B-boys (Rio de Janeiro) and rappers (Lisbon) in search of recognition
A brief comparison

Since the first appearance of rockers, there has been an explosion of youth cultures (mods, punks, teddy boys, etc.). Today's youth movements are now led by rappers, b-boys, *funkeiros*,[1] surfers, goths, emos and others. Globalization has connected different countries, cultures and organizations, producing shared identities for a common, transnational community. There are now young people all over the world who rap or break-dance, enjoying aspects of so-called 'hip-hop culture'.[2] This efficient means of asserting identity and gaining visibility is used by young people in the outskirts of Lisbon in Portugal, and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, to try and counter the subordinate status thrust upon them. In this chapter, I compare the creative way in which two groups of young people – b-boys from Maré, a *favela* (shanty town) in Rio de Janeiro, and rappers from Arrantela, a suburb of Lisbon – appropriate cultural styles to create positive self-image and question prevailing ideas about their place in society, contributing towards new meanings for their identity as poor, young, black people. Both groups make use of performance as a way to feel their existence is valued, at the same time building more wide-reaching parameters for integration into their cities. There are differences, however, in the ways in which they appropriate hip-hop and create strategies to break down segregation. Poverty and the stigma of living in a *favela* are seen as the greatest

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[1]   *Funk carioca* is the most popular music in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. Many dance events attract more than a million young people every weekend. The black dances in the 1970s are considered the forerunners of *funk carioca*, when the influence of North American black music (specifically funk and soul) became popular in Rio de Janeiro's suburbs. The genres were not immune, however, to the influence of Brazilian music styles, and the musicians involved gradually brought the music closer to the Rio de Janeiro context, which produced new rhythms. Miami Bass were also important in the hybridization process that produced *funk carioca*, whose beats began to be joined by lyrics in Portuguese. See Vianna 1997.

[2]   Hip-hop is an urban cultural movement, generally linked to rap, which includes four pillars: rap, DJing, breakdance and graffiti. The first two are to do with rap itself; break-dance has become established as the dance element of hip-hop, and graffiti, its visual representation.

obstacles to getting recognition and upward social mobility for b-boys in Maré, whereas in Arrantela, the greatest barrier is the racism in Portuguese society.

Lifestyle of the Arrentela rappers

The rappers from Arrentela are part of the Red Eyes Gang,[3] an informal collective formed by friends in 1995 after several rap groups emerged in the neighbourhood. Although they use the term 'gang', this group is not linked to crime, nor does it have any internal organization, hierarchy or initiation rituals. We can consider the Red Eyes Gang as a crew,[4] and its formation has certainly been associated with the influence of North American hip-hop youth culture, via the media. With a strong bond to the area, the Red Eyes Gang is the result of asserting friendship between members of the group and a feeling of belonging to the Arrentela neighbourhood.[5] It also allows members of the group to get a wider audience for their music, making it into an emblem of a locally constructed identity.

When asked, more than a hundred people, mostly boys,[6] with ages ranging between 16 and 30 years, said they were part of the Red Eyes Gang.[7] All were poor and most were black (the children of African immigrants), although there was a significant number of white Portuguese members of the group. Although almost all of them were born in Portugal, there was notable diversity in the national backgrounds of the young black people who made up the crew (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau), which mirrored the ethnic and cultural diversity of the area's residents. Members of the group did not select the company they socialized with based on nationality or skin colour. We could find young people with African heritage side-by-side with white Portuguese people, all dressed in a similar way, using the same accessories and the same types of behaviour: slang, attitude, style. Ethnic groups did not have a huge amount of influence on networks of friendships within the group, and were not a determining factor in joining the Red Eyes Gang. However, they saw a great deal of hostility from most of

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[3] The name Red Eyes Gang is a reference to the effects of smoking hashish, turning the smoker's eyes red. Smoking hashish is common among the group.

[4] Very common in the hip-hop movement, crews are groups of young people who identify certain common factors in the group, in this case rap, and who come together using the same term.

[5] Arrentela is a neighbourhood in Seixal, a town in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Seixal has just over 150,000 residents, of which 60 per cent came from other parts of the country and 13 per cent are immigrants, according to 2001 census data (Raposo 2007).

[6] Fewer girls frequent the group's main meeting points – - street corners, bars or cafés - which goes some way to explaining the smaller number of girls in the crews, making up no more than a quarter of the members.

