**The Dissertation Committee for Eliseo Josué Jacob Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

# The Gritty City: Representations of Male Youth in the Works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez

**Committee:**

Sonia Roncador, Supervisor

Jossianna Arroyo-Martinez

Lorraine Leu Moore

Omoniyi Afolabi

João Camillo Penna

# The Gritty City: Representations of Male Youth in the Works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez

by

## Eliseo Josué Jacob, B.A.; M.A.

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# Dedication

To *la reina del mar,* my wife, Marina.

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This project, along with my graduate studies, has been a long journey that could not have been completed without the patience and guidance of loved ones, friends, colleagues and professors that continually kept me on course amidst the challenges of completing my dissertation.

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# The Gritty City: Representations of Male Youth in the Works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez

Eliseo Josué Jacob, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Sonia Roncador

This dissertation examines the ways in which Ferréz Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez negotiate the global subordination of diasporic subjects in São Paulo and New York. Through a street aesthetic of the urban underworld, these four writers explore social inequalities tied to race and social class in the urban periphery. In São Paulo, Ferréz and Sacolinha use the public transit system to examine the contained mobility of residents of the *periferia*. Through encounters with criminality, Ferréz critiques the image of the *criminoso* associated with the marginal space of the *periferia*. Sacolinha analyzes systemic inequalities through the *cobrador's* use of the *perua*, which functions as a subversive tactic against governmental organizations. In New York, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez address the marginalization of urban Latino youth on the streets of the inner city. Díaz complicates the fractured identity of Dominican American youth who experience stigma in relation to the U.S.'s black-white racial binary. By dissecting the relationship between crime and hegemonic social structures, Quiñonez traces Spanish Harlem residents' colonized, racialized status as Puerto Ricans in New

York.  In the literary works of the four authors, young protagonists roam the streets,

maintaining a macho demeanor to conceal their insecurities and to appear to others -- and

more importantly to themselves -- as tough individuals who will not crack under pressure.

The aggressive, fearless attitude that they embody allows them to survive the inner city

streets.  They face an endless cycle of suspicion, racial discrimination and lack of

resources, which limits their chances for social mobility.

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# Introduction:  Street Literature in São Paulo and New York

*"race [is] an unstable and 'de-centered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle".*

*- Omi and Winant 1986*

*What I have coined "dialectic of marginality" underscores a new form of relationship between social classes. It no longer favours neglecting differences, but rather brings them to the fore, refusing the uncertain promise of social reconciliation. In this context, it is important to clarify that the term "marginal" does not have necessarily and exclusively a derogative meaning, representing above all (although not exclusively) the majority of the population impoverished and excluded from the benefits of social progress.*

*-João Cezar de Castro Rocha, "Dialectic of Marginality"*

This dissertation examines the ways in which the literary works of Ferréz and Sacolinha, Afro-Brazilian writers, and Junot Díaz and Ernsesto Quiñonez, Afro-Latino writers, refashion a street aesthetic that frames the globalized oppression of black diasporic subjects.[1]  The literary texts discussed in this dissertation directly address racial inequality through a brutal and vulgar street aesthetic that amplifies the everyday experiences of urban life.  Through this street aesthetic, the writers offer uncensored images of racism and cyclical poverty, which will be discussed in depth later on in this chapter.  The four writers' analysis of the oppression of black subjects in urban areas echoes the political shift in Brazil and in the U.S. since the 1990s.  In the United States,

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[1] Ferréz and Sacolinha have published literary works about São Paulo's *periferia*, while Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez write about hardship in Latino communities in the New York tri-state region.  Significant works by Ferréz include *Capão Pecado* (2000), *Manual prático do ódio* (2003), *Ninguém é inocente em São Paulo* (2006) and *Deus foi almoçar* (2012).  For Sacolinha, see the following works: *Graduado em marginalidade* (2005), *85 letras e um disparo* (2007), *Estação Terminal* (2010) and *Manteiga de cacau* (2012).  Significant works by Junot Díaz include *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008) and *This is How You Lose Her* (2012).  For Ernesto Quiñonez, see *Bodega Dreams* (2000) and *Chango's Fire* (2004).

unprecedented numbers of Latino writers gained greater access to the literary market in the 1990s.[2]  Brazilian literature also experienced a significant change during this same period, as narratives about the urban periphery and non-white populations gained more traction on the national scene.[3]  These four writers from São Paulo and New York capture the prominence of urban fiction at the turn of the 21st century that rescues the ignored experiences of marginalized, diasporic subject.

In recent decades, underrepresented groups in both the United States and Brazil have increasingly gained visibility at the national level and have demanded equal rights and improved living conditions.  In Brazil, following the *Abertura* of the 1980s, the transition from a military dictatorship to a democratic government fostered an increasingly open political environment that allowed historically marginalized social groups to voice concerns.[4] Underserved groups, particularly Afro-Brazilians, demanded recognition of the racial subjugation that they experienced and sought active participation in the political process.  The increased visibility of subaltern groups at the close of the 20th century in Brazil uncovered racial inequalities that were previously minimized.  In the United States, the 1960s Civil Rights era brought attention to socio-economic

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[2] Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez's *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-sixties Literature* (2007) provides an in depth analysis of the entrance of urban Latino fiction from the New York metropolitan region into the mainstream literary market during the 1990s and 2000s.

[3] See Beatriz Resende's *Apontamentos de crítica cultural* (2002) for essays on the emergence of marginal literature and music in Brazil.

