
Graça Índias Cordeiro, Lígia Ferro e Tim Sieber

Murais comunitários e identidade local em Boston

Art builds the city BostonArte que faz a cidade

community murals and local identity

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Introduction

- 1 During early 2009, the visit to Boston of Tim Sieber's long-term colleague Graça Cordeiro, and her doctoral student Lígia Ferro, led to a variety of productive collegial conversations about cultural production and local identity in Boston, Tim's home city for the past 36 years. The purpose of this paper is to describe an "ethnographic expedition" on community murals in Boston, experienced collectively by Tim, Lígia and Graça who joined together in Boston for a few days in April 2009. Graça was doing a field research on the local Portuguese speaking community while on her sabbatical leave, Lígia was visiting Graça while completing field research at New York City on graffiti and hip hop culture, for her PhD thesis, and Tim was there as a Bostonian who lived in the city and had studied it for decades. We shared common interests rooted in different former individual ethnographic experiences on some theoretical subjects – such as local identity and visual urban culture – and empirical sites – particularly, Lisbon and Boston –and these fostered our interpersonal communication, little by little defining a new subject for our collective research. Our encounter with these murals thus drew on our previous ethnographic experience with festivals and neighborhood representation in Lisbon (Cordeiro, 1997, 2001), with graffiti and street sports in Lisbon, New York, and Rio de Janeiro (Ferro, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c), and with architecture, music, and urban planning in Lisbon and Boston (Sieber 2002, 2005; Sieber and Centeio 2010). The benefits of our conversations together for deepening our collective understanding of the topic were, obviously, largely due to the generosity of Tim who shared with Graça and Lígia the deep knowledge he had about Boston neighborhoods and their community murals. In that sense, he was, in some way, much more than a colleague and teacher– he was, in the real sense of the word, a key informant. This helps us to understand that in collaborative ethnographic projects, especially when national and cultural borders are crossed, the ethnographer's and the key informant's roles overlap a great deal.
- 2 With a presentation that mixes our three voices, we want to emphasize the value of collaboration in urban qualitative research, even more so, probably, when the researchers are diverse among themselves and bring to bear all their differing lenses for building a new research focus. By examining the cultural production involved in the murals, a richer, more multi-faceted analysis is bound to result. We will present some details of our collective 'ethnographic' experience, respecting as much as we can its singularities; but we want to report on one of the most expressive and touching aspects of Boston, which is in fact an urban tradition strongly rooted in America - community murals.

What impressive paintings!

- 3 The original idea of that project takes shape during the beginning of the stay of Graça in Boston, since Jan. 2009. Tim was her privileged guide that tried to help her see 'the city in all of its aspects', with the murals as part of it, from Cambridge, across the Charles River and through the ethnic neighborhoods of Boston.
- 4 Graça's daily bus trips, riding on Bus 41 between Jamaica Plain, where she lived, and the University of Massachusetts in Dorchester (Fig.1) only increased her interest in this type of journey. She crossed through Roxbury and much of Dorchester (Fig. 2) and could easily see and come to appreciate the string of impressive murals at key points of this route (at public

transport stations, stores, parks, etc.) traversing these neighborhoods with a majority of “ethnic minority” populations, known for the high number of blacks and Latinos who live there. These are neighborhoods full of children and youth, who accompanied her on her bus rides, but also neighborhoods stigmatized by the skin color of their inhabitants, by poverty, and especially by a high rate of youth mortality, provoked by violence. More than half of Boston’s killings are of youth aged younger than 25 years¹. The contrast between this critical and often dangerous urban zone, and the rich, artistic, colorful and dynamic murals painted on its public walls, easily captures the observer’s attention.

5 Bus Route nº 41

6 In April 2009, we completed a guided visit of community murals selected by Tim. We recorded in audio our conversation, organized as an open interview with him over the murals and their context. We traveled through two well-known neighborhood areas, with a strong presence in the city both in the past and the present: Cambridge, and Roxbury/Dorchester. We took hundreds of photographic images. Eventually we decided to focus our attention on Roxbury/Dorchester.