[7] Research on the Red Eyes Gang was carried out between 2005 and 2007 as part of a Masters in Urban Anthropology.

the white residents in the neighbourhood, as Chullage, a rapper and one of the informal crew leaders, says:

> It's *bué*[8] mixed, no one gives a shit about nationality, even the Portuguese guys, some of the Portuguese guys don't give a shit, you know. Often you don't even realize that the guy who's talking Creole[9] is from Angola or wherever. That's one of the best things, there are no divisions like that [...] There are loads of Angolans who can speak Creole, loads and loads, and there are *bué* Portuguese guys who can speak Creole too. But wait. Portuguese people are *bué* racist about us, and I mean the younger ones. Among those who hang with us – not many of the Portuguese guys hang with us – but among those that do hang with us, there are no divisions like that. But the ones who don't hang with us don't trust us, we're divided.
> (*Nu Bai – O Rap Negro de Lisboa*, 2007, 65min.)

Although rapping was the main activity for the Red Eyes Gang, being a rapper was not necessary for membership. It was the set of shared experiences on the streets of the neighbourhood which determined belonging to the crew, as well as living the rap lifestyle. This was one of the main identity-forming aspects of the Red Eyes Gang, providing the content for collective identity. Rapping offered young people information and performance material which guided their day-to-day behaviour when defining strategies to deal with the challenges they faced. Language, musical and visual taste, body art, leisure choices and certain rituals (Feixa 1999) were some of the many elements which unified these young people's lifestyles, creating a 'narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1995). As Anthony Giddens points out, a lifestyle should be understood in relation to everyday life, as it is about routinized activities which guide practices and experiences in all kinds of social situations. For Anthony Giddens:

> A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity. (1995:75)

Thus lifestyle is a way of being and behaving which links a person with one type of symbolic appropriation of everyday life by a certain segment of society (Velho 1997).

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[8]   The word "*bué*" comes from Angola (and possibly from Kimbundu), meaning "very" or "a lot of", and has been incorporated into the vocabulary of young Lisboans.
[9]   Creole (*crioulo*) is the language spoken in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau, similar in some ways to Portuguese but also with many differences.

The influence of rap style can be seen easily in the different African-inspired hairstyles (braids, dreadlocks etc.) and in the street wear adopted by the members: shirts with symbols from hip-hop culture, jeans and baggy trousers, oversized hoodies, football shirts, branded trainers, caps and scarves and a wide range of accessories (earrings, necklaces and gold or African seed bracelets). The use of Creole as the group's main language, as well as certain gestures and behaviours, not only displayed alternative social behaviour inspired by the rap style, but also promoted a sense of belonging to an emotional group, in this case the Red Eyes Gang.

[PHOTO 1: rapper from Arrentela] Photograph by Otávio Raposo – July 2004

Identifying with the rap style and the crew gave these young people a way to assert their own way of being young, which turned the streets of Arrentela into the centre of their social world. This is why singing rap in the street, laughing and talking loudly at night, driving fast or smoking hashish were rituals through which they disobeyed rules, thereby giving themselves their own type of subjectivity. Such behaviours were symbolic displays of their right to youth that attempted to counter their subordinate status, which hindered their recreational activities. Through rap, members exercised the 'power of the word' and asserted themselves as active members of their peer group and society as a whole, breaking down barriers in an 'autistic' setting, unwilling to listen to them. Words give and encourage hope in a life which does not make sense, recovering important cultural and ethnic references, at the same time as revealing a life of oppression. This is what Chullage says.

> In a classroom you're not allowed to express yourself; in court you're not allowed to express yourself; at a job interview you can't talk the way you want or use your gestures. Now they're going to say that it doesn't comply with EU communication rules. On the news or on TV you can't express yourself, you didn't have anywhere to do it. And rap created a way to do all that. Rap informed people in the area, educated people and at the same time entertained them. It brought different things together, it was like a bomb. At the time you heard stuff like this: Ooh man! I can talk to my *niggaz*[10] through rap, get them to dance, get them to listen, get them to learn and get them into action for certain things.
> (*Nu Bai – O Rap Negro de Lisboa*, 2007, 65min.)

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[10]   Expression used by young black people in Lisbon to refer to themselves, with origins in North American rap: specifically the famous Californian rap group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude).

The rap style used by members of the Red Eyes Gang cannot be summed up as merely aesthetic because it also had an impact on their behaviour and attitudes. It produced symbols and ideology used by members of the crew as a way to invert their status, using rap to deconstruct the discourse which linked them to violence, inaction and poverty. Therefore rap style was the main language used to interpret the situation around them, rising up against a society which did not value them.

Choreography of Friendship. Young break-dancers in Maré

Break-dance first appeared in Maré in 2001, when a local Non-Governmental Organization started running hip-hop sessions in the area. The success of these sessions produced a small group of b-boys and b-girls (break-dancers) in Nova Holanda, one of the *favelas* in Maré, Rio de Janeiro.