[4] See Michael Hanchard's study on the Black rights movements in Brazil, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, 1945-1988* (1994), which includes information on how Afro-Brazilian cultural and political organizations were impacted by the return to a democratic form of government in Brazil during the 1980s.  Derek Pardue's *Ideologies of Marginality in Brazilian Hip-Hop* (2008) provides insight into a cultural and social movement that emerged during the late 1980s in the urban periphery among a primarily Afro-descendant population: Hip Hop.

disparity and unequal access to education.[5]  As more people of color attended college and gained increased representation in the media through the 1990s, their experiences were increasingly added to the national dialogue (Dávila 83-85).  During the culture and drug wars of this time period, the increased visibility of marginal voices brought attention to the long history of discrimination that people of color faced throughout the 20th century.[6] These significant social changes have allowed urban writers of color to not only write about their experiences in the inner city, but also to widely disseminate their works, thereby creating a dialogue with the cannon and shaping new representations of counter-narratives.

Following two decades of military dictatorship, Brazil's return to democracy through the *Abertura*[7] of the 1980s called for recognition of the racial and ethnic backgrounds non-white Brazilians.  During this time, activists demanded integration into government administrations on the municipal and state levels (Hanchard 133-34).  Activists and intellectuals have used Afro-Brazilian cultural production as a way to respond to the exclusionary practices of the state (Afolabi 4).  Cultural productions by Afro-Brazilians increased attention to current inequalities and histories of injustice tied to race.  Dominating the political culture of Brazil's northeast region during this time, the *Blocos Afros* (African Blocs) called on the music, art and theater (Hanchard 138).  Black

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[5] Juan Flores' *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000) and Arlene Dávila's *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (2004) provide extensive historical data on the importance of political and cultural organizations that advocated for Latino rights from the 1960s to the turn of the 21st century.

[6] See Robin D.G. Kelley's *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (1997) for additional analysis on the effect of the culture and drug wars of the 1980s and 1990s on communities of color in the U.S.

[7] In English *Abertura* means the "opening".

culture and its contribution to Brazilian history became institutionalized through the establishment of ethnic-centered organizations.

Composing literary works with race and social class as a central component, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez introduce protagonists who face social obstacles as a result of their racial background and socio-economic status. Situating themselves within the African diaspora, these authors point to the history of colonial subjugation and racial subordination experienced by their respective communities through racial profiling, lack of access to education, less funded schools, socio-economic inequality, police brutality and low paying jobs due to hierarchy in the system of labor. Ferréz and Sacolinha explore racial discrimination by employers, the police and other authority figures and invoke traditions tied to the African diaspora, such as capoeira, candomblé and musical practices, including samba and rap.[8] Similarly, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez accentuate the racial features of their Afro-Caribbean protagonists, contesting the negative connotations associated with blackness in the United States.[9] In light of the colonial racial histories of the United States and Brazil, these writers call upon the increased visibility of the black diasporic subject.

This dissertation brings together writers from São Paulo and New York in order to examine representations of the systemic oppression of marginalized, racialized bodies in the 1990s and 2000s, a period marked by racial tensions, police brutality, racial profiling

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[8] See Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva's book, *A descoberta do insólito: literatura negra e literatura periférica no Brasil (1960-2000)* (2014) for a study on the connections between Afro-descendant and peripheral literatures in Brazil.

[9] Ernesto Quiñonez's journalistic articles, "The Brown and Black Divide" (2008) and "Y Tu Black Mama, También" (2003) offer commentary on the complexities of Afro-Latino identity in the United States and the Caribbean.

and inadequate access to educational resources in inner city neighborhoods. By combining these writers in the same study, this dissertation emphasizes the prominence of urban fiction about people of color in contemporary Latin American literature at the turn of the 21st century.[10] The works of Ferréz and Sacolinha have been analyzed in dissertations from the fields of literature, communication studies and education.[11] Published studies on Ferréz and Sacolinha have focused on their public projects from an anthropological perspective, or have placed them in the larger context of Brazilian urban peripheral fiction.[12] This dissertation contributes to the existing body of scholarly work on *periferia* literature in Brazil by examining how the four writers complicate sanitized views of social disparity promoted by the ruling classes, resulting in the increased visibility of urban, diasporic subjects. In recent years, Latino literature from and about the inner city, including the works of Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez has gained attention in Latino literary studies.[13] My dissertation adds to the research on contemporary Latino literature by examining the fractured identities of Latino youth who navigate the spheres of legitimate and underground forms of social mobility in order to

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[10] While literature about individuals of African-descent was published throughout the 19th and 20th century, it appeared sporadically or was recovered as a part of historical projects. See Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo* in Cuba, Pedro Juan Soto's *Spiks* in New York, Manuel Zapata Olivella's *Chambacú: corral de negros* in Colombia and Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo* in Brazil for examples of literature about people of color.

[11] See Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva's dissertation "A Descoberta do Insólito: Literatura Negra e Literatura Periférica no Brasil (1960-2000)," Paulo Roberto Tonani's dissertation, "Escritos à margem: a presença de escritores de periferia na cena literária contemporânea," and Mei Hua Soares' dissertation, "A literatura marginal-periférica na escolar."

[12] See Erica Peçanha do Nascimento's landmark work, *Vozes Marginais na Literatura*, Tânia Pellegrini's *Despropósitos* and Beatriz Resende's *Contemporâneos: Expressões da literatura brasileira no século XXI*.

