



Youth, Young Adulthood and Society

BRAZILIAN YOUTH

GLOBAL TRENDS AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
Cláudia Pereira



ROUTLEDGE

Brazilian Youth

The collection brings together texts of Brazilian researchers who are dedicated to themes related to studies of youth cultures: social interactions, subcultures, identities and belonging, pop culture, social movements, migration, consumption and materialities, generational exchanges, media representations and digital media, among others.

The objective is to promote a broad dialogue that includes fields of knowledge such as communication and social sciences, as well as local perspectives that represent the huge and rich diversity of the Brazilian regions. At the same time, the book proposes to discuss the reflexivity of such local youth cultures in the face of a global context that challenges, with ruptures and permanencies, the very idea of youth. The book seeks to fill the gap of a selection of scientific texts by Brazilian authors, about Brazilian youth cultures, aimed at foreign researchers.

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Youth, Young Adulthood and Society

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I dedicate this book to João Pereira, my beloved father, who used to be so proud of me. And to Sônia, my dear mother, with whom I walk side by side in this short journey that is life.



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Preface

Ruth Adams

As I was writing this preface, Jair Bolsonaro, the recently elected, authoritarian president of Brazil, announced his intention to cut the funding of philosophy and sociology programmes at public universities. That this came on the same day as an assertion that the country must not become a “gay tourism paradise” and the censorship of a bank advert featuring positive representations of black and trans people, gives a flavor of the threat that Bolsonaro’s administration poses to critical thinking and alternative lifestyles and identities in Brazil. His policies and pronouncements explicitly challenge the status and the safety of numerous minority and marginalized communities: the poor, women, and black, indigenous, and LGBTQ+ communities. Consequently, this indicates too what a timely and important book this is. It is timely and important not just because it offers a corrective to the growing constraints being placed on Brazil’s intellectual and cultural life and celebrates diverse forms of creative action and resistance but also because it provides a snapshot of Brazilian youth culture *before* Bolsonaro; a period that, while very recent, is now also historical.

This is not to imply that Brazil before Bolsonaro was without its problems. In many ways he can be regarded as a symptom rather than cause, a symptom of a rapidly escalating political and economic crisis marking the end of a period of apparent growth and stability when the country felt ready to open itself up to a global audience, hosting the Football World Cup Finals in 2014 and the Olympic Games in 2016. I say apparent, because as the crisis deepened it became increasingly evident that long-entrenched divisions and inequalities along the lines of class, ethnicity, region, religion, gender and sexuality had been ameliorated but not exiated and continued to fester not far beneath the surface.

But this negative narrative in no way tells the full story of Brazilian society and culture or of the country’s immense and exceptionally diverse population. Brazil, as the editor of this volume notes, is a nation of superlatives, of paradox and of dichotomies. A huge country, rich in natural resources and beauty, it boasts a cultural and intellectual vibrancy proportionate to its size, both because of and despite its complex and not always happy history. Throughout the world Brazil has a reputation for excitement and a particular type of Latin, hedonistic fun, of futebol, Carnaval, Carmen Miranda, caipirinhas and Capoeira. Rio de Janeiro, in

particular, continues to enjoy a reputation in the West as an exotic and glamorous tourist destination. But again, these more positive stereotypes are only part of the story of a country that is complex, contradictory and often full of surprises.

The collection of chapters in this book make a contribution to painting a picture of Brazil that goes deeper than the persistent national stereotypes and decontextualized snapshots that foreigners see on the news. It tells stories of the cultural and political lives lived by young Brazilians in a variety of different spaces and places. It shines a light on some unfamiliar (to Western readers) activities and ontologies, locating these within a global context whilst emphasizing the importance of understanding the specifics of local circumstances. The book brings together a collection of innovative and fascinating scholarship in one place, allowing the reader to find patterns and connections between chapters in addition to the insights offered by each individual chapter.