From 2007, the number of dancers began to grow dramatically as young people showed their desire for somewhere they could practice more often than they had previously been allowed. This desire was only realized when they met the dancers from Morro do Timbau, a *favela* in Maré controlled by a drug-trafficking gang, rivals of the Nova Holanda gang. At the time, few of the Nova Holanda dancers had ever been to Morro do Timbau before. Fear of being mistaken for members of an enemy gang made moving around Maré extremely difficult and stifled friendships and networks between neighbours.

Maré is a conurbation of sixteen *favelas,* home to around 140,000 people (Ceasm 2003). It is the largest group of *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, and many armed gangs dispute dominance in the area. Its residents are forced to live with constant armed conflicts between traffickers, worsened by the truculent behaviour of the police, which hinders free movement around the area, especially for young people.[11] Rivalries between the different trafficking gangs produce territorial divisions which choke the social relationships of its population, hostages of a violent and illegitimate authority.

It was the desire to dance and to deepen their knowledge about the culture that led the b-boys in Nova Holanda to shake off their fear of going to Timbau. Little by little, they began to visit parts of the neighbourhood which they had never seen before, and began to be known by the local traffickers as the 'hip-hop guys' . Passing through the different parts of Maré allowed them to get a new understanding of the area they lived in and to expand their

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[11]   In 2009, when I began my research in Maré, there were three gangs which dominated the *favelas*, as well as the militia, a paramilitary group composed of police officers, fire-fighters and soldiers who controlled the territory through violence in similar ways to the traffickers themselves.

friendship networks, reducing the fragmentation which resulted from violence and segregation. Their intense relationship with dance brought together the groups from Nova Holanda and Timbau, made official by the formation of a crew which represented all b-boys and b-girls from Maré: Ativa Breakers. Founding the group also allowed them to be identified in competitions and dance events.

At the time I spent with the dancers from Maré, the main training area was no longer in Morro do Timbau but in Tecno, a cultural association which was still being put together, located in Parque União, another *favela* close to Nova Holanda. Between twenty and thirty dancers regularly met up at Tecno, most of them between 16 and 20 years of age. Although most of the b-boys in the area were of black descent, the mixture of skin colours was broad, and widely notable in friendship groups both in and out of rehearsals. There were very few b-girls in the neighbourhood, a situation which was reflected in break-dance competitions and events in Rio de Janeiro: girls did not make up even a quarter of participants.

Tecno was the main meeting point for the group, and training sessions were driven by the dancers themselves, as there were no teachers or parents involved. The training sessions were *'sociabilidades desafogadas'* (unrestrained social interactions), a term coined by Pais (1994), as it was the young people themselves who chose the training format (movements to be practised, music played, practice timetables, helping beginners), also taking care of all the practical aspects: cleaning and lighting, sound system etc. Break-dance was taught through direct contact with more experienced members of the group and a process of training through practice (Bourdieu 2007). They usually trained inside or outside the circle, a format in which each of dancer had to wait his or her turn to dance in the middle. Some concentrated on a single move, usually one of the more acrobatic moves (so-called power moves), others came up with sequences of moves, alternating those done standing up in a specific rhythm (top rock) with those done on the floor, using their hands (footwork) and freezes, in which dancers holds a certain difficult pose. Laughter, applause, whistling and other actions instilled a group spirit and common communication. The dancers prepared themselves thoroughly before starting to dance. The care showed when putting on their caps, the vanity they showed in the way they dressed called my attention to the importance of the way they used these signs to distinguish themselves. 'Visual façades' are essential for young people to show how they belong to a certain lifestyle and to strengthen their inclusion in their peer groups. Clothing allows an aesthetic grouping which creates a feeling of belonging, and a source of identification for the group as a whole, supporting interaction. Most dancers wore coloured shirts with symbols and expressions associated with hip-hop (sometimes from competitions

they had taken part in) or with the images of black music icons: James Brown and Bob Marley were favourites. Baseball caps were worn by most and some also put on scarves, beanies or other accessories, as well as knee-pads and elbow-pads. Their trainers were the most valuable thing the dancers had – All-Stars were the most common – because they used them to perform their most complex moves, which required great stability. Some of the dancers said that they danced better when they were dressed like that. One of them was Igor, a founding member of Ativa Breakers whose leadership among the dancers was notable:

> When I put on those clothes I feel like I'm in a break-dancing circle from back in the day, and it makes me want to dance. My posture changes when I get into the circle: I put my hand on my waist, cross my arms, all that comes from the clothes. So when I put on those clothes I feel much better about dancing. It makes it different, I feel like I'm dancing back then: me in the circle with the Rock Steady Crew.[12]
> (Igor, pers. comm. 3 November 2010)[13]

For the dancers from Maré, break-dancing transformed their lives, bringing about deep changes in their everyday life. They made a point of stressing the importance of knowing about hip-hop,[14] which promotes a set of norms and values associated not only with the ethos of dancing,[15] but also with the discipline needed by top competitive dancers. Although most of the knowledge investigated by these young people was limited to issues related to hip-hop culture, the involvement of style opened them up to a wider range of symbols and culture. Taking part in dance expanded their individual possibilities by allowing them to meet people from a variety of different cultural backgrounds and move among different social groups, resulting in some taking on a role of cultural mediators. Also, break-dance fostered a bond and a feeling of belonging (both within the group and their area), giving them a gateway into society by providing them with shared meanings and a specific type of social interaction which distinguished them from the masses.