[13] See Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's book, *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* and Antonia Dominguez Miguela's "Literary Tropicalizations of the Barrio: Ernesto Quiñonez's Bodega Dreams and Ed Vega's Mendoza Dreams."

negotiate the subordinate status of their colonialized, racialized selves. Studies have been published on Junot Díaz, Ernesto Quiñonez, Ferréz and Sacolinha; however, none have examined these writers together. By examining these four writers in the same project, this dissertation uncovers larger trends of marginalization and cyclical poverty that impact urban, diasporic communities throughout the Americas.

## GLOBAL COLONIALITY & RACE

Engaging the racial formation of diasporic subjects, the literary works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez examine the socio-economic disparity and political invisibility of urban peripheries in São Paulo and New York. Locating these writers within the framework of the Black/African Diaspora demonstrates how racial dynamics function on a local and a global level. In the case of the Black/African Diaspora, Black *roots* and Black *routes* connect individuals and communities of African descent through a shared racial ancestry and history of displacement. The unequal distribution of resources characterizes diasporic communities in São Paulo's *periferia* and New York's inner city making clandestine activities a viable method of negotiating cyclical poverty and racial subordination. The Black/African Diaspora provides a framework for understanding the nature of racial subordination in the works of Ferréz and Sacolinha, in São Paulo, and Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez, in New York. As Edmund T. Gordon argues: "The diasporic framework places seemingly disparate processes of racial formation in dialogue, enabling us to recognize and articulate how race operates locally and globally" (94).[14]  The notion of the Black/African Diaspora

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[14] Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (1986) provides a historical context for understanding the formation of racial categories and hierarchies in the U.S. For analysis on racial formation in Brazil, see Howard Winant's *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy*

links the development of racial identities in São Paulo's *periferia* (Ferréz and Sacolinha) and New York's inner city (Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez) through establishing shared histories and patterns of exploitation.[15]

On the other hand, Gordon notes that racial oppression does not occur disassociated from other social factors: "As we understand it, race is neither adequately understood nor lived absent inter-articulating and mutually constituting axes of [at least] gender, class, and sexuality" (95). Identity markers besides race must be considered when dealing with the social marginalization of diasporic subjects. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, an intersectional approach must be used to recognize other influences (i.e., social class and gender) combined with the category of race when dealing with discrimination (40). In the case of youth from the urban periphery, racial background and intersecting identity markers must be considered together in order to contextualize the oppression that they experience. The classifications of race, gender and social class impact identity and determine who is susceptible to marginalization.[16] For example, the protagonists of the four writers examined in this dissertation are young,

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*Since World War II* (2001) and Thomas Skidmore's *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (1993).

[15] For additional perspectives on the Black/African Diaspora, see also W.E.B. Du Bois, Audre Lorde and John Gibbs St. Clair Drake. Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) lays out several key concepts that bring a deeper understanding to the perspective of Afro-descendant populations in the west, such as double consciousness and the veil. Drake's *The Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (1945) offered a landmark study on race and urban life through his examination of Chicago's African American communities. Lorde's studies, including *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) are based on the theory of difference, which argues that the binary opposition between men and women is too simplistic to understand the complexities of race, social class and gender that determine social hierarchies.

[16] For more on the intersections between race and gender, including the relationship between masculinity and Blackness, see Robert Staples' *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (1982), bell hooks' *We real cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) and Ronald Jackson's *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (2006). Barbara Christian's *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985) also considers how gender should be included with race when analyzing social inequality.

Black men from the urban periphery, and these axes of identity impact social participation and civic engagement.

Throughout the Americas, including New York and São Paulo, individuals of African descent share histories of exploitation and segregation tied to their racial background. Ted Gordon's notion of Diaspora incorporates historical power dynamics based on race. He uses the term Black *roots* to mean "the politics and experiences of many Black people of meaningful connections to 'imagined' or 'real' African ancestry and culture" (94). He also references the significance of the relocation of Afro-descendent populations through the idea of routes:

> Black *routes* being the historical and political–economic processes by which Black identities have been constructed within and across local places and national spaces—for example, Brixton, New Orleans, Port Au Prince and Rio de Janeiro—made up of folks with similar relationships to racialized power hierarchies who recognize each other as connected and potentially collective." (94)

Based on shared ancestry among individuals of African descent living in different regions of the globe, the idea of *roots* provides a foundation for understanding identity formation prior to the dispersion of Black bodies through enslavement, colonization, and migration. Robin D. G. Kelley's idea of a Black radical imagination illustrates how Afro-descendant artists capture their communities' resiliency in the face of racial violence and cyclical poverty (5-6). Artists' attempts to understand and withstand racial subjugation in different areas of the globe (i.e., Ferréz and Sacolinha in São Paulo, and Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez in the New York metropolitan region) emphasize how diasporic subjects' resistance to oppression goes beyond the immediacy of their local community. Traversing national boundaries, *routes* connect local communities to global hierarchies of race, which explains how the urban peripheries of São Paulo and New York face comparable dynamics of racial subordination.

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The themes of racial subordination and cyclical poverty engaged by Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez points to the systemic oppression of Afro-descendant subjects. In the U.S. and Brazil, Afro-descendant populations have encountered marginalization and economic exploitation due to their racial background (Winant 98-99). Albeit distinct, racial hierarchies in both nations established patterns of political and social oppression.[17] The four writers literary works call upon similar narratives of racial subjugation, which reiterates the presence of the Black/African diaspora found in urban peripheral communities. Given that primarily Afro-descendant populations inhabit the marginalized communities of these urban centers, citizens experience *de facto* segregation according to racial hierarchies in the U.S. and Brazil.[18] Forced to living in squalid conditions, society views residents from the urban peripheries with suspicion and not as citizens who should have access to the same resources and rights. In Brazil's urban areas, marginalized subjects typically remain confined to the outskirts of society. Teresa Caldeira documents in *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* how working class populations of color were systematically segregated from wealthy districts and pushed to the outskirts of São Paulo. Their expulsion from the city center results in a lack of access to resources. The oppressive conditions they endure in Brazil's cities reinforce inequality based on racial differences and class (Sheriff 17). Likewise, Afro-Latino communities in the New York metropolitan region remain primarily confined to impoverished, inner city communities

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[17] James Holston's *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (2008) focuses primarily on marginal communities in Brazil, but he does offer a brief analysis of racial and social class formations in the U.S. as a point of comparison. Howard Winant's *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (2001) also provides individual case studies on Brazil and the United States to understand how racial dynamics have formed in each nation.