7 Boston Neighborhoods

8 A reading of documentary and bibliographic materials on U.S. community murals accompanied our investigation from the beginning, as we inserted this engaging research among the other lines of work we were doing in Boston. Curiously, that which started as a simple exchange of impressions, intuitions, and knowledge acquired over the theme, in an open and free manner – and it is important to emphasize the ludic and freely chosen manner of this ethnographic “spirit” – has gained importance for us and defined a set of topics that have become configured into a new object of study for us.

The Historical Background of 20th Century U.S. Urban Murals

9 Community murals surged in the decade of the 1960s in the United States. It is commonly recognized that the first “community mural” dates from 1967, and was realized in Chicago, organized by William Walker: the “Wall of Respect”:

10 "In early spring 1967, a group of some twenty black artists started painting on a semi abandoned two-story building on the southeast corner of Forty-third and Langley streets. It was in the center of Chicago's old ‘black belt’ South Side, an area scheduled for demolition to make way for urban renewal. The project began without fanfare, unnoticed by the press; but it gathered around it a festival of the arts of black people. Photographs were added to the paintings and poems inscribed among the portraits. Musicians came to play jazz sets, poets to read poems. Uncommissioned, without patronage or manifestos, it was a self-determined effort of community-conscious artists. The *Wall of Respect* was the beginning" (Cockcroft, Weber, Cockcroft, 1977: 1).

11 This mural marks the beginning of the contemporary mural movement in the United States that can be briefly characterized by a number of key elements: their locations (outdoors, in neglected sites, working class and minority neighborhoods, etc.); the initiative of artists and the leading role of black artists, and those from other minority groups; the grassroots support and involvement of the local community; and the character of the art as a form of collective expression (Cockcroft, Weber, Cockcroft, 1977: 10-12).

12 Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago are cities where in their ‘black communities’ we see this type of mural appear, where the principal objective of the murals is “bringing art to the community and serving popular struggles,” transforming streets into galleries (idem:31). Dana Chandler, a Boston muralist, told a reporter in 1968, as he painted a wall in Roxbury in Boston: “There is no Black art in the Museum of Fine Arts, so we are going to utilize the facade of buildings in our community for our museum...black people (are) painting murals about themselves and their situation...Black art is not a decoration. It’s a revolutionary force” (p. 31²).

13 Boston’s Summerthing mural program, whose rise and fall took place during 1968-1973, deserves a brief reference³. Subsidized from above (by grants from art institutions, municipal programs, and the business community) it first appeared in an initial accord between a group of artists from black neighborhoods and the city government that resulted in the appearance

of a series of murals during 1968-1969. These murals located in Roxbury and South End neighborhoods echo today's more recent street art (see below, **Fig. 3** "Faces of Dudley"). Some of the artists were paid, through financial support from institutions like the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), and the projects also were linked to the creation of improved urban leisure spaces such as playgrounds, parks, and recreation centers. Eventually diverse types of murals were painted in over 30 critical neighborhoods between 1971-72, many emphasizing environmental themes. Overall, between 1968 e 1972, 72 murals were painted in Boston, "... the most vital public mural program of any city in the world", said the art critic Taylor (cit in Cockcroft, Weber, Cockcroft, 1977: 54). The program finally ended in 1973, owing to a shift in public policy, revealing also the weak organization that obtained among the involved artists. Nonetheless, it is possible to say that this mural movement has continued in Boston to the present day, although on a lesser scale (ibidem).

14 During the 1970s, public art programs still continued to be developed. We can give an example of a case related by Mark Favermann when he was named director of the "Visual and Environmental Arts of the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs of Boston" in 1975 (Favermann 1978). In this period, a competition was opened for a commission to paint metallic grates that protected the fronts of stores on West Broadway, a major shopping street in South Boston, dedicated to the theme of "Proud of Southie". It is interesting to note that the process of choosing artists for the work involved local residents from this zone, as well as commuters. In a process lasting six days, people viewed various proposals for artwork and chose the ones they most liked. Favermann also tells the 1977 story of the murals of the North End, which involved about 400 neighborhood residents in a process of choosing ten designs from among 50 different proposals submitted.

15 Another later example is the City Arts Program that announced a budget of \$50,000 for its programs in 1982. As expected, this subsidy was not directed exclusively at the development of community murals; but the "creation of public art with ethnic themes," was one of the areas eligible for funding (McLaughlin 1982). In the end many murals were financed through these means.