[PHOTO 2: break-dance practice at Tecno] Photograph by William Oliveira –

October 2009]

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[12]　　The Rock Steady Crew was formed at the end of the 1970s by b-boys in the Bronx, New York. It is one of the most famous break-dance crews, responsible for making break-dance popular throughout the world.
[13]　　Igor is a Brazilian male break-dancer. At the time, he was a 21-year- old secondary school student.
[14]　　Added by Africa Bambataa (one of the movement's founders), 'knowledge' is considered the fifth pillar of hip-hop (to complement MCing, DJing, graffiti and break-dance).
[15]　　There was a code of conduct among the dancers which denounced copying moves or break-dancing which was too focused on power moves. The 'fundamentals', a term used to refer to the base moves of breakdance (top rock, footwork and freezes), were prioritised, as was originality.

Dance experience was not isolated from other spheres of their personal lives. It was quite the opposite, in fact: there was a strong connection. Attending practice sessions three times a week after intense days spent working or studying gave the young people a self-discipline which could be applied to other challenges in their lives.

To cover the costs involved in taking part in championships or break-dance events the young people were forced to save, which in turn meant they had to work. Giving talks on hip-hop for middle-class audiences obliged them to speak Portuguese properly and without swearing, which indirectly enhanced their appreciation for going to school.

> When I began break-dancing I started using some of the stuff from break-dance in the rest of my life; over time it became a way of life [...] If you're giving a presentation you can't swear or mess around. You have to have the right attitude for that environment, the right kind of behaviour. So I started getting that in all my life, like: 'if I behave a certain way when I'm going to dance why can't I behave a certain way here too? If I speak a certain way there, why can't I speak that way here as well?' So I had these tricks I took from break-dancing and used in the rest of my life, and there are things from my life that I brought to break-dancing, like my personality.
> (Igor, pers. comm. 26 August 2010)

Break-dance cannot be understood without linking it with the search for meaning in life and a desire for personal achievement. Young people in Maré want to be recognized and respected as good dancers, refusing to accept their portrayal as jobless, marginalized *favelados* (*favela*-dwellers). Joining a respected dance crew on the Rio de Janeiro circuit should be understood as a tool for achieving that, as it is a symbol of affirmation which provides prestige and space for cultural creativity.

The street according to rappers and b-boys

It is the experience that young people share on the street which makes up the 'ideological base of hip-hop culture', and it is an urban, youth, street-based phenomenon (Fradique 2003). The act of representing hip-hop, through dance, music, graffiti or as a consumer, is the preferred way to support the movement and requires active participation at its heart. It serves to mark a position and pass on a message, going against the submissive stance and attitudes encouraged by educational institutions, political bodies and public-security forces.

For the rappers in Arrentela, representing the street or neighbourhood where they live was highly valued, because it meant not only putting themselves in the public eye, but putting all the others members in the public eye too. The explicit link to the street was explained by the rapper Chullage:

> The street is your support, it's your rock, your source of inspiration, it's everything man, where your troops are, you know. You represent your people, your people are represented by you and your people support you, you have the street behind you. It's the love that the street gives you which pushes you to keep going. I think that when a rapper comes from a neighbourhood, he has to look for that link, to be responsible about representing for the good of your area, representing the fight your troops face.
> (*Nu Bai – O Rap Negro de Lisboa*, 2007, 65min.)

A central theme in Red Eyes Gang's rap lyrics, 'the street' is full of feelings, invoking a series of collective memories from their shared life experiences. The sincerity and relevance of their raps were always tested, and they needed to stick to a set of moral codes – being real and truthful in what they sang, for example – and those who went against them were considered fakes or suckers. The lyrical content was designed to highlight what was wrong with society and the lyrics served as resistance against a system which offered few incentives to break free from poverty.

