europe, experiencing people and places that truly changed my life and how I viewed the world.

My travels have left me with a million lessons about how essential communication is. Spending a year living with Spanish roommates taught me a great deal about the complications and misunderstandings that naturally arise between people from different languages and cultures. Learning Spanish has enriched my life in incredible ways and inspired me to pursue other languages. During my school year in Spain I met a Brazilian girl through our local church choir in Granada who was also studying at the University. Our instant friendship and shared interest in each other's native languages inspired a bi-weekly "intercambio" where we would spend half the time practicing her English conversational skills, and the second half working on my basic Portuguese. After we finished school Aline invited me to spend a week with her in the home of her Brazilian friends in Lisboa, Portugal. It was a wonderful crash course in Brazilian culture and language, inspiring continual travel pursuits. My experience speaking Spanish and Portuguese proved to be very helpful during my travels that summer in Italy. From the day I arrived in Sardinia I was determined to speak the language, and by the end of the three weeks I had proudly learned enough Italian to connect with a local island family, musicians in Florence, and a retired seaman in Venice. My new friends left me with unforgettable lessons in the cooking, history, and generosity of their country.

I first discovered the intellectual wealth that could be accessed through studying in a foreign country when I chose to spend winter quarter of my sophomore year attending a language school in Costa



Rica. I spent the majority of this time living with a family in the tranquil beach town of Samara, where the closest bank and grocery store were a 45 minute drive away, meals rarely diverged from beans and rice, and life drifted along to the lazy rhythms of the Bob Marley music that filled its streets. At the end of my Costa Rican travels I lived in an even humbler beach town called Gandoca, which sits nestled up against the border of Panama. One can only get to this wildly remote community by following a dusty road through extensive tropical jungle and a Chiquita Banana plantation, until finally reaching the end and finding yourself facing into the magnificent Caribbean ocean. During my time in Gandoca I helped a non-profit group called ANAI in their efforts to save the local Sea turtle population from being hunted to extinction by the local people who found the animals valuable for their meat, eggs, and shells. I lived in a shack, ate from a pot of beans cooked over a fire in the back yard, spent my days exploring local lagoons and wildlife, and my nights patrolling the black-sanded beach for turtles and guilty poachers. Within three months I had completely fallen in love with the laid back attitude, the warm tropical climate, the language, and the welcoming people I met in Costa Rica.

Traveling is one of my passions simply because I am always excited to see and learn new things. I thrive in challenging situations and am inspired to meet and talk with people who live differently than I do. I am double majoring in Spanish and an innovative program at the University of Washington known as The Comparative History of Ideas (CHID). The ambitious goal of the CHID degree centers on understanding the patterns, ideas and histories of cultures in every part of the world. This includes examining the connections that these backgrounds and beliefs have with the people and identities of each community. The great variety of cultures, geographies, governments, philosophies, lifestyles, religions, traditions and habits that exist in every corner of this world fascinates me.

My most memorable experience working in a classroom occurred during my freshman year of college while I was volunteering at Fairview Interagency School and Rehabilitation Center in downtown Seattle. I was eighteen at the time and worked with kids close to that same age who no longer attended a regular high school and were in the process of earning their GEDs (General Education Degrees). Every student at Fairview was either on probation or parole for a range of criminal offenses. The first day was a bit of a shock when I had to pass a metal detector and a security guard just to walk through the front door. Though my introduction to these teenagers was not a warm one, I gradually got to know them and learn about some of their amazing talents and backgrounds. One who still stands out in my mind was John, the tall and visually intimidating convicted drug dealer, who I later discovered wrote sweet poetry in Ebonics for his beloved girlfriend. The student I worked with most consistently throughout the year was Daniel, an intelligent and rebellious 19 year old guy who wanted to become a firefighter. At the end of spring term that year Daniel proudly became Fairview's first graduate.

During my sophomore year of college I took a class on the lifestyle patterns of Latino immigrants in the United States. I decided to do my final research project for this class on the academic identities of Latino immigrants learning English as a second language in American schools. A major part of my project was performing a case study at Hamilton International Middle School in Seattle. I spent three months interviewing, observing and working with the students in the ELL (English Language Learners) classroom. My goal was to observe the specific teaching methods used; such as separate or integrated teaching of the ELL students with the rest of their peers, permitted use of student's native language to communicate with their classmates, methods of evaluation and positive reinforcement in the program, and the general attitudes of the teacher's towards their students and their specific needs. I was interested in drawing conclusions about how these methods of teaching affected the student's attitudes towards their own capabilities and likelihood to succeed in school.

Recognizing the disparity between the successes of students from different backgrounds was one of the thoughts that prompted my interest in interning as an English and Spanish teacher in Recife, Brasil. Given that I grew up in Portland, Oregon, where my home, neighborhood, and school communities were equally inspiring and stimulating, I have always had a passion for working with needy and impoverished youth, and focusing on the education, personal initiative, and critical consciousness of those living in challenging environments. My mother is a Reading recovery and Title 1 teacher, so I have always had a strong awareness in the importance of literacy and education. I currently work as an English Language Learner's assistant at Harold Oliver Primary School in Portland, Oregon where 40% of the students speak a language other than English and 80% of the students live in poverty. In the near future I plan to pursue a master's degree in Education with an ELL endorsement so I can continue to work in the field, which I have discovered to be so gratifying.



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