16 In 1988, Alianza Hispana, a community agency based in Roxbury, organized the painting of a mural to keep Hispanic youth occupied during the summer and out of the neighborhood's sometimes rough street life, where it was easy to find trouble (Ribadeneira, 1988). Many of these initiatives in the United States were developed as measures to combat drug use and youth violence. Many murals that are visible in Boston emerged also as an attempt to improve neighborhood quality of life, by offering a space for the development of identity markers that can strengthen ties within the community, as we will shortly see⁴.

"Building community" through mural art

17 Let us take time to examine up close what we refer to as community murals. We chose a small set of five murals, all of them situated in the adjacent neighborhoods of Roxbury and Dorchester, along Dudley Street. The analysis and reflection that follow, by Tim, result from a long-term knowledge accumulated as both "native" and "urban anthropologist," that involves both ethnographic fieldwork and cultural analysis in his own city. We can consider these statements as outcome of a dialogue with two Portuguese colleagues that stimulated the organization of these reflections, having now become transformed more into a process of scientific knowledge, namely, in the realization of this paper. Davey's Market, Left Side I

18 This mural is painted on the side of a restaurant in the main square, and transportation hub (Dudley Square), in the heart of the African-American neighborhood of Roxbury.

Every person shown in the mural was a real individual who lived there, as local celebrities, entertainers, or personalities. Almost all these people were of mainly local fame or significance, which validates the importance of the community, but there are occasional people like Malcolm X, who lived in the area as a child, or Martin Luther King, who visited frequently when he was a doctoral student in theology at Boston University not too far away, whose faces are also included. The high beauty and style of the people is evident, in the mode of the 40s, 50s, and early 60s, a time of greater racial segregation both in US society more

widely, and in Boston. This is a powerful evocation of the dignity, integrity, and style of a community and a place that the racism and segregation of the time could not conquer. Davey's Market, Left Side I

19 This mural celebrates youth, their hopes for a good future, and the many rich immigrant cultures they represent even in this one, seemingly all "black," but still very diverse neighborhoods. Flags from many countries are evident throughout – Cape Verde, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, to name a few. Schools and youth groups that the young people belong to are also named. One important theme is sports, and the role they play in bringing people together, and leading to success. Many of the messages exhort the young to make an effort, and give hope that the struggle to succeed is worthwhile. This mural helps young people to see the heroism, the resources, and the assets of their own lives and communities, and to be prideful of the efforts they are making. This mural is dedicated also to Jorge Fidalgo, a beloved neighborhood leader, and owner of the store in this building, who was murdered in a robbery at his store. Davey's Market, Left Side II

20 Davey's Market Right Side I

21 This is the famous "Unity through Diversity" mural that was the first one designed and executed by youth at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (<http://www.dsni.org/>) The stress here is not only on inter-racial cooperation (in the example of the two elderly women, one white and one black, and in the various colors of the youth pictured), but even more importantly here, on intergenerational cooperation and solidarity. Youth are given a strong place in the community, and a lot of responsibility, and most respond well to the trust that older generations put in them. They grow into leaders that take on the mantle of authority and responsibility from older people. The young man, 15 years old, who is playing the conga drum in this mural, for example, is now 20 years older, and is the Executive Director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, and a respected leader.

22 Once again here, as in the Faces of Dudley mural, we see the ubiquitous Orange Line Metro train that links the neighborhood with the outside world. Davey's Market Right Side II

23 "Nho Lobu"

24 Nho Lobu is an important traditional figure in Cape Verdean folklore in the archipelago, a kind of trickster figure, who is always trying to find the "jeito" of an easy way out, and who usually gets into trouble because of it. This mural was the joint product of collaboration between Cape Verdean youth and elderly people associated with the organization Cape Verdean Community UNIDO. Many Cape Verdean adults fear that their immigrant children are losing contact with the traditional culture of Cape Verde, and that this loss is what explains the youth's frequent involvement in troubles with the law and criminality in the United States. This mural is meant to have a "moral," or a lesson, attached to it – that in the transition between Cape Verde and Boston (both the archipelago and the city of Boston are pictured in the mural), it is easy to lose contact with good, traditional values. The Pilon grinding corn was chosen as the symbol of traditional Cape Verdean values in this mural. Nho Lobo has embraced materialism, is driving a fancy car, has his hand full of dollars, is wearing gold jewelry, and is acting very carelessly in the way he is driving the car. He is about to be hit, and probably killed, by a large truck coming around the corner, and it will be the result of his own carelessness! This mural is on the side of a restaurant that serves Cape Verdean, African-American, and Latin American food. The muralist who worked with the Cape Verdean youth and elderly to develop this mural, John Ewing, is an Anglo-American who has long experience working in US and Latin American cities organizing communities to complete popular murals. Upham's Corner Peace Mural I