At weekends, particularly in summer, it was not difficult to find groups of more than thirty young people chatting or playing football in the streets of Arrentela. For someone looking on, it would have seemed that they were not doing anything, just passing the time. For Machado Pais, however, 'doing nothing is an activity which produces a huge amount of social interaction' (2003:131), at the same time that it creates opportunities for people to catch up, and to create feelings of common belonging. This is what I saw happening among the young people in Arrentela. While they talked, they updated each other about the music scene, exchanged information about the job market, organized nights out and greeted friends or acquaintances who passed by (on foot or by car) in a kind of celebration of the emotional bond which held them together. We can say that at some locations in Arrentela, the young people created reference points and local identification points close to the '*pedaço*' (piece or chunk) referred to by Magnani (2007), where the relational element is evident, as it is the place where friends meet and a network of codes and practices are developed to determine who is and who is not part of the group. This was the case with the wall by which the rappers were usually found. Although it was a public place, it had private qualities too, in which topics that were private (for members) and forbidden (for outsiders) were dealt with, and

people from outside the group were not accepted. In fact, the young people from Arrentela created the Red Eyes Gang to give such distinctions some form.

[PHOTO 3: Red Eyes Gang rappers singing] Photograph by Otávio Raposo – July 2004

Despite the importance of the neighbourhood for young people from Arrentela, they were not isolated and established a network throughout recreational areas in Lisbon. The crew's rappers were the ones who travelled the most around the city, as the hip-hop lifestyle encouraged them to give concerts in other neighbourhoods and create partnerships with musicians from other regions, expanding their friendship networks. They created new 'circuitos' (circuits)[16] of social interaction and consumption which gave value to the stigmatized areas of the city; visiting other poor neighbourhoods contributed towards a new, innovative conception of the urban landscape, at the same time subverting the conventional flows of power from the centre to the periphery encouraged by institutional power.

Differently from the rappers of Arrentela, the b-boys and b-girls of Maré met outside the public sphere and their main objective was to improve their dancing. Nevertheless, a festive atmosphere and light-hearted conversation made Tecno much more than just somewhere to practise. The setting for many social interactions, it was a place where they could talk openly about whatever they liked and enjoy themselves without feeling like they were being watched by outsiders. Informal learning was put into action, and this went beyond physical performances. The b-boys and b-girls of Maré discussed problems and happy moments from their day-to-day life, musical tastes, aesthetics and ethics. They strengthened the bonds and friendship between members of the group by creating an 'us': us, the break-dancers. They looked for the one thing which marked them out from other youth cultures in Maré, at the same time rejecting a single, homogenous view of young people from the *favela*.

The room where they trained offered them some protection from the violence of trafficking and the police, and from the effects of being so close to a thriving drugs trade. The presence of heavily armed youths and the risk of shootings at any moment made the streets of Maré unappealing for most dancers. This was made worse by the high population density in

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[16]   According to Magnani (2007), 'circuitos' include the whole network of spaces, facilities and establishments which certain groups of young people use in setting up their meetings, conflicts and exchange relationships. This idea calls attention to the huge range of social interactions developed by young people in the urban area, which can provide a more contextualised vision of their social practices and the spaces with which they interact.

the neighbourhood and lack of public spaces available for calmer, more intimate conversations. This is why Tecno was a haven from risks outside, somewhere that acted as a 'shield' against the routine violence which ravaged the neighbourhood.[17] This does not mean that the b-boys were closed off from the street or other things going on in the neighbourhood. On the contrary, break-dance sessions helped them to practise innovative strategies for getting into the public sphere,[18] creating new representations for the neighbourhood and coming up with new paths through the city. The desire to take part in break-dance events and competitions made Tecno the 'launch pad' for getting out of the area and making all kinds of excursions throughout the *urbe*.[19] Everyone in the group understood the importance of hip-hop as an incentive to go to other parts of the city, and they said that they rarely left Maré before they started dancing. It was common for them to take part in events and competitions in rich parts of Rio de Janeiro as well as other *favelas*, like Rocinha and Vidigal, or go to break-dance meetings in other Brazilian cities.

[PHOTO 4: break-dance circle at Tecno] Photograph by William Oliveira – December 2009]

Hip-hop culture can be seen as a trigger for action as it brings people together. Hip-hop culture encourages the movement of young people through the urban area, putting them in contact not only with young people from other neighbourhoods and social classes but also with the huge range of behaviour, knowledge and lifestyles in the metropolis. Travelling around the city, taking part in break-dance competitions or rap concerts in or out of their area, has made the b-boys and b-girls from Maré who they are. They stopped being passive and instead made themselves active creators, exercising a rebellious citizenship that uses the city as a place in which to mobilize activities that redefine what it means to be poor, black and live in a stigmatized area. This is why break-dance (for young people in Maré) and rap (for the Red Eyes Gang) act as escape cultures, encouraging participants to reflect on their place in the world through artistic and cultural projects that help give meaning to their existence.