[18] See Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (1986) for an in depth analysis on how racial dynamics have impacted social relationships and the distribution of political rights in the west.

(Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* 45-46)**.** In Latino neighborhoods, such as Spanish Harlem, residents increasingly experience precarious living conditions due to decaying housing projects, drugs and crime (Dávila 31). Subjected to unjust practices, such as racial profiling by the police and segregated housing projects, Latino citizens remain trapped in the inner city. The *periferia* of São Paulo and the inner city of New York contain large numbers of Afro-descendant individuals viewed with suspicion due to economic and political policies that limit opportunities for full integration into society.

The state and ruling classes in Brazil and the U.S. limit the political rights of non-white, urban populations, which result in racial and economic inequalities. For James Holston, modern, western nations classify their inhabitants as citizens, but not all have equal rights before the law (4-5). His examples of the U.S., France and Brazil demonstrate the prevalence of hierarchical structures of citizenship in the west (Holston 21). While differences exist among these nations in terms of what citizenship rights are afforded to various demographic groups, they share the unfortunate reality that certain individuals lack equal political access due to their racial and social class background. Holston defines this inequality as differentiated citizenship, where all inhabitants of a nation are recognized as citizens of the state, but access to political power and social privilege remains in the hands of a small percentage of the general population (5-9). The unequal distribution of citizenship rights result from the passage of laws and *de facto* social practices that benefit only a small portion of the population. In terms of social class, property holdings and wealth determine who has access to the political sphere, which includes voting.

The literary texts of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez illustrate the ways in which activities not authorized by the state function as a form of resistance to

the inequality found in urban peripheral communities.[19]  Seen as a threat to the stability and safety of society, non-white, working class residents from the inner city encounter limited opportunities for social mobility.  They must work low wage jobs and face frequent unemployment and/or find other options that counter the systemic oppression of inner city communities of color.  Subversive activities allow urban periphery residents to counter racism and the lack of economic opportunity.  Rather than engaging sanctioned legal avenues, residents employ prohibited strategies that bypass unjust laws.  This unconventional approach may not offer long-term solutions to societal inequalities tied to race, but it allows urban peripheral residents to moderate cyclical poverty and racial discrimination.

Race plays a central role in the experience of citizenship as Black and Indigenous populations encounter policies that further segregate them from mainstream society and give more power to the upper classes.  Ironically, the state functions as a democracy for a small portion of the population while citizens with limited rights find themselves at the mercy of the ruling class whose self-interests come first over the well being of others. The racial oppression of the urban peripheries of São Paulo and New York leads to the unequal division of political rights and resources. Literary works about the urban peripheries examine differentiated citizenship through images of never ending poverty and racial discrimination that affect these communities.  Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez bring attention to the dynamics of differentiated citizenship that have contributed to their communities' political invisibility.  No matter how discomforting, they call upon their community's history in order to examine the social inequality that results from racial profiling and unequal distribution of resources

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[19] See Leila Lehnen's recent study, *Citizenship and Crisis in Contemporary Brazilian Literature* (2013) for additional examples of contemporary urban writers who use their literary works to explore ideas of citizenship through subversive tactics.

## STREET AESTHETICS

Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez employ a street aesthetic that calls attention to institutionalized practices of racism and social inequality by stressing the minutia of the urban periphery's brutal environment. Through an uncensored prose, these writers encapsulate the tumultuous atmosphere of urban spaces, underscoring the cultural-political landscape of social disparity, violence and isolation. Inner city residents face problems associated with social inequality, such as living in public housing, unemployment and racial discrimination. Literature about individuals who inhabit peripheral communities can be defined as "lower case literature," and the protagonists can be considered *"gente minúscula"* (small, or lower-case people).[20] The protagonists survive the inner city streets by maintaining a tough demeanor. Through slang, blurring the lines between the written and the spoken, a rapid pace and the brutal depiction of violence, crime and poverty, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez convey the complex social problems of race and poverty in inner city communities.

Framed by the concept of social marginalization, the street aesthetic employed by Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez functions to illuminate the cyclical poverty, racism and violence that shape the social and physical landscape of the urban periphery. Nelson de Oliveira's *"gente minúscula"* and Juan Flores' "lower case people" define the literary works emerging from São Paulo's *periferia* and New York's inner city as a literature that paints a picture of everyday life in harsh urban environments. The focus on urban life leads to the exhibition of social problems that affect marginalized

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[20] Nelson de Oliveira coins the term *gente minúscula* (small, or lower-case people) to represent individuals who live in simple housing, possess few resources and have limited opportunities for social mobility ("O novo conto"). Juan Flores' notion of a literature of "lower case people" includes works that document the daily experiences of inner city inhabitants who do not have access to formal education, nor the means for social mobility (*From Bomba to Hip-Hop* 184).

communities.  João Castro de Cezar Rocha defines the confrontational approach to the violence and cyclical poverty found in contemporary Latin American literature as a "dialectic of marginality." Karl Erik Schollhammer's work examines the minutia of urban periphery life in the context of harsh living conditions.  David Crouch and Ivana Bentes' observations on urban youth's formation of networks on the city streets can be applied to the works of these four writers, as they frequently use the street to explore how youth navigate the brutal reality of racial subordination and socio-economic marginalization.  Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's notion of the mask compliments Crouch and Bentes by observing urban youth's adoption of a tough exterior to handle the unforgiving nature of the inner city streets.  Taken together, these theorists add to an understanding of social marginalization in urban peripheries.

