Europe in Black and White Immigration, Race, and Identity in the 'Old Continent'

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Chapter 7

Opportunities, Politics and Subjectivity in Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon's Non-governmental Organizations

Susana Durão

Introduction

It has been argued that we live in a time when modern and rigid institutions, such as school and work, are in progressive decline (Dubet 2002). In contrast, we are confronted with the non-stop rise of social forms, movements and creative organizations all over the planet, seeming to reflect the end of pure, unitary ideas of order (Law 1994). These forms can perhaps be characterized as multiple, plural and flexible (in social, cultural, political and legal terms). Furthermore, by being much closer to the populations than the national state services and institutions, they can be termed 'grass-roots' organizations, with the ability to promote what has been called the positive movement of grass-roots globalization (Appadurai 2000).

In the last ten years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have moved into a field where relations with states, the market, the media and a popularizing movement are at stake. Well-connected grass-roots NGOs and social movements, with new forms of transnational connection, challenge the state's well-established claims of vertical superiority in unexpected ways (Ferguson 2006: 111). As a whole, the NGO phenomenon is characterized as an expansive field in negotiation and in tension (Teixeira 2003). But, as Ferguson critically poses: "Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a 'grass-roots' that would be not [just] local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well connected, and opportunistic?" (2006: 106). If we agree with Ferguson, we now have a theoretical and empirical challenge in hand.

In this vein, we need to specify the concepts in use. The grass-roots or local NGOs I consider in the text, and even as a larger concept, differ from the international NGOs (the INGOs for development), but they are no longer the typical local associations (even if they are called so). The latter depend strictly on voluntary services and maintain a high level of informality. The organizations I mention here can have a number of more or less temporary employees and can reach a level of bureaucratization and professionalization that associations never will. Furthermore, they strongly advocate the creation of new opportunities for places and people that have been lacking. That's why they have been considered part of the future challenge for economies and countries, allegedly an entire sector: the 'third sector' (Sherer-Warren 1994). They may be local and even situated in urban peripheries, but they start to operate in a wider context through media and policies. Likewise, the purpose of the majority of these NGOs is, at some point, to sustain mediation between the local populations and other social structures and institutions; in many cases, not from below but across, not against

but with and within the national states. Even if we tried to see these organizations as fixed and generalizable entities, it would be impossible because the arrangements are multiple and the environments that contextualize them are rather complex. This is one of the leading aspects favouring an ethnographic, multi-focus and comparative viewpoint.

The studies on colonialism, postcolonialism and empire in the arena of social sciences and humanities have, for some years, been highly dynamic and even politically charged. This is not the place to go into the debate details, but, in terms of this essay, the concept of 'postcolonial' used reflects the ideas of Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good *et al.* (2008). This essay aims to offer empirical insights for considering a new field of research: the interconnections between persons, subjectivities and local 'organized' lifestyles that grass-roots NGOs are implementing in places with historical, colonial past experiences. At the same time, the present text focuses on the modes of subjective experiences and forms of subjection that shape the lives of Brazilian and Portuguese youth in poor, urban peripheries.

Taking two cases from Portugal and Brazil – two linked postcolonial societies – the aim is to interpret what I call the complex of opportunities, defined as the range of material and symbolic experiences NGOs gather from cultural and social contexts and then pass on to particular individuals, creating a setting for new possibilities, interrelationships and subjectivities that certainly would not occur if concrete NGOs did not exist. Some concepts – 'opportunity' being one among others – tend to be associated with the discipline's legacies and paradigms. My aim is to lay claim to an idea for social anthropology: that of subjective and organizational opportunities – defined here as situations or conditions favourable for the attainment of a goal – which are the basis of a complex set of experiences. An opportunity, therefore, must be seen as a wider cultural entity, and not only pertaining to the territory of economic studies.

Nevertheless, whilst NGOs have been seen as the panacea for democratic problems, they have also been criticized for not implementing structural changes, serving few and sometimes selected people in the localities where they work, reproducing autocratic power relationships in the name of 'doing good' and treating local conditions as 'problems' that require technical, rather than structural or political, solutions (Ferguson 1990; Fisher 1997). There are some particularly critical views of NGOs: for example, they have been accused of changing political and ideological agendas with regard to 'partnerships', 'conventions', 'pacts', 'agreements' and other forms of sometimes violent state subjugation; and of a dangerous mimesis of neo-liberalism's darkest aspects, such as the use of the language of the market (Teixeira 2003: 99). Moreover, NGOs tend to create development buzzwords, such as 'participation' and 'empowerment', that have different meanings for different people (Rahnema 1992; Fisher 1997: 455). But, while these views acknowledge the participation of NGOs in a coherent general policy of order, there is also the possibility of changing that policy by changing the micro practices, local politics and the discourse from which they emerge (Fisher 1997: 457).

When opening the "black box" (Fisher 1997: 447), it becomes clear that NGOs are vulnerable to all the problems befalling other kinds of institutions, including the dangers

of routinization and the gradual conversion from democratic to oligarchic rule (Fisher 1997: 456). But there are some other crucial aspects we must acknowledge. What, ultimately, are the wishes and demands of the people who serve the NGOs? Despite now having a good overview of the macro and global flows surrounding NGOs, we tend to forget the perspective of those helping to create and keep NGOs active.