'The system tries, but it can't control us': two views on segregation

[17]   I found many similarities between Tecno and the boxing school researched by Loïc Wacquant (2002) in a North American black neighbourhood. Both were 'islands of stability and virtue', by offering a set of values and references to young people which countered the pressured exerted by drug trafficking.

[18]   The months they spent practising in the squares of Nova Holanda were examples of innovative strategies for taking back the street and common areas of the neighbourhood.

[19]   Conurbation, metropolis or city.

The misery of unemployment among young people in Arrentala forced them to accept unstable jobs in construction (men) and as cleaners (women). The long-standing economic problems in Portugal have made things worse for these young people, who were already among the most vulnerable members of the population.[20] Unlike most of their parents, who had migrated to Portugal, these young people were raised in a consumer society in which the effects of globalization and new media raised their expectations. They shared lifestyles and standards close to those of the middle class, but their opportunities remained stalled (or had regressed) when compared with those of their parents, worsening their feeling of hardship. The limited job opportunities hampered their role as consumers, understood as one of the most important gateways to citizenship.

> The worst thing for a *gajo[21]* is getting stuck in the street and with no money in his pocket. If a *gajo* has ten or fifteen euros then you feel better, but having nothing doesn't make us feel like men, we can't have a cake, have a beer with the boys or play snooker.
> (Gringo, pers. comm. 5 July 2006)[22]

Not identifying with school, a gap separated them from political institutions, and hatred for the police (the result of police brutality) meant that these young people built positive references outside formal institutions, making use of the urban space around them and the informal bonds they established among themselves. Being young and without prospects to improve their conditions meant that for these people their rap style was built around 'street culture' that acted as a cry of revolt against mainstream society. For Philippe Bourgois, street culture among young people of Puerto Rican heritage in El Barrio, New York, included:

> A complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society. Street culture offers an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity.
> (Bourgois 2003:8)

Meanwhile, street culture among members of the Red Eyes Gang encouraged them to partake in rebellious behaviour which occasionally went beyond the boundaries of the law,

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[20]   Around 42 per cent of crew members were unemployed in 2006, a percentage far higher than the Portuguese average. Among those who did work, almost all had badly paid, unstable and socially undervalued jobs (construction work, McDonald's, restaurants and cleaning); only 8.3 per cent had an employment contract. See Raposo 2007.

[21]   *Gajo* is anyone whose name is unknown or should be omitted (it can also be humorous or derogatory).

[22]   Gringo is a male Portuguese rapper.

and meant they had the impression that they had built their own social and symbolic order, and that they were the ones making the rules. This is what is said in an extract from the lyrics of *Polítika da Rua* ('Street Politics'), a song by rapper Komikilla, a member of the Red Eyes Gang.

> *A situação política é que manda/ Babilónia tenta mas não nos comanda/ A situação política é que manda/ Sistema tenta mas não nos comanda, mas não nos comanda/ Kosmikilla ninguém comanda/ Arrentela ninguém comanda/ Red Eyes Gang ninguém comanda/ O hip-hop ninguém comanda!*
> [Politics are in control / Babylon tries but it can't control us/ Politics are in control/ The system tries but it can't control us, but it can't control us/ No one controls Komikilla/ No one controls Arrentela/ No one controls the Red Eyes Gang/ No one controls hip-hop!].
> (Kosmikilla 2003)

Among the b-boys in Maré, opposition to mainstream society seemed to be much less than the that from the rappers in Arrentela. Unlike the Red Eyes Gang, the b-boys from Maré used strategies to get closer to institutions (non-governmental organizations, schools etc.), using hip-hop as a way to win over and be accepted by more privileged sectors of society. They kept a lifestyle steeped in discipline and regular training which, together with the new social networks maintained by 'mediation projects' (Velho 2001), stimulated their incorporation into social-mobility projects similar to those enjoyed by the middle classes. An example of this is the dedication that many of them showed towards education; some intended to go to university or take vocational courses in photography, web design and informatics. Although the income of families in Maré was much lower when compared to the residents of Arrentela, economic growth over recent years in Brazil has reduced unemployment among young people in the area and improved the population's quality of life.[23]

Facing levels of violence drastically higher than those in Arrentela, residents in Maré were forced to live side by side with armed groups and the drugs trade, and this seriously affected their day-to-day life. They lived in a 'culture of terror' (Bourgois, 2010:62) and submission that kept them out of the public sphere. Residents of Maré were also impeded from access to justice due to a stigma that depicted them as accomplices of the drug traffickers. The influence of these armed groups is not restricted to their dominance of the area, but is also imposed through more light-hearted social activities. Funk dances, the places