25 This mural is located near the boundary line between two different gang territories, and in an area where many youth have been murdered in street violence. The mural emphasizes peace, harmony, and hope ("Speranza," kriolu) for young people, who live separated from the downtown Boston area of high buildings, skyscrapers, and money. The need to work together for peace, so that all can succeed, is evident, and the mural like most of the others shows many examples of people of different skin colors and cultures coming together and showing compassion and caring for one another. Peace also is something that the mural suggests does not come naturally, but that must be struggled for – through demonstrating and taking other

positive action to make peace happen. Most of the violence that occurs in this area, by the way, is not between ethnic groups, but is territorial in nature. Gangs who are at war with one another are all, internally, multi-ethnic. Upham's Corner Peace Mural II

26 Dedication of Peace Mural Photo I

27 Dedication of Peace Mural Photo II

28 One of these 2006 photos shows Isaura Mendes, Cape Verdean immigrant resident of Dorchester, who has lost two of her three sons to street violence. Mrs. Mendes is a widely known leader and anti-violence activist, who speaks publicly against violence among youth. She is standing next to a quilt that has on it one button for each of the youth, almost all male, who have been murdered in this part of Boston over the past ten years. This quilt is both a memorial to those who have died, but also a reminder and a caution about the need to prevent further violence. The second photo shows Thomas Menino, Mayor of the City of Boston since 1994, speaking to youth present at the ceremony of dedication for the mural. At the moment this photo was taken, he was telling the assembled youth about his own Boston childhood within a poor Italian immigrant family, and trying to give encouragement and hope about their own chances of improving their lives just as he did.

There seem to be some relevant general characteristics of this mural art that are worth enumerating here.

29 a) The murals above all work to build solidarity in the neighborhood, especially horizontal ties across racial and ethnic lines; in a positive way, the murals valorize and celebrate the actual situation in the neighborhood – that is to say, its vibrant multi-ethnic and multi-racial mix.

They hold up the neighborhood that people know, and by representing it, they valorize its special beauty, human vitality, and goodness.

30 b) The murals make a semi-permanent record of the neighborhood's history, place, and culture, that can be viewed over and over again to remind people of who they are and where they came from.

31 c) The murals are truly a collective artistic production, the product of the neighborhood (rather than an individual artistic product). Each work is the result of a long process where there is collective discussion of the themes, through meetings and workshops, often with youth as key figures, and where participants examine and give commentary on provisional designs. Sometimes the members of the community, especially youth, also execute the painting that the mural requires. Usually this process is led by a "community muralist," who is not only an artist, but a community organizer at the same time. They are specialists in facilitating the neighborhood to coalesce into a collective voice about what the mural should portray.

32 d) Because murals belong to the neighborhood, or are "owned by" it (metaphorically speaking), there is virtually no graffiti or defacement of the murals over many years; they have the respect of residents.

33 e) Youth are usually the central actors in this process, and in the murals insert their own hopes and dreams into the narrative of their neighborhood's collective history, often linking with their ethnic group's transnational connections and memories before the experience of immigration. The neighborhoods also understand that the perspectives of the youth as the "second generation," usually U.S.-born, are different than their own, and they welcome their voice. The entire process, however, works mainly to help youth make connection with their elders and with the past history of their group.

Mediating Cities and Communities

34 Lígia brings her strongly comparative, cross-national perspective on street art and the role of youth in artistic production to bear on assessment of these Boston works of public art. We cannot underestimate the controversies that sometimes arise over the balance that is struck between ideal and realistic representations in the community murals. In Dorchester, for example, there was an argument in response to a mural that portrayed the case of Rodney King, the African-American who was brutalized by four police officers in Los Angeles. The mural prompted reactions from various groups, since it showed an image of violent police (Canellos, 1992). Despite the protests, Boston's Mayor Raymond Flynn decided to preserve the mural

(Ribadeneira, 1992). More recently, in summer 2009, the metropolitan transit authority tried to suppress another mural on its property that depicted the suffering of neighborhood poor people in the past (see Sieber and Centeio 2010). On many occasions, the issue has been centered on how much the murals should reflect the everyday realities of the neighborhoods where they are installed, where violence is often a reality, or on the other hand, should be idealistic vehicles for celebrating mainly the community's aspirations and positive hopes.