Despite the celebration of the quiet and associational revolution, on one hand, and the growing notion that they are participating in a world dominated by the neo-liberal idiom, on the other, anthropologists, to date, have made relatively limited contributions to it. The literature about the growth, expanding and empowering NGOs' global movement, is based more on faith than fact. There are few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations (Fisher 1997). In order to mitigate the described ideological dualisms, this text proposes to look closely at particular NGO experiences, how 'NGO-ing' is done in its often complicated processes, seducing others to produce more indepth studies, something that, with few notable exceptions, has not been very frequent in anthropology (see, for instance, Hilhorst 2003). This does not mean that anthropologists should abandon the interdisciplinary or the multi-sited approaches. Rather, we need to be aware of the extensive translocal networks, transnational connections and alliances, control technologies, and the production of 'world opinions' concerning NGOs and other social movements (Ferguson 2006).

In this essay, I have chosen to explore the ethnography of two of the most highly dynamic grass-roots NGOs. Both are extremely important in their fields and are currently very well known in Brazil and Portugal. They are, respectively, the Grupo Cultural AfroReggae in Rio de Janeiro, and the Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude (literally, the 'Youth Mill Cultural Association') in Lisbon. Hereafter, I will use the names by which they are commonly known: AfroReggae and Moinho.²

'Opportunities' - an NGO buzzword

One of the major problems emerging from my research is the paradoxical situation of NGOs in having to 'create opportunities' for people at a time of clear inequality and social exclusion. NGOs in Brazil – and, to a certain extent, in Portugal – face the problem of organizational survival almost every day. Leaders must entice private and public corporations and foundations in order to acquire funds for a year or two, depending on the length of the projects. As a specialist once told me, "NGOs today are about projects. That's what gives us the money, our survival kit". Even when they reach a certain level of popularity, developing several financed projects at the same time (as is the case of both NGOs described here), the future is always uncertain. The level of institutionalization and bureaucracy is always an issue. There is, in addition, the problem of what is considered a "Third World' developing country and a 'First World' one (I shall return to this question later, in connection with the Brazilian case).

From the perspective of their users (especially young people with few opportunities of entering the formal job market, such as those from the poor areas of Lisbon or Rio de Janeiro, African immigrant children in Portugal or black and powerless adolescents in Brazil), the NGOs face a problematic situation. They are unable to provide what (young) people most want from them: namely, a steady job, life project and regular income.

Moinho is based in Cova da Moura, Amadora, near Lisbon (Portugal), which is a bairro de lata, or shanty town. I first heard talk of 'opportunity' when I was doing fieldwork there (January-April 2007), within the ambit of the Peritos da Experiência (or 'Experience Expertise') project.³ Moinho had also created the supposedly new occupational classification of 'mediator' (though this was unformalized in terms of governmental categories), which involved young people that had undergone dramatic and violent experiences mediating between community members and state institutions.⁴

When in Rio de Janeiro doing fieldwork in peripheral favelas (shantv towns). I was in frequent contact with monitors, instructors and young users of the AfroReggae courses and activities.5 Nevertheless, my main approach to the NGO was through an unusual and culturally creative project called "Youth and Police", which was started by AfroReggae in 2004. The aim was to take some young boys and a few girls - poor and middle-class adolescents from the favelas and asfalto to Belo Horizonte for some weeks. 6 There, they gave workshops on percussion music, theatre, graffiti, street dance and street basketball to police officers, in an attempt to undercut stereotypes and change patterns of behaviour between these two traditionally antagonistic social groups in Brazilian society. The police were then 'qualified' to repeat the model in secondary schools, becoming monitors and instructors for half of their duty schedule (two weeks per month). Twice a year, the 'AfroReggae team' got together with 'AfroReggae policemen'.7 This encounter caught the attention of the mass media, as Minas Gerais police officers and young black men and women from Vigário Geral played the drums and danced in a sensually provocative way on Globo channel's top-rated TV show, Faustão (2005). The episode brought both fame and suspicion to the project and the NGO; no one remained indifferent.

In Rio de Janeiro, even more than in Lisbon, the language of opportunity was very much a topic of discussion for this and other NGOs. The adolescents provided a wide variety of definitions of this term. They first wanted a job, but mentioned also the experience of otherness, the chance the project gave them to travel, to meet girls and get to know nice people from different backgrounds and lifestyles (such as artists, intellectuals, students and... police officers), to find stores to buy clothes and so on, to walk quietly in the streets of a city that was not so violent. All in all, they wanted to find a temporary way out of the "neurotic favela world", as they called it. But the opportunities to change identities could be seen as more permanent. Some of the more prominent NGO's male 'leaders' – a powerful local category in these contexts – by increasing their income were able to leave the 'violent communities' with their wives, children and mothers, and live in some less expensive central and southern neighbourhoods, such as Glória, Santa Teresa or Largo do Machado.