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[23] According to research overseen by Marcelo Neri (2011), between 2000 and 2010 unemployment in Brazil decreased significantly, and living standards improved. This change was brought about by a large increase in income (with growth an average of 67.93 per cent among the poorest 50 per cent).

for having fun *par excellence* for young people in Maré, are organized by drug traffickers, who are responsible for hiring sound systems, DJs and for ensuring 'security' on site. This influence is reflected in the lyrics of the funk tunes played at the dances. These lyrics almost exclusively allude to sex and are designed to glorify whichever gang dominates the area. Known as '*probidão*'[24] ('extremely prohibited'), the songs are not played on the radio (except in their softer forms), nor are they sold legally. But in Maré, the omnipresence of that kind of funk in public spaces is so marked that it smothers other musical genres (whether samba, rap, *forró* or *pagode*).[25] The highly erotic lyrical content, together with lyrics in support of drug trafficking, have provoked criticism from residents and non-residents alike (both young and old). Most b-boys in Maré have accused funk of transmitting messages that did not contribute much to the society in which they lived, and also for symbolically linking its fans to the criminal groups which run their area. As the antithesis of everything symbolized by hip-hop, *proibidão* funk embodies a range of images and practices from which the b-boys wished to distance themselves. Hence the appropriation of break-dance by dancers in the neighbourhood has brought them closer to a set of values and behaviour associated with hip-hop culture that are hostile to the destructive influences of the drug trade. Promoting symbolic and cultural narratives that are not found in the opportunities offered by drug trafficking made break-dancing a 'school of morality' (Wacquant 2002). The impact of these values and emotions was to give fans of break-dancing some alternative prospects for improving their status and social standing.

In Arrentela, violence was unusual and did not interfere with residents' day-to-day life. Drug trafficking was hidden, and not organized, and its collateral effects are not comparable with the situation in Maré: no weapons were evident, violent deaths were rare and confrontation with the police was on a different level. However, violence and unlawfulness infused many more elements of masculine identity in the Red Eyes Gang than in the b-boys in Maré. If the main division for the b-boys was based on outlaws and workers – it was common to use categories like 'us' and 'them' to assert this distinction – in Arrentela the division was much more ambiguous. Although only performed by a small minority, stealing and drug trading were considered acceptable or even fair alternatives for survival, given the significant rates of

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[24]   *Carioca* funk, which is one of the largest mass-cultural forms in Brazil, is complex and varied, and cannot be limited to '*probidão*', which is merely one version of the musical style. There are many MCs (Leonardo, Júnior, Dolores, Galo, among others) who refuse to write songs with overtly sexual connotations or which glamorise drug trafficking. They favour music which deals with love, social injustice, happiness and everyday experiences.

[25]   *Pagode* is a slower variation of samba, and it is usually romantic. *Forró* is a musical style which originated in the north-eastern states of Brazil, the region where most residents of Maré are from.

unemployment, and these activities were less dangerous in Arrentela than in Maré.[26] The Red Eyes Gang marked their boundaries with other social groups through the articulation between the rap lifestyle, the area and their social background as poor black people.

[PHOTO 5: Young people from Arrentela taking part in the Kosmikilla's music video] Photograph by Otávio Raposo – July 2004

The huge stigma faced by young people in Arrentela and the fact that many were not fully accepted as Portuguese[27] further intensified their defiance. The label used by the media and political establishment 'second-generation immigrants' produced an idea of incompatibility between young black people and a Portuguese culture by making cultural distinctions based on race. The result of this process was the tightening of the ethnic borders among the Portuguese population and the lessening identification with Portugal by the children of immigrants. This was particularly noticeable among the black rappers in the crew – most of whom claimed not to feel Portuguese – whose lyrics told of the racism they were subjected to, at the same time they gave value to their black heritage and African reference points. We can see this in the lyrics of the rap *Pretugal*, whose title alone parodies racism by mixing together the words *preto* ('black', but derogatory) with Portugal:

> [sic] *Koração lá e korpo ká em pretugal/ Mentalmente enkkkarcerados ká em pretugal/ Sem pão, mas kom veneno e armas p'ra morrermos em pretugal/ Segregados p'ra ñ sermos ninguém em Portugal*
> [Heart there and body here in *Pretugal*/ Mentally imprisoned here in *Pretugal*/ No food but poison and weapons to die here in *Pretugal*/ Separated so we're no one in Portugal].
> (Chullage 2004)

The heavy segregation suffered by the Red Eyes Gang meant that racial and class issues were felt by all members. However, the persistent racism, even that carried out by neighbours

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[26] According to Waiselfisz (2011), Brazil has the highest number of murders in the world in absolute terms, mostly victims of involvement in drug trafficking. Between 2004 and 2007, more than 190,000 people were murdered, most of whom were young, poor and black. In Maré, armed conflicts between rival gangs or with the police were not unusual, and more than forty murders took place there between May and November 2009, according to information from residents and non-governmental organizations in the neighbourhood.

