

DRAFT!!!

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The king is naked: media, black youth, and police in Brazil

This work takes two complementary perspectives: my experience living in a favela and my experience as an activist of the black movement. It is a mindful reflection for my research interest that intends to explore the relation between academy, urban violence, space, race, age, and homicides in the city of São Paulo. I argue that the skin color and the origin of victims are key factors in the distribution of deaths among young male in the city of São Paulo. I suggest also that the Brazilian University plays important role in the maintenance and reproduction of multiple faces of the violence against the black people. To start it is evident that the myth of the racial democracy supports a pact of silence among State, academy, media and society hiding the real dimensions of this tragedy. What are following are some reflections.....

To study the multiple faces of violence in Brazil requires contextualizing its manifestations within the national ideology of Brazilian racial democracy. How this myth embodies practices of sophisticated racism “without racists” and how it is incorporated in everyday life is a challenging question. Thus, to face violence is to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the racial democracy which at the same time that evokes the multiculturalism as Brazilian legacy endorses the death of thousand of Afro-Brazilians every year. Experts on urban violence have emphasized the specificity of urban violence in Brazil where the combination of different factors such as poverty, age, sexuality, gender, and place are determinants in the victimization of minorities groups (see Ramos,2005). We can say that as many as subalterned positions a person occupies, greater will be the probability of s/he be victim of urban violence. In other words, to be male, young, homosexual, black and poor is a lethal condition in the Brazilian society.

Given the transversality of violence against minority groups in Brazil, why my primarily emphasis on the violence against black male, age 15-25 year? Because “officially”

this is the most vulnerable social group in my country. Black males between the ages of 17 and 24 years old who are unemployed, without educational opportunity and living in the outskirts of metropolitan areas are the archetype of marginalized social groups in Brazil. According to United Nation Program to Development/UNDP-BRASIL, the Brazilian national rate of homicide is 28 for every 100,000 inhabitants. If isolated by race and age, Black males between the ages of 15 and 24 account alone for 127 homicides for every 100,000 inhabitants, while whites represent 64.4 out of every 100,000 inhabitants. Also, it is almost certain that at some time in their lives, Black youth in Brazilian metropolitan areas will come into contact with the criminal justice system. Traffic of drugs, organized crime, and street gangs are some of the factors for victimization of **Black youth**, but they are not the only ones. Researchers as Ignacio Cano (1997) and Jorge Silva (2002) have shown that black males are the main victims not only of the criminals, but also of the police. Official data from Sao Paulo' Security Office has shown that 328 suspected had been died for civil and military policemen in the State between January and July of 2006 raising the rate of lethality in the police action to a daily average of 2 deaths. According to Folha de S.Paulo's newspaper, in the first six months of 2006 the São Paulo police killed 84.27% more people than in the same period of 2005. Between 1995 and June of 2006, military police in SP had killed 5,473 people.

For obvious reasons, the discussion on urban violence in Brazil must be racialized. Also, in order to understand its phenomenon one must discuss gender, sexuality, and poverty. Although official data's absence of the cumulative experience of terror lived by black women, gays, and poor in general, my research aim to interrogate how does state violence generate a cycle of violence in Black communities. Also I intend to understand how black's male racialized experience of oppression is projected and reproduced in everyday life of women, gays, lesbian, and their peers. Thus, although the focus is on the specificity of black male victimization, the research also point to two unconcluded hypothesis are: ii) urban violence in general, and police brutality against black male in particular, feed a cycle of responsive

violence against black women; ii) if in order to be accepted in Brazilian society black male must take white values (such as heterosexuality, patriarchy, whiteness) then the violence against women and gay in their community can be translated as a crossing to white world. I hope it is clear that I am going away from the traditional pathologization of black male as criminal. It is not the case! What I want to emphasize here is that one cannot talk about police anti-black male violence without take into consideration its direct consequences in the life of their parents, relatives and their community. Another very important variable in analyzing urban violence in Brazil is the ghettization of black folk in spaces called “favelas”. In *Brazilian Apartheid....* João Vargas (2005) invites us to read the relation race/urban space as production of white supremacy. In other words, the spacial segregation of the black population in precarious urban spaces must be seen as an intentional and strategic attempt of control of blacks by whites. Helicopters, weapons of last generation, outlaw-policemen, policeman-outlaws, cameras, reporters and plus a series of paraphernalia transform the slum quarter into a true hell. “Todo camburão tem um pouco de navio negreiro”, sings musical group Rappa. It is a precise description. In Brazil the favela is a zone of occupation where the white order is imposed by the police. It is in the context of the militarization of the public security, and the culture of the fear manufactured by the press that the favela is re-updated in white mind as the place of the disorder and its inhabitants as potential criminals. The imposition of the white order is rationalized as domination necessary to guarantee the harmony and to minimize the conflicts. The massacre of young men, of black color is incorporated as normal in everyday life and justified as collateral effect of a legitimate war against criminals. Unnecessary to say that here the discourse of racial democracy makes miracle erasing the color of dead bodies. The pact of silence has tragic consequences. A tacit complicity reaches the media, the academy, the State, and finally the society in general. Two distinct looks in the urban landscape: in the white mind the image of the black male as biologically propitious to crime. The “asphalt” does not see the favela as space of sociability, agency, emancipation, dreams, and struggle. On the other hand,

the image that the “favelados” have of the state is the image of the death. It is the image of a police that humiliates, spansks, brutalizes, kills. The police brutality is only the part most visible of the institutionalized daily oppression in the state’s apparatus. It has other ritualized, institutional, continuous violence.