One of the most widely discussed aspects of the "Youth and Police" project, as well as in AfroReggae's general activities, was the fact that some of the new instructors had been drug dealers, having only given up the practice a short time previously. Both formal and informal techniques were used to 'rescue' them from a criminal life. Those experienced or trained in the same kind of situations served as 'conflict mediators', operating also in violent territorial emergencies. The aim was to continue to include adolescents in the NGO, giving them a chance to have a life outside of violent crime, rife within the world of the favela.8 The solutions for personal 'rescue' involved drug cures, as well as religious and moral commitments - mainly to the neo-Pentecostal churches increasingly present in the favelas (Mafra 2001). Others involved a more informal socialization and interpersonal effort to help newcomers adapt to NGO rhythms and lifestyles; and, before that, there were intense negotiations between NGO mediators and drug leaders in order to "let the boy go". However, this second approach was not without certain practical complications, as they were all competing for the same limited job opportunities, leader admiration and the social recognition acquired through an NGO with a high media profile. Nevertheless, when someone wanted to give moral support to an ex-drug dealer in order to keep him on the "right track", they would say: "Look at your life inside AfroReggae. This is really a world of opportunities. Take your chance".

A number of young people spend all their lives in and around these local NGOs, in neighbourhoods where they have lived since they were children, and with little or no employment. For many of them, such organizations are seen as the only way out of poverty, drug dealing or petty crime, since they hardly ever leave their "relegated territories" (Wacquant 2007). As one of these young boys said to me: "In *favelas*, either you stumble into an NGO or you stumble into crime and drug dealing. It's up to you to choose". The same dilemma comes up, though less dramatically, in some of Lisbon's peripheral neighbourhoods.

For all of these young people, the 'slum condition' is a stigma giving them little opportunity to work in formal jobs. The dark but insightful research of Mike Davies shows that "favela ecology" is increasing enormously and creating a large, worldwide population living outside the market, most of whom are young people (Davies 2006). This global territoriality of poverty also raises a paradoxical question for local NGOs, since the social state is also globally decreasing (Wacquant 2000). NGOs cannot solve the problem people most want solved.

António and Dongo are two young men that lead different lives connected by the trends of global poverty. Their experiences within local NGO projects offer a clear view of the subjective opportunities available for particular individuals.

António - the difficult leap

António is a 30-year-old divorcee with a 9-year-old daughter and a girlfriend. He presently lives with his parents in Cova da Moura, the neighbourhood where he has always lived. Although his parents are from Cape Verde, Portugal is the only country he has ever known.

His parents, like many others in the neighbourhood, have worked from dawn to dusk all their lives. His father works in the construction industry and his mother is a cleaner in private homes and companies. António was educated on the street, although he did go to state school for nine years, leaving just one year before completing the minimum mandatory schooling. He has been arrested twice for being involved in drug dealing and knows that the two years he spent in prison ruined his life. Nonetheless, he took the Moinho "Experience Expertise" course, which is a good example for other, smaller associations that work for the immigrant community in other neighbourhoods. The course raised his expectations of getting a job and promised to involve him in activities closer to people, local authorities and the police, giving him back his life. However, he did not manage to get an apprenticeship or a paid job, as employers tend to avoid signing contracts with a coloured man that has Cova da Moura as his home address. Consequently, he dropped out of the organization. He now works in construction but finds himself exploited. He will, possibly, give in to the economy of the streets in the end, for this assures him at least one hot meal a day, trainers, some fashionable clothes and something extra for the more ambitious.

Dongo - a fighter

Dongo is 28 and from Rio, a *carioca* (as as residents of Rio de Janeiro are known in Brazil). He has two daughters, several women (a main one and secondary ones) and several intended girlfriends, including the young girls of the neighbourhood (girls from 12- to 14-years-old, called *novinhas*). He is a local star. He has achieved a certain status in the NGO, has featured in films, appeared several times at public events and concerts and is one of the main monitors in percussion groups that have become the image of the AfroReggae. He has always lived in Vigário Geral, which achieved a certain notoriety due to police killings in 1993. Dongo considers himself a 'whitey' but the official Brazilian skin colour classification would see him as *pardo* ('mixed race'). He reminds us, as other inhabitants do, that Vigário Geral has one colour – mainly black – even if there are enormous variations in other *favelas*, as northern migrants that make their way to live in precarious Rio. His parents work as *camelôs* (peddlers) in the city and they follow the market flow, selling the trendy goods of mass consumption.

With almost no schooling, Dongo had a promising career in the local drug trade. He made it to manager of one of the *bocas de fumo*, a place for selling drugs in the *favela*. However, things got too hot too often. He got caught up in gun fights, and feared for his life during police raids, attacks from other *bandidos* (rival gangs who wanted to take over the *bocas* in the neighbourhood), organized attacks and personal vendettas that he has never forgotten. It was in the local NGO that he found a way out. He met some mediators and volunteered, after some negotiation. His salary could not be too low (after all, he had been a manager in the drug trade). So he was given certain responsibilities and, today, is one of the main project promoters, particularly of those taking place inside Rio de Janeiro's juvenile prisons in partnership with state departments.

These two lives have similarities, but also major differences, in two of the most successful grass-roots NGOs in Lisbon and Rio today. And they enable us to reflect on the complex of opportunities, so to speak, from the perspective of the 'NGO-ing' process in both countries. Let us start with the Brazilian.