The book also functions as a useful addition and corrective to the Western canon of youth and subculture studies which is dominated by Anglophone authors and their perspectives (as is global scholarship more generally). As Cláudia Pereira, the editor of this collection, notes, it can be difficult for Brazilian and lusophone academics to find an international readership for their research, and this volume makes a small but significant contribution to amending this imbalance. This is of advantage not just to the authors but to anyone with an interest in youth culture and a desire to gain a wider, cross-cultural perspective on the topic. In an increasingly globalised world, it is no longer sufficient – if it ever were – to look at cultural expressions in isolation, without acknowledging the broader contexts and networks within which they develop. A number of chapters in this book examine the ways that global cultural and media phenomena, such as YouTube, Beyoncé and the goth subculture, have been adopted and adapted to meet and reflect the specific social and cultural needs and wants of Brazilian youth. However, Cláudia Pereira poses the question, “Can we also believe that Brazilian youth cultures, those that constitute artistic expressions, for example, modify the global youth cultures?” I think we can, and would offer the growing popularity (in both audience size and distribution) of funk music. Funk music, usually described as *Baile* or *Carioca funk* in Western contexts to distinguish it from the North American variant, has become the dominant form of popular music in Brazil. A bass-heavy party music, often with rap-style vocals, that emerged from Rio’s *favelas*, it has enjoyed a cult following in Europe and North America in the twenty-first century, influencing hit records by the likes of Diplo and M.I.A. However, prompted in part by the international exposure afforded by the Olympics and the rise of streaming services, it has started to reach a bigger global audience. In December 2017, funk megastar Anitta’s song “Vai Malandra” became the first Portuguese-language release to find a place on Spotify’s Global Top 50 Chart.

Brazil and its youth culture(s) are distinctive and unique, but they also share some common characteristics with other countries and cultures, which further increases this book’s interest for an international readership. As James Joyce observed, “In the particular is contained the universal”, or as the editor of this

volume asserts, “the different situations of young Brazilians can illustrate, as case studies, issues that concern young people around the world. After all, they are young people who are living with inequalities, violence, insecurities and vulnerabilities, but also with a lot of creativity to survive all of this”. Specifically, readers from nations with colonial histories which are now grappling with the ramifications of those pasts in a multicultural present may find the opportunity to make comparisons between Brazil and their home nations both fruitful and enlightening.

This certainly reflects my own experiences. I owe my first encounters with Brazilian youth and youth culture to Cláudia Pereira when, in spring 2015, she invited me to PUC-Rio to give a number of guest lectures on the creative industries sector and youth culture in the UK. Lively conversations with her students and colleagues indicated shared themes and concerns and encouraged me to explore these further in collaborative conferences and publications and my teaching in London and Rio. A London music scene like Grime, a predominantly black, working-class genre which combines the polyglot sounds of a world city and the global reach of social media with an intense localism, can speak to Brazilian youth, as the Carioca funk and Passinho dance scenes of Rio can speak to young people in the UK, with both their similarities and differences cause for fascination. In both places, the popular success of these styles and the voice they offer to marginalised groups have facilitated a growing sense of self-worth and community in socio-economic contexts which actively militate against this. As Aline Maia observes: “passinho reveals common aspects of individuals from *favelas*, everyday situations and the relationship with the territory that in response to a stigma of place, it has been re-signified in the pride of the statement ‘I am favelado’”. As such, these cultures can be thought of as a form of revolutionary social action as well as creative production.

The popular success of “ghetto” cultures such as passinho has facilitated a degree of social mobility, producing a fraction of young, working class people, suggests Cláudia Pereira, “who go through social inequalities, leaving daily from poor and peripheral neighbourhoods, crossing social barriers erected in the form of malls and luxury nightclubs, becoming mediators, taking and bringing culture from one side to the other”. Reading this reminded me of a memorable evening spent at the Caixa Cultural Centre in Rio, enjoying history and dance lessons from Cebolinha, a famed exponent of passinho. Confident and articulate as this young man was, the class and ethnic differences between him and the majority of his audience at a predominantly white and middle-class downtown arts venue was marked. It pointed to the limitations of such social mobility; he was a tourist in his own city, as was his audience, arguably entranced by an exhibition of domestic exoticism as well as physical and artistic skill. The mainstream might attempt to repress and diminish such autonomous creative flowerings, but equally they may seek to exploit their (sub)cultural capital, or as Cláudia Pereira suggests, they may be “coveted and well paid by companies, who take to themselves the image of an ‘other’ that comes to their lucrative interests”. A notable example was the

Passinho Dream Team that was assembled and sponsored by Coca-Cola as part of their marketing drive connected to the 2014 Football World Cup Finals. An audience member at the Caixa event expressed the opinion that this was an example of passinho “selling out”, only to be informed by Cebolinha that one of the group was his sibling, and that his community were for the most part thrilled that the dance style was becoming accepted and offering careers and a means of escape for a chosen few. There is, however, a thin and constantly moving line between cultural legitimacy and cultural appropriation and exploitation, between autonomy and hegemony. Again, we can see that these case studies from Brazil offer unique, culturally specific insights but also speak to broader phenomena in youth cultures and Youth Culture Studies. How to maintain an “authenticity” of style and purpose that satisfies both the originating community and external interests (and particularly in instances when that “authenticity” might be equated with poverty and/or criminality) and fulfil the emancipatory potential of finding a wider audience for marginal cultures, identities, actions and positions when capitalism is the only available vehicle is perhaps the most knotty and universal dilemma of youth cultures across space and time.