Ferréz and Sacolinha's works emerged out of the urban fiction of the 1990s in Brazil as mainstream writers published a significant number of novels and short stories that mirrored everyday urban life in Brazil's lower-class communities, establishing a literary precedent in Brazil where the everyday struggles of working class individuals became a central theme in contemporary literature.[21]  As more mainstream writers turned their attention to the city in the 1990s and 2000s, detailed portrayals of individuals inhabiting urban environments become the principal focus for many Brazilian contemporary literary works, and new forms of realism gained prominence, including the *hiper-realismo* and *novo regionalismo* (Schollhammer, *Ficção* 14).  In São Paulo, several

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[21] For examples of this literature see Marçal Aquino's collection of short stories *As fomes de setembro* (1991) and *Miss Danúbio* (1994), Marcelo Mirisola's short story collection *Fátima fez os pés para mostrar na choperia* (1998) and Luiz Ruffato's *Histórias de remorosos e rancores* (1998) and *Os sobreviventes* (2000).  Fernando Bonassi published the novel, *Subúrbio* (1994), which unmasks life in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro.  In 1995, Patricia Melo published the novel *O matador* that provides vivid imagery of the harsh conditions commonly found in Brazil's urban centers.  She continues the themes of violence and despair in her next novel, *Inferno* (2000).

noted writers published works that focus on the everyday details of city life.[22] Ferréz and Sacolinha use realism -- in one form or another -- to underscore the everyday experiences of *periferia* dwellers.  Scenes filled with violence, crime and poverty characterize the literary works of Ferréz and Sacolinha who critique the problems that plague the *periferia* as a means of undoing them.  By directly addressing the challenges faced by *periferia* residents, Ferréz and Sacolinha's literary works reveal societal problems that are the result of social inequalities in education, employment and social services.  Ferréz's novels, *Capão Pecado* (2000) and *Manual prático do ódio* (2003) contain characters that engage in the drug trade and drug use, murder and robbery.  Besides crime and violence, São Paulo's *periferia* historically had few opportunities for social mobility. Sacolinha's book *85 letras e um disparo* (2007) also contains short stories that mirror *periferia* residents' daily battle with scarcity and hunger.  Life in São Paulo's *periferia* contains few economic opportunities, drugs, violence and crime.

Raised in the inner city communities that they portray in their texts, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez illustrate chronic problems tied to inner city neighborhoods' (Spanish Harlem, Washington Heights, the south Bronx and Paterson, New Jersey). [23]

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[22] Luiz Ruffato's book, *Eles eram muito cavalos* (2001), provides a kaleidoscope of experiences connected to urban life. Ana Paula Maia's novel, *Entre rinhas de cachorros e porcos abatidos* (2009), contains two novellas that uncover the daily life of workers in the suburbs of Brazil's urban centers.  Part of a larger series titled "Trilogy of the Common Man," her stories saturate the senses with images of grime, filth and blood.  Published by one of Brazil's premiere book publishers, Companhia das Letras, Paulo Lins' novel, *Cidade de Deus* (1997), was the first major work of fiction by a writer originally from a *periferia* or a *favela*. A significant number of books, films and documentaries about *periferia* and *favela* life also appeared at the turn of the 21st century.  See Paulo Lins' *Cidade de Deus* (1997) and Drauzio Varella's *Estação Carandiru* (1999), films such as Fernando Meirelles' *City of God* (2002), Heitor Babenco's *Carandiru* (2003), Ricardo Elias' *Os 12 Trabalhos* (2007), Paulo Morelli's *Cidade dos homens* (2007) and Jeferson De's *Bróder* (2011), the Rede Globo mini-series *A cidade dos homens* (2002-2005) and the documentaries *Falcão – Meninos do tráfico* (2006) by MV Bill and Celso Athayde, *Bus 174* (2004) and *Favela Uprising* (2005).

[23] Ernesto Quiñonez also writes about the trials of inner city life for Latino youth, but in Spanish Harlem: *Bodega Dreams* (2000) and *Chango's Fire* (2005).  He explores young men's ambivalence towards family and community in Puerto Rican neighborhoods through scenes of inner city crime (Sandín; Dalleo and

The literature of Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez explores young men's ambivalence towards community membership, *de facto* segregation and a generalized lack of opportunity. Latino youth, the protagonists of their literary works, embody the despair of inner city life as they attempt to make sense of divided identities. Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez's literary works resist assimilation by conveying Latino youth's ambiguous status in relation to society and community. In *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity,* Juan Flores argues that urban Latino fiction from New York should be classified as anti-colonial resistance literature since it details the major problems that negatively impact Latino neighborhoods. Resistance literature challenges the "fictions of American democracy and racial equality" (Dalleo and Sáez 26). Resistance literature challenges notions of upward mobility and introduces characters who do not assimilate into mainstream U.S. society. Flores argues that the 1960s and 1970s writers of the Civil Rights Era laid the groundwork for a socially conscious aesthetic by detailing the racism, the drugs and the crime that their characters could not escape, including themes of resistance to mainstream society's efforts to assimilate and oppress communities (*From Bomba to Hip-Hop* 200-01).[24] During the 1990s, Latino writers of Caribbean descent gained more prominence with fiction that depicted the

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Sáez). Junot Díaz's short stories weave a tapestry of young lives struggling with their Dominican identity in *Drown* (1996) and *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007).