Being AfroReggae: "culture is our weapon"

"Culture is our weapon" is a powerful phrase, used in a book title that intends to summarize the AfroReggae politics and practice (Neate & Platt 2006). It creates the main duality present in other narrative tales: the story of life on the front line of a 'drug war' with the NGO centre stage, with global aspirations, which seeks to rescue *favela*'s residents from the path of poverty and violence, through soft politics, through music and an appreciation of black culture and identity.

In the 1970s, when the Brazilian NGOs were developing through international aid and the involvement of the Catholic Church, they generally supported the popular and social movements and took an active role in the country's democratic transition (Landim 1993). Between the 1980s and the 1990s, however, with the emergence of social lobbies such as environmentalism, feminist activism, black and anti-racist social movements, organizations to help Aids victims and the *meninos de rua* (street children), the NGOs were transformed, becoming half organization, half social movement. But as Cristiana Bastos (2002) has underlined in her studies about sociopolitical–scientific responses to Aids (also in Brazil), it is these hybrid combinations of global efforts, new partnerships and local effects that create innovation and sociological change.

Perhaps Brazil and India are the national cases that have stirred up the enthusiasm so apparent in Arjun Appadurai's words: "Although the sociology of these emergent social forms – part movements, part networks, part organizations – has yet to be developed, there is a considerable progressive consensus that these forms are the crucibles and institutional instruments of most serious efforts to globalize from below" (Appadurai 2000: 15). For some authors, scope for a conception of citizenship marked by legal conquests, as well as by the affirmative action of new rights, was created in Brazil, and in Latin America more generally. In Brazil, this was an important movement against the dictatorship that lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s (Dagnino 1994: 108). The associative experiences increased enormously, with the anti-hunger campaign and others (Abelem 1998). The NGOs started to take on the role of "social actors with a proper voice" (Landim 1993; Teixeira 2003: 50). At the same time, near the end of the 1990s, the whole field diversified and amplified. New groups, businesses, foundations and even political organizations with rather vague philanthropic or social intentions appeared with the same NGO designation. The idea was to promote a private sector with public functions (Fernandes 1994).

In addition to the problematic aspects of defining intentions and practices within the new global order of the late 1990s, the Brazilian NGOs had to face new challenges in order to

survive. They had to redefine their agendas. One of the main distinctions from the last two decades was the diminishing investment of international agencies, since Brazil was considered to be on the road to democracy and development. This gave the NGO-state connections more impact (Teixeira 2003: chapter 3) and has gradually replaced older groupings, such as neo-Marxism, liberation theology and neo-anarchism (Sherer-Warren 1995). Ana Claudia C. Teixeira has classified the different kinds of relationships involved between NGOs and the state into three categories: the offer of local services with state validation; the maintenance of NGO political pressure, obliging the state to develop certain policies; and the exploration of participatory encounters with more space for ongoing negotiations (2003: 178–9). At the same time, several NGOs have acquired a role in the public forum, even participation in public policies, which the national social movements do not seem to have, creating some tension between them (Teixeira 2003: 131).

In spite of the changing dynamics occurring inside the expanding and complex field of Brazilian NGOs, the process has been marked by a bottom-up approach, which has had theoretical repercussions. As Ferguson argues, the state-civil society opposition – which comes with the term 'civil society' – forms part of a pervasive way of thinking about the analytical local, national and global levels. It is a way of thinking based on a "vertical topography of power", where the state is "up there" and society "down there".

It might make sense to think of the new organizations that have sprung up in recent years not as challengers pressing up against the state from below but horizontal contemporaries of the organs of the state – sometimes rivals, sometimes servants, sometimes watchdogs, sometimes parasites, but in any case operating on the same level and in the same global space.

(Ferguson 2006: 103)

While contributing to public policies, a particular NGO, a chain of them or organizations well connected with the society's intelligentsia may have a big impact on governmental choices in a Brazilian state like Rio. Even the state development projects and policies, when looking for a wider territorial implementation, can be totally dependent on the grass-roots NGOs and their networks of action. For instance, in Rio, where there are more NGOs affiliated to the Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não-Governamentais (ABONG; see Teixeira, 2003: 29–30), it is very common for the Government to try to benefit from the mass media visibility of the best known and highest profile NGOs such as AfroReggae (the 'NGO of the moment', as some people say).

One of the fundamental aspects of AfroReggae in this national context is the passage from political discourse and practice to a social market and cultural orientation. While I was in Rio de Janeiro for several months' fieldwork, I was able to observe that AfroReggae is both loved and hated. When it appeared, it promised young people a path from the fringes to the centre, taking seriously what is considered to be the *favela*'s culture, or, as the leader

calls it, the "narcoculture" (Junior 2006). Instead of denying such a reality, the leader thinks this culture must be involved in its own solution.

AfroReggae is both an NGO and a 'culture enterprise', and is one of the biggest in this field in Brazil, with nearly 200 full-time employees. It started as a movement in Vigário Geral in 1993 with the reactions and marches for peace that followed the local killings. A group of more than 50 hooded and armed men, organized into 'extermination units', supposedly members of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police, broke into houses and executed 21 adolescents, adults and children. The slaughter in Vigário Geral was one of the biggest in the state of Rio's history and provoked several public demonstrations after the event (Ventura 1994). Even today, slaughter in *favelas* are the cause of events organized by human rights activists.