35 Local groups almost always have shown themselves to be substantially interventionist, and critical, a sign that the execution of these murals really arouses emotions and arguments among different segments of the neighborhood. The neighborhoods usually seek to conserve the murals, attempting to recuperate ones that are in a state of advanced degradation (O'Brien, 2006), or even to recreate murals that have already become extinct (Woy, 2005). These processes of negotiation that are involved show that the murals are complex in their meanings and put into play the differing opinions and sentiments of the population. Also because of this, the murals fill an important social function of communication within the community. Perhaps for this reason, Boston's mayor's office decided to leave the Dorchester mural the way it was, with the understanding that there were positive aspects to generating neighborhood discussion on the themes it handled.

36 A majority of North American community murals celebrate the neighborhood and its most charismatic figures, and often engage with themes of social justice, ethnic relations, policy-community interactions, and social and cultural practices of youth. There also exist some overtly moralistic, exhortative murals that try to give examples of models or styles of life that are desirable or that are condemned as harmful (see, for example, the "Nho Lobu" Mural). Tom Anderson (1988) lists a variety of themes that, in fact, are the ones most represented in American muralism: "ethnic pride", "hippy culture", "antiwar activism", "health food consciousness", "local identity", "women's rights", "environmentalism," and "economic and social inequality" (Anderson, 1988: 267).

37 Looking at the issue of murals and public art more widely, Lúcia's doctoral investigation of graffiti practices and street art has shown that it is important to appreciate youth's significant involvement as mediators among different social worlds (in the sense given by Gilberto Velho, 1994, 2001). Youth are involved in a diversity of urban cultures (from the culture of hip hop, punk, hard core, rock, and so on) and they traverse distinct social worlds. To speak of youth means acknowledging a social universe that is substantially heterogeneous, with respect to subcultures, different levels of cohesion, lifestyles, and in regard to social class.

38 These youth create relations of sociability and this is the manner in which they mediate between their own social context and others (those of their companions). Additionally, youth who engage on urban art regularly show a strong interest in social intervention. In fact, we can see that these youth still demonstrate links to the middle or more privileged classes and also cross less privileged urban spaces, such as social housing or favelas, physically and socially marginalized, developing intervention projects with the community. These writers and artists in such distinctive contexts also penetrate the world of institutional art, creating exhibitions in legitimate galleries and receiving subsidies from museums and local authorities. They succeed in mediating between peripheral urban public spaces, and indoor spaces for legitimate art. Many graffiti artists strategically attempt to mediate between legitimate indoor art spaces, and outdoor street spaces. Parisian graffiti artists are among those who most consciously seek to mediate between these two types of spaces. Some have created the artists' association LE MUR, in the neighborhood of Belleville, with the objective of formally fostering this mediation.

39 Beyond the indirect mediation between diverse social worlds, some of these youths also explicitly embrace a broader life project of mediation, self defining themselves as social mediators. They use the practice of graffiti as a tool for social rescue, that is, by creating a language attractive for youth from the periphery, making it possible to motivate deviant youth and to support their finding a way to integrate with society.

40 The case of the Association for Dialogue and Action stands out as a good example of current trends. Constituted by graffiti writers, this association leads intervention projects in some

peripheral Lisbon quarters. The association was created by Brazilian graffiti writers with the objective of mediating conflicts among youth from the poorest neighborhoods in Lisbon. The idea first emerged during a conflict between the Roma and the African communities in the Quinta da Fonte, in Loures. The project “Escolhas”, knowing that Brazilian graffiti writers were motivated for engagement in this type of project, asked them to organize collective painting that would bring together youth from both communities. From the point of view of the leaders of “Escolhas”, the graffiti artists, and the local residents, the project was a great success. The “Mural for Peace,” opened up avenues for dialogue and, consequently, for resolution of conflict. From that juncture, these youth created the Association for Dialogue and Action under whose auspices they developed a series of similar projects.