[27] Previously, a significant number of African immigrants' children did not have the right to Portuguese nationality even though they were born in Portugal, as a result of the restrictions imposed by the *jus sanguinis* requirement. Only Portuguese citizens' children were entitled to Portuguese nationality. In 2006, the law was relaxed, allowing the children of immigrants born in Portugal to obtain Portuguese nationality provided that at least one of their parents had the legal right to live in Portugal for at least five years. See Raposo 2007; Verbo Jurídico 2006.

in the same social conditions, made skin colour the lens through which their marginalization was interpreted. For young people from Maré, break-dance wasn't appropriate as a single means of asserting black identity, just as they did not make style a tool in the fight against racism, a problem they rarely discussed. Renato, a b-boy from Maré who also does graffiti, explains:

> Man, we just want to live and we don't think much about race. Because for us, hip-hop culture is on top, whatever your colour. We don't talk much about those things. I don't know, it's not because we don't want to. And obviously if one of us is hit by racism, we'll find out and we don't like it. But we don't talk much about it because we don't feel the need to. We don't want to think about it, because it's a problem, that's all.
> (Renato, pers. comm. 18 September 2010)[28]

They did not deny that racism existed, especially in richer parts of the city, but they didn't think it very important. I have heard b-boys from Maré saying countless times that 'everything here is a mixture' and in interviews there was a clear focus on *Brasil mestiço* (a mixed-race Brazil).[29] Unlike in Portugal, the non-white population of Brazil are the majority, and some symbols of black culture have been incorporated into national identity. According to Livio Sansone (2007), black Brazilians do not feel that they belong to an ethnic minority, and their attachment to the nation is expressed in a number of ways, showing 'black pride without ethnicity'. Group tensions in Maré rarely take on a racial dimension, as white, black and mixed-race people all feel marginalized by the State and have problems in common: inter-racial solidarity in the area is not a mere myth. Rather than dividing the world around two poles, one white and the other black, the break-dancers in Maré organized their experiences according to a continuum of colour, whose boundaries were notably flexible, depending on the situation. Being poor and living in a *favela* were the key explanations for understanding the injustices they were subjected to, such as their low status. It was not by chance that, at dance events, the Maré b-boys made a point of telling people where they were from, a way of challenging the stigmas which painted them as potential criminals. By winning dance competitions, they projected an image of power rather than need, breaking symbolic barriers which wanted them labelled simply as *favelados*. This labelling process was explained by Rômulo, one of the Maré b-boys.

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[28]   Renato is a 19-year-old male Brazilian break-dancer and graffiti artist.
[29]   The idea of racial democracy has guided reflections on race relations in Brazil since the 1930s, when Gilberto Freyre made mixed-race a defining part of national identity. More than a myth, this idea is reproduced in day-to-day life, and is accepted by the vast majority of the population, especially the lower classes.

It's as if they told people we were 'ready made' outcasts. I think it's something that has to change, it has to change. We're not going to follow the same *favelado* name just because we live in a certain community, you know. Because *favelados* are... [...] I can even say that I live in a *favela*, I live in a community, and we're not ignorant now. I think it's the opposite [...] Depending on the place, when a guy says he comes from the south [the richer part of the city], people calm down. But when you see someone good come out of a community, people get freaked out because they want to know what happened for that guy to make something good of himself: 'Jesus! How did he turn out like that, coming from a *favela*?' That's the thing [...] they get curious, they're caught off-guard.
(Rômulo, pers. comm. 5 November 2009)[30]

Conclusion

Dancers from Maré and rappers from Arrentela used hip-hop as a way to get recognition and participate in modern society, by viewing themselves as part of an important global culture. For the former, the desire to be someone was partially achieved through break-dance, a beacon of virtue which guarded them against the heavy violence in their neighbourhood. Style was an avenue through which the b-boys sought to break free from segregation and iron-cast social immobility in Brazil without, however, making mainstream society their adversary. For the Red Eyes Gang, the search for respect and dignity clashed constantly with the traditional mechanisms of social ascent and assertion, all of which was worsened by a feeling of rejection by Portuguese society. Infused with African cultural references, rap style questioned the hegemonic and subordinate relationships present in their day-to-day lives, placing them in the context of a fight for a place in society. In a setting where poverty, violence and a lack of opportunities compromised the expectations and lives of young people in Arrentela and Maré, different strategies were established through hip-hop in an attempt to overcome life's uncertainties and to delight in the joy of youth.

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[30]   Rômulo: a16 year-old, Brazilian male break-dancer and graffiti artist.

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