Afterwards, a small group of young people got together with the intention of distributing a newspaper about African music and culture in several northern area *favelas*. The newspaper was named after the NGO. They also organized parties and other cultural events. AfroReggae became a famous NGO and acquired increased access to crucial corporate and state sponsorships (Natura, Petrobrás and the state government among others) after 2000. The NGO became known for its annual award and for a number of academic theses, but especially for the musical group and other cultural merchandise, such as its trademark clothes. There were also documentary films and books created about it, which use a mixture of fiction, documentary and ideological activism to represent the violence and poverty of the Brazilian *favela* (Hamburger 2007).¹⁰

In recent years, AfroReggae has introduced what has been called 'social technology' into several favelas, in an attempt to avert urban violence, as the leader says (Junior 2004). The NGO permanently negotiates its presence (at least with residents' associations, the local armed drug gangs and, more recently, the police), mostly by offering cultural and musical training to children and young people. But the networks have never ceased to grow. It has working relations inside Rio and other Brazilian states, and also in the rest of Latin America, India, the UK and the USA, among others. The NGO image is found within a percussion music and performance concept inspired by Oludum (a pioneer NGO of its kind in Bahia, northeastern Brazil), promoting black aesthetics and 'self-esteem', now used for social-cultural, political and also marketing and mass media purposes (none of which are perceived as contradictory).11 Since then the NGO has formed various units, micro-bands - combining hybrid music styles such as reggae, samba, funk, Afro-tribal drums and so on. It also demands a combination of very different occupational roles, including performers, artists, teachers, monitors, instructors and conflict mediators. Sometimes, a single person can perform all the functions; in other cases, there are special 'appeals' for specific functions. In still others, the physical presence of some people in the projects is enough, providing a certain amount of income for young people, while creating several situations of hesitation. For instance, there are times that the afflux of young people around the NGO's centres is enormous; they expect to participate in activities, projects or shows. However, there are not enough functions at the NGO for them all. Some will get a 'vacancy' later.

AfroReggae has always had important support in some middle-class *carioca* circuits. Intellectuals and artists, such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto and Flora Gil and Zuenir Ventura, are seen as the NGO's 'godparents', crucial for attracting influence, favours, power and mass media visibility. There are moments when the performance and the media-orientated lead all the NGO's movement, and, at that moment, it seems nothing more matters. The figure of the young charismatic leader, José Junior, and his personal beliefs, are constantly evolving with AfroReggae, a movement paralleled in other major NGOs. As we can see, this organization creates all sorts of hybridism.¹² This hybrid trend makes the old limits of NGO analysis – social, cultural and political action – problematic. It also raises the issue of what place subjectivity and the personal have in these contexts.¹³

Overall, we can say, for the moment, that the cultural process of 'multiplication', as the activity of successful NGOs such as AfroReggae is called in Brazil, is based on an ideology of social opportunity replication. The aim is to show that these types of NGOs are a kind of local social remedy for all sorts of problems, even having a pedagogical effect on public policies concerning urban violence. To this end, they use the same ambiguous dualities present in all Brazilian society, such as black/white, poor/rich, young/old, criminal/hero, bandido/dogooder, favela/asfalto, urban war/peace and so on. AfroReggae constructs itself as a metaphor of Rio and Brazil through a global range of opportunities for a developing economy and society. In all the projects and creations, the mestiço ideology has expanded from a racial standpoint to a social and cultural one. As argued by Esther Hamburger, "Before the deterioration of the state and the partisan politics [in poor Brazil], [material] culture affirms itself as a privileged space of professionalization and expansion of citizenship" (2007: 128). But the NGO deals with the structural political problems of the Brazilian state and economy as well, and all the leaders are aware that the organizations are also largely dependent on its flow.

Let us now take a look at the development of NGOs in Portugal.

Moinho: Africa in Portugal?

Portugal has a shorter history of NGOs. All discussion seems to start with and centre on the state and the Catholic Church, still the predominant influence on associativism (Capucha 1995). The little literature we can find on these matters gives the idea that, in the 1990s, the state and regional governments finally 'authorized' the existence of NGOs; not only legally and politically, but, also, socially (Ribeiro 1999). Nonetheless, NGOs and any civil associations clearly still have a long way to go in Portuguese society. There are frequent complaints about the lack of 'civil participation', but always with the intrinsic idea that the state has all the necessary means to operate instead of a non-organized 'civil society'. At the same time, sovereign figures, such as the President and others, appear in the mass media preaching the importance of civic involvement in society for the resolution of social problems.

There is a problem of definition in the Portuguese context. Until recently, NGOs were confused with NGDOs (the NGOs for development), which have been set up, on a limited

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basis, in both Portuguese-speaking countries and internationally (Ribeiro 1999). Grass-roots NGOs working in the Portuguese context are not always formally recognized as such. Most are viewed as local organizations and, particularly in poor and peripheral urban and metropolitan neighbourhoods, they are classed as immigrant associations. It is vital to note that since 1996, with Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural (ACIDI) (the Cabinet of the High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue), the state has had a central policy and decision-making role in intercultural politics, figuring largely in negotiations over many aspects concerning the immigrant condition and immigrant associations. Nevertheless, the main goal of ACIDI was to support, without losing central control over the process, the 'civil forces' for local transformation and 'social inclusion'.