[24] Jesús Colón, wrote about Latinos struggling to survive in New York's inner city through his book, *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches* (1961). For Colón, the writer must educate the lower classes through literature so that they may see the inequalities caused by the larger economic system (Dalleo and Sáez 23-24). The biographical approach that he employed in his works would later influence future Latino writers who sought to represent the everyday experience that residents witnessed in their home communities. Piri Thomas built on Jesús Colon's work by publishing a novel that blurred the lines between autobiography and fiction. *Down these mean streets* (1967), an autobiographical account of Piri Thomas' life as a young Puerto Rican man growing up in New York, explores issues related to social class, gang violence and masculinity among marginalized subjects. In the 1970s, Miguel Piñero composed literary works that reflected his personal experiences with drugs and crime in New York's inner cities. One of his most well known works, a theatrical piece titled *Short Eyes* (1974), portrayed the hardships of prison life for men from the inner city.

challenges that Latinos faced in integrating into American society and achieving financial stability (Dalleo and Sáez 25-26).[25]  Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez build on this foundation through their focus on inner city life, particularly among young Latino males, which can be interpreted as a rejection of mainstream ideals of what it means to be an American.  Their protagonists are social misfits who question social hierarchies through their actions.  The lack of resources labels these individuals as outsiders whom society blocks from gaining access to the rights of citizenship.  Because of this social stigma, they resist assimilation into American society, and instead find ways to subvert the system in order to meet their physical needs and to maintain their cultural identity.

Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez produce a sensory overload that functions as a form of social critique. Antônio Cândido views contemporary literature as a "kind of ultra-realism without prejudices" that confronts the reader with the details of urban life, no matter how discomforting or intense the episode (213).[26]  João Cezar de Castro Rocha argues that a "dialectic of marginality" found in contemporary Latin American literature adopts a confrontational attitude**,** providing a critical lens of urban life (1).   In "'The Dialectic of Marginality': preliminary notes on Brazilian contemporary culture," de Castro Rocha writes:

> Whereas the dialectic of malandroism was represented by a joyful way of dealing with social inequalities as well as with everyday life, on the contrary, the dialectic

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[25] Oscar Hijuelos' novel, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989), tells the story of two Cuban brothers who migrate to New York City during the 1950s.  The novel reiterates Latino immigrants' struggle to assimilate in American culture, a common theme found in Latino fiction (Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*; Sandín and Perez).  Julia Alvarez's novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* (1991), a *bildungsroman* that exemplifies the fragmented identities of Dominican-Americans as they attempt to assimilate, emphasizes the ambivalence of Latino youth towards family and community.  In 1994, Esmeralda Santiago published *When I was Puerto Rican,* a memoir about her childhood in Puerto Rico and subsequent migration to Brooklyn.

[26] Alfredo Bosi also comments on a brutal realism that has emerged in Brazil in recent decades.  For more on this recent trend, see his book, *O conto brasileiro contemporâneo* (1975).

of marginality presents itself through the exploration and exacerbation of violence, seen as way of denouncing the social dilemma in Brazil. (2)

Recent literary trends in Latin America take an uncensored approach to societal problems.[27] Malandroism provided the illusion of social harmony among different social classes inhabiting the same social sphere by negating the existence of social tensions. This approach to inequality buttressed the hierarchal structure. As long as societal problems are presented in a non-threatening way, the ruling classes maintain their privileged social status and continue to benefit from the unequal distribution of resources without taking responsibility for the impoverished conditions of marginalized communities. By bringing the prevailing social problems of the city to the forefront, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez take up the dialectic of marginality through representations that challenge hegemonic notions of inequality.

Illuminating the complex dynamics of inner-city conditions is a current trend in Latin American literature. Karl Erik Schollhammer's seminal work, *Ficção brasileira contemporânea*, discusses the two trends of contemporary literature: brutal realism on one side and a fragile introspection on the other side.[28] He discusses "a reinvention of realism" that exposes all aspects of urban life, including poverty, police brutality, drug trafficking, prostitution, inter-personal violence and racism, which mirror the real world

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[27] For example, MV Bill and Luiz Eduardo Soares' book, *Cabeça de porco* (2005), brings attention to the effects of social inequality in Brazil through stark imagery that documents youth involvement with crime and drugs in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*. In Argentina, Cesar Aira's *La Villa* (2001) provides vignettes set in Buenos Aires's slums while Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's *El rey de la Habana* (1999) confronts the government's refusal to acknowledge the poor living conditions many Cubans experience through overwhelming images of filth.