University, silent violence, and exclusion. Brazil has made significant progress in universalizing the access to basic education in the last decades. But that process took place with neither concern with the quality nor with complementary public policies to the young generation. Under the neoliberal philosophy of Washington’s Consensus, public policy to poor youth suffered brutal disinvestment. If for one side the government privatized essential public services and treated formal education as a commodity, by the other side it responded the popular demand for land, education, and job market with the criminalization of social movements. Also, under neoliberal era the Brazilian public universities continued as centers of excellence made for whites, controlled by whites, to whites. If formal education enables particular groups to accumulate cultural capital, as Pierre Bordieu (2003) argues, then, to monopolize the instruments of appropriation of these resources assures "permanent positions" to the ruling class. Indeed, since "academic qualification represents for cultural capital what money represents for economic capital" (Bordieu, 2003:187), than in keeping black folk outside of university State is doing not more than perpetuating white supremacy. Putting differently, by an unequal distribution of opportunity the Brazilian university operates within a political economy of racism perpetuating the social and economic distances between whites and blacks. The result is simple: the same black youth that are getting older outside of the university is the same one brutalized by the police, segregated in the favelas, unemployed, without access to essential public services. The University is fundamental actor in the institutionalized process of oppression of the black people not only by the discourse it produces but also by its exclusionary practices. The University of São Paulo is the best example here:

With 78 years, USP is the biggest public university of the country. USP is also the symbol of white supremacy in Brazil! An ethnic census of the University, from 2001, disclosed that 78.2% of its students were white, 8.3% was black, 0.5% was Indians, and 13% were “yellow.” It is in this context of exclusion that a cynical, racist, reactionary elite, takes advantage of the liberal notion of meritocracy “to keep black and Indian people in their place.” The strong opposition of Brazilian academy to affirmative actions to Indian descents and afro descents has no other explanation than keep the “Casa Grande / Senzala relation untouchable. The excuse is simple: in Brazil we do not have racism. If approved, the racial quotas for blacks and indigenas will introduce in the country a bi-racial system that only existed in U.S.A. and South Africa. In addition, since we are equal before the Law, "preferential" treatment for certain groups would be opposite racism. Hrrrrr!

Black Insurgency! The gestures of lie down on the main streets, occupying public buildings, or chaining in front of banks, multinational companies, and public institutions have been a frequent symbol in youth black insurgency in Brazil. What does it mean? The symbolic gesture wants to call the attention to Brazil historical debt with its Black population. The gesture is also a challenge to the insidious discourse of Brazilian racial paradise. What these young people want to say is that there is no racial democracy in a country where among the 10% poorest, 70% are black. Still, we cannot talk about racial democracy in a country where the State not only is incapable to guarantee right of citizenship the black people, but it also became into the main violator of these minority's human rights. Black youth resists to the racial oppression elaborating strategies of insurgency “abriendo brechas” throughout the structures of oppression. The Black youth also re-signify the favela as space of sociability, political organization, and solidarity. The hip hop, the rap, the graphite are expression of resistance forged and imagined in these spaces of life and death. Other example of resistance that I will show on the video is The EDUCAFRO. With more than 10,000 Black

youth and poor whites organized into 186 groups based in the city of São Paulo, Educafro has as its main goal to organize marginalized youth in the struggle for affirmative action policies in the job market and in Brazil's public universities. Since its creation in 1992, this NGO has struggled along two fronts: officially it has pressured the Brazilian government to pass a law to create affirmative action quotas in public universities and in public service sector jobs for Blacks and indigenous peoples; also, it has contested everyday racism and police brutality against youth in São Paulo's ghettos by creating educational training programs to improve the chances of poor youth to access a university education, the job market and to develop their own means of expression. Indeed, Educafro has judicially activated Brazilian state-based organizations such as the University of São Paulo and the Bank of Brazil, among others, to take a stand against institutional racism. Educafro's example is just one of many initiatives of resistance of the Black people. In the context of oppression, Black youth subvert white order and its concept of peace! We are tired of the white peace because to defend it is the same to fight against ourselves. For us, the peace is fruit of justice, but justice with very small "p". "Reacts or you will be killed" has been the slogan of the youth organized against the police violence, the university exclusion, and against the multiple faces of violence that targets our multiple being: the woman, gays, black youth, the poor in general. Black youth insurgency is pacific, but not passive. It is resistance forged in the inheritance of Dandara, the queen of Quilombo dos Palmares. It is resistance that is Abrindo Brechas throughout Brazilian cynical racial democracy.