Public policy usually flows in a single direction – from the top down – since the local here is very much conceived as "down there" (Ferguson 2006). In Portugal, as in other European contexts, notions of citizenship are closely linked to legal and political rights. Even in immigrant populations, stress falls on the right to vote, to nationality and, in a far more limited way, to residential and employment rights. 'Civil society' seems tied to traditional political life, although anthropologists such as Miguel Vale de Almeida have argued that basic rights, such as employment, welfare and civil rights, must be universalized and redistributed, rather than being based on nation state citizenship or membership (Almeida 2004: 90). The long state dictatorship (between 1933 and 1974) left little room or opportunity for the rise of social political movements that could have matured by the end of the 1990s, when the wave of immigration started to grow.

With a few exceptions (such as diffuse feminist activism, groups fighting for gay and lesbian rights and wider concerns with social otherness, consumer rights and environmental sustainability since the late 1990s), debate in recent years seems to have taken second place to the political parliamentary agenda. Legal and national policies have tended to silence local problems and growing social inequality. Social movements concerning inequality, human rights, local and cultural rights, violence or racism are still very restricted, with little visibility in public and mass media spheres.

Thus, the local stays local, and local NGOs such as immigrant associations concern themselves mainly with local demands. Many of the associations are not connected to each other and barely know other neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, as individuals, city dwellers are mobile and have extended their urban connections. Young people visit and get to know other immigrant and poor peripheral neighbourhoods. It seems to be the hip-hop culture, and some other cultural variants, that brings them together, not a political or social motivation *per se*, properly speaking (Fradique 2003; Raposo 2007).

Moinho, now 34 years old (the same age as Portuguese democracy), is considered one of the best examples of an immigrant association. The leader, Godelieve Meersschaert, is a Belgian who has lived in Portugal and in Cova da Moura since 1974, the year of the democratic revolution. She has created one of the largest associations of its kind in the country, employing 70 people today. The organization leaders are sensitive to the immigrant communities' struggle for new ways of life and urban recognition of the neighbourhood as a legal territory. However,

they have more difficulty with the new generations of residents that no longer see themselves only as African descendants and who challenge the purposes and traditional projects of the organization, such as the Cape Verdean folk culture and music groups.

For Moinho, its main project is the social and cultural construction of 'difference', cultural difference. The message is: "My culture is African culture". There are all kinds of signs of 'essentialized' differences based on ethnic utopia (even if non-Africans living in Cova da Moura are a minority). Some local questions, such as drug dealing, are not really acknowledged and worked on by the organization's specialists. Such issues are seen as things where young people have to make their own individual choices rather than being the organization's concern.

This organization is still very local, in spite of some connections with other NGOs in Europe. There is still very little contact with similar associations around the country, or even in Lisbon. Voluntary action is valued and there is opposition to specialized paid work. People are asked to share a sense of "community service" and a "communion of community interests". In spite of its civic goals, the association is very much inspired by Catholic movements. The idea of the leaders is to "help the community and make it better". So, the main services are those that the state does not provide, such as kindergartens and childcare. There are a number of activities in which the African women take part, such as cooking and all sorts of volunteer work. At the same time, state support implies a certain institutionalization: the majority of the organization's specialists (almost 30 people) are state employees. The members with most responsibility deal with management and accountability issues brought about by Portuguese state and European Union bureaucracy. Opportunities to develop the NGO structure seem to be appearing, but the 'NGO culture' is still very much the same, with a very local perspective.

Final remarks

What this ethnographic journey into the worlds of two organizations show is that, even if born to be local NGOs, the frontier between what is local and global is actually blurring. Some NGOs today face the challenge of having to grow not only vertically from below, but to the sides and horizontally as well. In addition, the frontier between people and places, between what is done and programmed, what is the urban, the NGO profile and the persons' identities are not clearly distinguished and settled issues, not even for NGO agendas. Whenever they programme a project, they have to measure priorities and sometimes have to deal with questions of local livelihood and environment that were not in their original brief and that sometimes are not solved institutionally at all (for instance, when questions of urbanity, sanitation, health and social services are involved). This is even more contradictory when we are speaking about NGOs that imagine themselves as working with topics such as culture and performance. Likewise, NGOs can turn out to be sort of 'social firefighters'. The very optimal role they play in those social settings, mediating process, people and powers, may also be interpreted as one of their most persistent weaknesses. At the same time, when narrowing

their scope, they may also come under critical fire. These are risks the 'local participants' in NGOs are very aware of. And, to a certain extent, this precise tension in politics and action definition may mean the end for many projects, even the most creative ones. This is probably why the word 'empowerment' has such importance in these contexts. Empowerment is not merely an ideological buzzword; local recognition is, in fact, the perfect gauge for the NGOs to see if they are, as they claim, "doing good", to use Fisher's expression (1997).