41 Presently, the majority of the association’s projects are concentrated in neighborhoods in Amadora, especially in Quinta da Lage and in Santa Filomena. These neighborhoods are inhabited mainly by Africans from the PALOPS⁵. According to the graffiti artists, hip hop culture and graffiti, in particular, constitute a very appealing language for youth of African descent, that makes it easier to involve them in activities of the association, and to motivate them to accept duties, in which the youth can learn new ideas of discipline, diligence, time management, and so forth. The Association succeeded in obtaining funding from the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian for work with “at risk” girls from various peripheral neighborhoods, involving them in activities related to graffiti, break-dancing and MC’ing. In Lisbon, “Diálogo e Acção” has been active for almost a year, and engages in mural art projects in peripheral neighborhoods in the city. This is quite different from the American case, with its much longer history of similar public mural projects.

Some concluding reflections

42 In the end, the community murals evince collective practices that represent certain places – a street, a neighborhood, a school, or an association; certain activities – celebration, leisure, circulation and mobility, and music; certain values – success, friendship, solidarity; certain groups, school-, friendship-, or family-based; and, particular individuals. Mural painting as a human process that builds community and furthers the community’s gaining collective consciousness of itself socially and culturally. A community of the type we refer to is not anonymous, after all, but is made up of real people and concrete places – situated, narrated, and lived: “Community is a process of people coming together around common problems, discovering their common values, and developing their sense of solidarity” (Cockcroft, Weber, Cockcroft, op.cit: 72).

43 Murals construct and represent much else: social and ethnic integration; the dreams and hopes of youth struggling with difficult lives; the everyday personal experience of life in cities, far from anonymous, but instead very concrete, localized, and personalized through the sharing of important histories, memories, and events. Murals also display an almost countless number of urban entities and institutions sponsoring, supporting, and sometimes opposing this art. Like other types of urban visual culture more or less performative, like for example carnivals or other festivities, these murals that take such a clear form in the city of Boston reveal a multiplicity of social practices and organizational activities, of cultural and artistic production, of public and private financing, of thematic contents, images, histories, narratives that, all in all, make the city in all its planes and dimensions. As Cindy Wong, Cindy and Gary W. McDonogh said, the “visual culture of cities (...) represents a central formative feature of the lives and identities of contemporary citizens and demands ethnographic fieldwork and cultural analysis to study... [The] holistic social and cultural interpretation of urban visual cultures represents a central challenge to urban anthropology as well as a key contribution for the discipline to make in interdisciplinary discussions” (2001: 96-97).

44 We thus present a provisional paper, a work in progress, with a research base begun in Boston but that contains, in itself, innumerable comparative elements. The case of Lisbon, referred to by Lúcia, is significant. The analysis of community murals in Boston helps us understand better the social processes, attitudes, behaviors, values, practices and representations that are at play in the local production of urban life; and to identify the dynamics between conflicts

and divisions, solidarity and alliance, and the entire process of mediation that connects these contradictory movements, that joins and well as separates.

- 45 The questions that arise in Boston are not, in the end, different from those that emerge in other cities, in other contexts: how do we gain social consensus, how do we build trust among neighborhood residents, on the street, and in our public institutions? How do we succeed at negotiation among various instances, at the horizontal and vertical levels, between individuals, informal groups, associations, local institutions and governments, and businesses? How can we pursue community *building* through the creation of a sense of common belonging within urban environments that are ethnically and socially diverse and that show, in themselves, the strong marks of urban residential segregation? And what forms are useful to us, in our attempt to valorize horizontal linkages, through our neighborhood networks, schools, and associations?
- 46 To be able to conciliate an experience of ethnographic investigation – free, open, reflexive, deep, and long term – when it is usually a solitary enterprise – with forms of collaboration that are international and intergenerational – has been extremely rich and productive, even more so when it builds on a shared base of experience and knowledge in globally diverse cultural settings.
- 47 Boston, Lisbon, Barcelona, 2010⁶