[28] For more on the tensions between the brutal and the delicate in contemporary literature, see See Luciene Azevedo's dissertation, "Estratégias para enfrentar o presente: a performance, o segredo e a memória (2004), Denilson Lopes' essay "Forgetting *City of God:* From a Return of the Real to a Poetics of the Ordinary" and Karl Erick Schollhammer's article, "Realismo afetivo: evocar realismo além da representação" (2012). These recent trends in contemporary Latin American literature can be better understood in the larger context of realism in contemporary art and literature, as analyzed in Hal Foster's seminal work, *The Return of the Real: The Avante-Garde at the End of the Century* (1996).

as closely as possible, no matter how discomforting to the senses (*Ficção* 15).[29]  For the gentler perspective, Schollhammer defines it as the following: "to evoke and to deal with the present become synonymous with a subjective consciousness and with a literary approach with the everyday, the autobiographical and the banal, the subject matter of ordinary life in its smallest details" (*Ficção* 15).[30]  The minutia of everyday life becomes the focal point, clarifying the protagonist's responses to the surrounding environment, no matter how insignificant. Examining the minutia of everyday life in the inner city and engaging the context of abject poverty and violence serves to humanize protagonists who might otherwise be seen as merely deviant.[31]  Analyzing the violence and poverty of the inner city together with the daily experiences of its residents offsets superficial displays of violence.[32]  By focusing on the minutia of everyday life in the inner city, these four authors transgress superficial displays of violence.

The four writers challenge mainstream ideas about taste through literary works that contain gritty scenes of survival and misery that contest notions of refinement. Vulgar aesthetics that overpower the senses question notions of taste.[33]  They disrupt the political hierarchies of taste through a literary project that exhibits a crude and disgusting reality.  Curse words, graphic descriptions of sexual encounters and hostile language

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[29] For writers whose works reinvent realism, see Marcelino Freire, Luiz Ruffato and Marçal Aquino.

[30] See also Adriana Lisboa and Rubens Figueiredo.

[31] Ferréz's op-ed piece on April 5, 2006 in the Folha de São Paulo, "Antropo(hip-hop)logia," argues for literature, art and documentaries that look past the spectacle of violence in order to understand the larger social causes behind the problems of the *periferia*, and in turn, see the complex dynamics of living in marginalized communities.

[32] Denilson Lopes' book, *A delicadeza: estética, experiência e paisagens* (2007), analyses the softer side of contemporary literature.

[33] In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that universal truths are shared among most humans surrounding taste (aesthetics) as to what is considered beautiful.  For Bourdieu, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, taste equates to social power; therefore, higher social classes determine which artistic expressions are the best, acceptable or objectionable.

accentuate the cruel environment of the city.[34]   Dialogues that use coarse language

reproduce the diction of prostitutes, drug dealers and roamers from the city's underworld,

which creates a realist aesthetic of how urban youth speak and act in their own milleu.[35]

The candid use of vulgarity reflects the harshness of the modern city, which can

deconstruct inner city problems.   For example, dialog in a story may employ foul

language to emphasize the frustration that youth experience in challenging social

situations, humanizing them by complicating the taboo elements of their life.

The instability of the street makes it a high-risk environment, but this

characteristic also defines it as a space of flexibility.   David Crouch identifies the street as

a place that enables its inhabitants to move beyond the confines of their current

environment, and he notes that the streets "make escape possible and are a step to

somewhere else, and someone else" (160).[36]   In the case of the protagonists discussed in

this dissertation, the street takes them to spaces beyond the confines of home and to other

youth who roam the streets of inner city communities.   Traveling the streets offers a

momentary release from isolation.[37]   In "Collaborative Networks and the Productive

Precariat", Bentes elaborates on the possibilities that emerge from inner city networks:

> "[The] outskirts produce new neighborhood relations…as well as rhizomatic help
> networks — the culture of parties, religious rituals, samba, funk and hip-hop, an

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[34] Guillermina de Ferrari's study, *Vulnerable States: Bodies of Memory in Contemporary Caribbean Fiction* (2007) focuses on the social and cultural impact of a vulgar and abject aesthetic found in Caribbean literature at the turn of the 21st century.

[35] For example, Ferréz's novel, *Ninguém é inocente em São Paulo* (2006), contains dialogue by bandits in which they frequently use expletives and crude language thereby stressing the *periferia's* unforgiving setting.   In his collection of short stories, *Drown* (1996), Junot Díaz's protagonists, youth from the inner city, expound curse words when in the company of other youth.   Díaz's descriptions of scenes and characters in his literary works also contain profanity to emphasize the harsh tone of the text.

[36] Lyn Di Iorio Sandín also notes the importance of the street in urban Latino fiction in her book, *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity*.

[37] Dalleo and Sáez and Juan Flores (*From Bomba to Hip-Hop*), examine how the protagonists of contemporary urban fiction, primarily young men, look to the street and the clandestine activities associated with it as a means of escaping the poverty and alienation of the inner city.

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entire cultural and affective capital born in an environment of brutality shared by different social groups. From these territories arise cultural practices, aesthetics and networks of sociability and politics forged in the ghettos… (2)

Bentes' analysis that urban, peripheral communities are not merely "factories of poverty and violence," but function as "territories and networks of creation" and offer relief from the desolation of the inner city ("Collaborative Networks" 2).[38] The young protagonists continually seek out ways to not only survive the challenging urban landscape, but also to create informal social structures that allow them to thrive in the face of adversity.