Let's now look again at the two particular lives we met earlier in the text. António and Dongo live in two peripheral urban contexts and work in the two NGOs, which differ from each other in scale, history, demography and crime levels. 15 The urban violence identified in this Brazilian metropolis, involving a great level of state violence, has no parallel in Portugal and, according to some authors, in three decades, it has become an interiorized cultural aspect of favela livelihoods (Silva 2004). Nevertheless, when we look at the subjectivities and life stories of the two young men whose lives illustrate contemporary dilemmas, we find wider, interlinked sociological and anthropological connections between them. What Dongo and António ask from the organizations in question is an opportunity for a better life, to ally survival to subsistence. Dongo's story is apparently more successful than António's, but also more crucial. As another AfroReggaen instructor used to say in every public session: "I escaped from the favela death statistics after my 30s. This NGO was my opportunity".16 But even Dongo knows that everything he has constructed and the guaranteed benefits of working in the NGO can, at any time, collapse. People often say they have a career inside an NGO, and some may even establish inter-NGO connections in order to 'grow'. A similar process occurs in the street-level favela drug dealing. But young people's careers in NGOs, and in drug dealing, are always at risk due to external and internal impositions (such as leaders' decisions, the illicit local and national economies, the police raids and, sometimes, killings). What we see here are organizations organizing through the politics of action and the politics of recomposing lives.

At this point, we can be reassured that ethnography is not just a methodological approach to description, but a form of reflecting on global and local contemporary problems, as well as a significant way of producing epistemologies for social studies at very different levels (Law 1994; Davies 1999). In these Portuguese and Brazilian field experiences, I detected personal and organizational levels of opportunity with different implications. We could even say that the organizational opportunities are not the same as, but have implications for, the subjective opportunities people are seeking from these organizations. Likewise, we can go back to the conceptualization initially proposed, the complex of opportunities, and define it as socially and culturally produced by ways of organizing and composing new moralities and new kinds of selves. If we agree with Jarrett Zigon that moralities are "the acquired attitudes, emotions and bodily dispositions of a person throughout her life" (2008: 17), then we see how morality implies relativity and self-criticism; what we see is a continuum process of moral construction and deconstruction. I call the range of opportunities 'complex' because these are generated by NGOs, but, consequently, they are subject to several actualizations all the time and producing movement through peoples' lives, which ultimately can interfere in the whole NGO's agendas and create or destroy a new ground for opportunities.

As we have seen, people's lives are constantly subject to a bigger picture and, in some poor urban environments, such as those described, NGOs are an integral part of their destinies: embodied in their personal trajectories and moralities. A cross-cultural perspective, a description of NGO history and context in Brazil and Portugal, also seems important to enhance the level of organizational opportunities in the two countries. With a solid background, grass-roots NGOs in Brazil can grow much faster and acquire a level of national and global visibility never experienced in Portugal and, in so doing, develop their ability to underline people's options and opportunities through their participation. Nevertheless, projects and opportunities can grow as fast as they can disappear, since they are so dependent on the oscillation in waves of national and international funding.

A Portuguese grass-root NGO – limited by the institutional consideration and legal status that insists on calling it a 'local association' – can achieve a certain amount of permanent state support, allowing it to persist over time, to 'institutionalize' itself. But there are some risks – size limitation, the danger of routinization and some lack of creativity and innovation, especially when it comes to dealing with young people's demands and "urban cultures" (Pais 2003), where art can be the axis for living. The effect may be the production of some sort of soft morality and a certain restraint on opportunism. Hopefully, then, this essay may be viewed as a first modest step into a wider, reflexive anthropology that can be called a 'citizenship of opportunities' project.¹⁷ An initiative mediated by NGQs, trying to connect the analysis of NGOs' contextual histories, their concrete policies and practices, and opportunities, moralities and ambitions for living in urban environments they may or may not enhance. Citizenship cannot be viewed solely as a person-orientated action or as a wider programme and politic for action, but rather, as what is in between, what is created through contexts, organizations and people that are living in and experiencing the city.

The ethnographic examples discussed in this essay reveal how NGO environments are continuously permeated by historical processes and institutional delimitations, as well as livelihoods that come both from above and the sides. Furthermore, to state the existence of a wider contextual environment doesn't mean, necessarily, that it is a 'global' or 'macro' environment, as opposed to the 'local' or 'micro' level of grass-root NGOs. Ethnography may be the best way to determine what is 'local', 'regional', 'national', 'international' and 'global' in a specific field of research. In this vein, ethnography may effectively contribute to the design of theories of local/global organizations and the complex of opportunities they generate

Notes

1. This concept, initially gaining force in the USA, was used to show individual solidarity values as beneficial to public causes, and as an alternative definition to the old 'civil society'. It ultimately expressed the reaffirmation of a certain 'Western' development model (Salamon 1997). But the very term NGO has always been imprecise. When the UN formulated the designation in the 1940s, it referred to all kinds of organizations not established by government agreement (Tavares

1999). The term remains confused and imprecise because of the wide variety of organizations covered by it (Montenegro 1994).

2. The material explored in the text derives from wider ethnographic research conducted mainly between 2007 and 2008, over ten non-sequential months of fieldwork in different cities: Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte. The project was called 'Policing, citizens and cities' and was hosted by the Museu Nacional of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. I acknowledge with gratitude the generous funding that I received from the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia from the Ministry of Science and Technology in Portugal.