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Notas

- 1 http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/2009_murders_in_boston/
- 2 Cit from Thomas H. Shepard, "Exodus Building Hub Artists Canvas", *Citizen Item* (Allston-Brighton, Boston, Mass.), July 29, 1968, p. 1.
- 3 For a more detailed history, see Eva Cockcroft et al 1977: 51-55
- 4 Philadelphia presents itself as perhaps one of the most paradigmatic case, due to the extraordinary degree of development of its Mural Arts Program (<http://muralarts.org/>), created in 1984. This program emerged as a component of the Anti-Graffiti Network of Philadelphia, and was led by the artist Jane Golden, who was contracted to recruit graffiti writers and redirect their energies toward painting constructive murals (under the prevailing assumption then that graffiti as practiced informally by youth was a destructive practice). In 1996, due to the success of this dimension of the program, the city of Philadelphia recognized MAP as a separate program, autonomous from the Anti-Graffiti Network. Simultaneously, MAP created a non-profit organization, the "Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates," with the mission of supporting youth in revitalization of neighborhoods through mural art (Golden, Rice, Pompilio, 2006: 12). Today MAP organizes its activities in four lines of work: arts education, "community mural-making", prevention and rehabilitation, and public engagement.
- 5 Portuguese speaking African countries.
- 6 All of the mural's pictures were taken by the authors.

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Resumos

Três antropólogos empreenderam uma reflexão conjunta em torno de alguns murais comunitários (community murals) que visitaram nas ruas de Roxbury e Dorchester, conhecidos bairros de Boston habitados por uma população maioritariamente latina, afro-americana e cabo-verdiana. A ideia deste encontro em torno das pinturas de rua surgiu de prévias experiências etnográficas pessoais que tinham em comum uma atenção particular aos processos de construção de identidade urbana local, fosse nas festividades e representações de bairro em Lisboa, estudadas por Graça Cordeiro, nos graffiti e desportos de rua em Lisboa, Barcelona, New York e Rio de Janeiro, por Lúcia Ferro ou na arquitectura, na música e no planeamento urbanístico em Lisboa e Boston, por Tim Sieber. O resultado desta “excursão etnográfica” partilhada foi a escrita de um ‘relato em curso’ (work in progress) sobre uma forma particular de cultura visual urbana – os murais comunitários – que documentam, transmitem e representam formas de identidade através das suas histórias e narrativas locais. Tais formas de arte pública exprimem dinâmicas de organização colectiva, de segregação residencial, económica e étnica, de relações inter-étnicas e inter-geracionais, falando do papel central que a juventude assume nos processos de continuidade e mudança cultural cidadã. A análise substantiva e cultural dos murais que aqui é feita, decorre, pois, de formas de colaboração de campo, em que as sinergias e o acaso ajudaram a estabelecer a ponte necessária entre um passado de experiências etnográficas concretas e a focalização num novo objecto de análise partilhado.

Three anthropologists visited community murals in Boston, concentrating on the black and Latino neighborhoods of Roxbury, and Dorchester. With common interest in the ethnographic perspective, they moved toward a joint reflection on local murals. Our encounter with these murals drew on our previous ethnographic experience with festivals and neighborhood representation in Lisbon (GIC), with graffiti and street sports in Lisbon, New York, and Rio de Janeiro (LF), and with architecture, music, and urban planning in Lisbon and Boston (TS). We thus report on our resulting work in progress on a particular form of urban visual culture, community murals, that document, mediate, and represent local urban histories, places, and identities. These public works of art offer commentary on related dynamics of collective organization, of residential, economic, and ethnic segregation in the urban setting, inter-ethnic and inter-generational relations, and the role of youth in cultural continuity and change. The researchers’ concern is both with substantive cultural analysis of the murals, as well as with the serendipity, synergy, and collaboration they experienced in the field, that helped them draw on their past urban ethnographic experiences in order to focus on a new, common object for analysis.

Entradas no índice

Keywords : ethnographic fieldwork, neighborhood, community murals, Boston (USA)

Palavras chaves : trabalho de campo, bairros, murais comunitários, Boston (USA)

Notas do autor

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Universidade do Porto, Portugal, 10 Dezembro 2009; “Calles coloridas en escenarios grises: juventud, mediación y conflicto a partir de los murales comunitarios de Boston» no Master en Mediación y Migraciones, DASIF, Facultat de Lletres, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Espanha, 20 Janeiro 2010. Somos especialmente devedores dos comentários de Bruno Monteiro, João Queirós, Wiebke Keim, Monserat Soronellas e Yolanda Bodoque, nos momentos em que esta apresentação foi discutida.