Despite the darkening political clouds in Brazil and elsewhere, we, like the authors of this book, can find hope in the attitudes, actions and bravery of young people in taking a stand against inequality, violence and corruption. At PUC-Rio the students renamed one of the university’s administrative buildings after Marielle Franco, the black, bisexual, feminist political activist who made the transition from *favela* to serving as a member of the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro. Franco was assassinated in March 2018, aged only 38. The students’ gesture can be understood as part of the wider grassroots movement of “Marielle Presente” (Marielle is here), which seeks not just to honour her memory but to ensure her image and values are not erased from public life or public spaces (including Carnival), despite the best efforts of the authorities. During the period of the election which saw Bolsonaro victorious, students and universities across Brazil risked censure and worse by publicly demonstrating their opposition to fascism. Campuses were raided by federal and military police to remove the evidence of this political opposition and to disrupt classes regarded as encouraging dissent. When the “adults” in power are deemed to be inept or downright dangerous, it is often the youth that step up to be counted and attempt to take charge, now armed with the “digital native’s” understanding of social media and technology, of public discourse and political process, an action that provokes suspicion and hostility amongst established elites. Witness, for example, the attempts to discredit Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish climate change activist who has managed to mobilise support and political action from school children and adults alike and gain the ear of politicians and opinion formers across the world. As Cláudia Pereira observes: “Since the ‘adults’ are now confronted to a new political player, the ‘Other’ that comes to arise, they ask themselves, ‘who are these adolescents and youngsters that put in doubt our system? Where do they come from? What are the forces that support them?’” That this would seem to be a widespread phenomenon further supports the case that

research that focusses on the specifics of the lives and activities of Brazilian youths can have a wider resonance and relevance across cultures and continents and indicates the topicality and significance of this book and the stories it tells. But these accounts and analyses of Brazilian youth can claim their own inherent value and interest; they are windows into lives rarely known or accessible to overseas readers and, as such, can enrich our understanding of the world around us.

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This collection could not be carried out without the cooperation of many people, some of whom I may, from pure and unjust oblivion, fail to mention here. I therefore address my first thanks to all those who, directly or indirectly, take care of my affective health, encourage my projects, inspire my days, support practical things, finance my ideas and gently accept to be observed, interviewed, analyzed.

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I thank all of my students for inspiring daily exchanges.

Introduction

Visiting Brazilian youth paradoxes

Cláudia Pereira

Brazil is a place of continental dimensions, with a territory of more than 8 million square kilometers – so huge that there are only four other countries that are larger. Its lands are divided into five major regions (North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and South), through which 26 states are distributed (plus the Federal District of Brasília, the capital of the country) and 5,570 cities. In Brazil, everything is superlative: we have the largest forest in the world (the Amazon rainforest) and the tenth most populous city in the world (São Paulo), as well as the Samba Schools Parade in Rio de Janeiro, the biggest popular party in the world. We are also among the ten countries with the greatest social inequality on the planet.

We are one of the greatest in the world in many respects, both positive and negative, and consequently we have brought together many worlds in one place. We are more than 200 million Brazilians, including 50 million (almost an entire England) ones who are young people from 15 to 29 years old. So we already have a problem with the title of this collection: can we talk about “Brazilian Youth”? Can we talk about, in fact, a single youth, despite all the social, political and economic crises that affect him or her?

The challenge of the social sciences in the sense of investigating youth in all its plurality has long been accepted, and, we may say, surpassed. The “youth culture” that Edgar Morin (2006) analyzed in the emergence of mass culture in the ’60s and ’70s no longer exists in its original form. The world is now fragmented and unfolded in other universes, such as the internet, and with them, we have seen the suppression of distances and the extension of some generational categories – after all, what is it to be “old” or “young” today? Youth, as an object of study, becomes more complex and invites us to abandon the *doxa* and visit the *paradox*. Brazil, for all its characteristics, is given to paradoxes. And to understand them through their youth cultures is what motivates this collection.

For José Machado Pais (1993), the idea of “youth culture” is directly related to “leisure culture”, in a sense that it is a way of saying, “Hey, we are distant and different from you and your values, stupid adult”. For British cultural studies, Youth Culture (with capital letters Y and C) is a specific social phenomenon in postwar England when youth subcultures emerged – of mods and rockers at first and then punks and skinheads (Clarke et al., 2003), – directly related to the idea of