3. The 'opportunity' is a slightly different idea from the optimistic concept of 'fields of possibilities' created by Gilberto Velho (1994). Firstly, it not only stresses the idea of personal project development, but also some kind of arrangement between new options and life escapes, as well as the high and low points between them. Secondly, the opportunity idiom is not restricted here to personal practices and aspirations, but is also open to those organizations, NGOs, which confer a new status to social and cultural movements, such as the inscription of the AfroReggae in a new tradition, associative practices, intervention strategies and diverse stimuluses to popular participation. Even if based in personal projects, the idea is to guarantee the access to citizenship of favela inhabitants, as Duarte (1993) and Cunha (2000) have analysed, albeit through the idiom of professionalization and opportunities.

4. The mediator is a recent category that this same NGO previously helped to formalize (Coelho 1998). But the state created few job opportunities in schools and local associations, apparently not believing enough in the decentralizing approach to social problems, which the project argued for, inverting a national tendency towards governmental and centralized public policies. The several mediators I interviewed had not been 'integrated' into the job market, as the course promised. The 'experts' experience tended to be even more precarious.

5. AfroReggae has several units in Rio. The first and main one is in Vigário Geral, one of the city's northern *favelas*. There are, however, others: Parada de Lucas, Cantagalo, Complexo do Alemão and Nova Iguaçu. It has also been developing specific projects in other cities, such as Belo Horizonte (in the state of Minas Gerais). I travelled to all these places between April and September 2007, returning there in the first semester of 2008.

6. This is a recurrent dichotomy in Rio. *Favelas* are normally considered to be 'hillside pockets of poverty', while *asfalto* refers to the lower region, especially the whole coastal stretch where the white middle-class neighbourhoods are located.

7. The project lasted until 2008, with the political and financial support of the Minas Gerais State Security Office and the technical support of Rio's Centro de Estudos de Segurança e Cidadania (CESeC) (Security and Citizenship Study Centre). Having failed with Rio's Military Police, the AfroReggae leaders are now negotiating with the Rio Civil Police for a new project with the same features.

8. When there are violent, armed raids from the police or other drug-dealing factions, the schools stop, and people are trapped at home. Some have been wounded or killed by random shootings. Even the routine of the NGO's workshops is constantly interrupted. I was present at some of these not only frustrating but dangerous situations, which turned out to be part of daily life.

9. The parallel with bocas in other urban slum contexts would be street-corner drug dealing.

10. Favela Rising (2006) is perhaps the best known documentary about AfroReggae, increasing its national and international visibility. It is a semi-real narrative, created with the strategic aim of showing material and symbolic opportunities presented by NGOs in favela contexts. It depicts the doubts, the accidents, the ups and downs, the depression of crime and poverty and, finally, the

- joy of personal and NGO liberation. It is a tale about Anderson, who, in 'real life', turned out to be one of the most popular boys in a group made extremely successful by the film. The ambiguity between the person and the NGO is enormous. As with other Brazilian films in the genre, success and failure are the main narrative themes.
- 11. It is important to note the progressively popular awareness of how Iberian colonialism and its Latin American slavery system, dating from the 16th century, affected Brazil. It gave the country a particular social stratification and lasting inequality (Tilly 1999), as well as creating social-racial movements.
- 12. The concept has been revised in its rhetoric, in part deriving from the globalization phenomenon, transnationality, postcolonialism and diaspora that mark the return of 'race' in the domains of cultural affirmation (de Almeida 2002). In this essay, I use hybridism to consider the game of attraction and opposition between spheres of actions, such as 'the social', 'the cultural' and 'the personal', played out for their particular effects.
- 13. Marcio Goldman (2009), for instance, argues that the analytical categories suitable for the study of this phenomenon in Brazil are still being developed, which raises some important questions: Has there been a turning away from the social towards the cultural? Can we call this a search for the social uses of cultural purposes? From this perspective, we can think of 'culture' as societies in movement: not only as a process *per se*, but a social agency project. In addition, 'cultural movements' must be seen not only as the result of citizenship, but as interpersonal and collective experiences of these social contexts in movement.
- 14. Portugal has a higher rate of poverty risk than most European countries. About one in every five people (21% of the population) lives below the poverty line. And the risk of this situation continuing is estimated at 15% (cf. Oikos, *Social Watch Report 2007* and OCDE 2007).
- 15. The favelas of Rio and Lisbon's bairros de lata certainly vary in size and social heterogeneity. For instance, Rocinha is said to be one of the largest favelas: a city inside the city, with all the possible variations. However, the population of Vigário is not so very different from that of Cova da Moura, with between 6,000 and 8,000 residents.
- 16. The risk of violent death among young black males (between 15 and 24 years old) living in poor neighbourhoods and *favelas* (Ramos 2007) has been a discussion point in the context of Brazilian NGOs and political movements since the 1990s.
- 17. The idea of a 'citizenship of opportunities' I propose here, based in the observation of subjective local experiences, dialogue with the idea defended by Yúdice (2000), when he says we are witnessing the emergence of social transformations coming from Brazil urban peripheries that may be defined as 'cultural citizenship'. Nevertheless, when using the complex notion of culture without defining it, the author's proposition remain unclear.

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