As a component of the protection provided by informal networks on the streets, urban youth adopt a mask that enables them to navigate the harsh environment of the urban periphery. In order to survive the brutal aspects of the street and to maintain their social standing among other tough, street figures, the protagonist must use a façade. Lyn di Iorio Sandín's notion of the mask in *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* illustrates the emotional ambivalence of youth. According to Sandín, the street mask conceals the pain of rejection by general society; it also depicts open defiance of that same society. Sandín uses Piri Thomas' fictionalized autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets,* as the starting point for introducing the notion of the mask (101). According to Sandín, Thomas refers to the mask as "cara palo," meaning "face of wood." The hard surface of the mask symbolizes a tough exterior that cannot be twisted or easily changed; it is physically durable and maintains the same look day after day. Sandín elaborates on this toughness by pointing out how the mask can represent the "street macho…prepared to destroy anyone who challenges the masquerade" (101). The mask functions as a shield, resisting attacks to one's self esteem

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[38] For real world examples of this theory in action, see Guilherme Genestreti and Rafael Gregorio' article, "Mais articulada, cultura da periferia de SP ganha visibilidade" found in the July 15, 2012 edition of the Folha de São Paulo. Arelene Dávila's *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (2004) also provides references to collaborative networks emerging in Spanish Harlem.

due to repeated rejection.  Outside, on the city streets, the wearer of the mask appears strong and intimidating; on the inside, he laments loneliness.  Sandín notes that while the mask worn on the street, it serves "as a form of resistance," it eventually leads to "symbolic immobility" (101).  While the mask may be sturdy and can withstand the inner city's harsh conditions, its immobile features limit the individual's ability to express a range of emotions.  The youth who inhabits the street must uphold his tough demeanor at all costs for two reasons: (1) to appear strong and invulnerable and (2) to inoculate himself from the hostility of inner city life.

The brutal characteristics of urban life come to the forefront in literary works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez, which complicate filtered images of inequality traditionally controlled by the upper classes.  João Cezar de Castro Rocha's dialectic of marginality frames the four writers' unfiltered imagery of violence, racism and poverty that affects the urban periphery.  Delicate moments in the harsh environment of the urban periphery humanize inner city youth who are typically viewed with suspicion.  They inhabit public spaces, including the street, as they navigate racial discrimination and socio-economic disparity.

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1, "Social Marginalization and Public Transit in Ferréz's Novels," examines Ferréz's reevaluation of the image of criminality and danger associated with the *periferia,* and how he provides a deeper understanding of residents' precarious living conditions through banal moments found in the public transit system.  By bringing attention to the social circumstance that shape his protagonists' lives, Ferréz demonstrates how crime is a part of the cyclical poverty that contributes to the *periferia's* instability.

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In Ferréz's novels, the public intellectual replaces the lure of criminality with images that elevate the important social contributions made by Afro-Brazilians and other marginalized communities. Long commutes, cramped quarters and the generalized isolation of public transit amplify the subordinate status of *Periferia* residents. Ferréz introduces sublime moments on the bus and at transfer stations that interrupt the rider's drab existence. By examining the dynamics of cyclical poverty, Ferréz complicates *periferia* youth's connection with criminality and uses the public transit system as a window into the adversity faced by *periferia* residents.

Chapter 2, "Criminality and the Perua: Social Stigma in the *Periferia*," analyzes the *cobrador's* negotiation with systems of power and marginalized communities through the threshold positioning of clandestine transportation. Sacolinha's *cobradors* parallels the *malandro* in his responses to the inequality that impacts the *periferia*. The *cobrador* cannot change the unequal distribution of resources, but he can engage in mischievous behavior to manipulate the system to benefit himself and to assure the well being of other *periferia* youth. This concern for others indicates a desire for community, which unfolds in the liminal space of clandestine transportation, namely the *perua* and the *terminal*. The *cobrador's* participation in rituals with other youth, and the *ambulante's* creation of support networks with other illegal workers exemplifies *periferia* residents' efforts to address São Paulo' infrastructure inequalities and to survive their unstable status as racialized outsiders.

Chapter 3, "Racial *Desencuentros* and Stigma: Dominican American Youth as the Perpetual Outsider," addresses the stigma Dominican American youth experience as a result of their cultural *desencuentros* with U.S. society and their immigrant community. Their ambivalence towards U.S. racial classifications indicates the formation of a hybrid self that redefines established norms of racial and cultural identity for Americans and

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Dominicans. Unable to fully integrate into either culture, Dominican American youth's outsider status amplifies the alienation they experience in the inner city. As a stranger to all social groups they encounter, Junot Díaz's protagonists must look within themselves to endure the isolation of being neither fully American nor Dominican.

Chapter 4, "Urban Decay, *Bodegas* and *Botánicas* in Ernesto Quiñonez's Novels," explores Spanish Harlem residents' resistance to their colonial status as Puerto Ricans in New York. Quiñonez examines the various strategies Spanish Harlem youth employ to escape cyclical poverty and racism to see if they can ever overcome the stigma of being non-white. The endless barrage of decay and displacement that characterize this Latino community during the second half of the 20th century provides a foundation for analyzing Puerto Rican's inability to change the racial subordination that limits their life chances. Quiñonez's allusions to the *bodega* and the *botánica* demonstrate how urban youth engage with the capitalist structure through crime and spiritual practices in order to find lasting solutions of economic and social stability.

In summary, the conclusion, "Peripheral Literatures: São Paulo and New York," provides an overview of the main ideas presented in this dissertation. Ultimately, these authors demonstrate the importance of street aesthetics in exploring deeper issues related to race and marginality in contemporary Latin American society. Through examining systemic social issues, such as violence, poverty and crime, as well as encapsulating responses to adversity in inner city communities, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernsesto Quiñonez's literary works about *gente minúscula* dissect experiences of life on the margins of society. The challenging environment of São Paulo's *periferia* and the squalid living conditions in Latino neighborhoods in New York are characterized by uneventful hardships experienced by *gente minúscula*. Questioning notions of upward mobility and using an assertive stance, these writers engage mundane occurrences, such

as roaming the city streets, riding public transit or hanging out at the bar, that provide backdrops for the interplay of tender moments and gritty narratives. The brutal features of the urban underworld, coupled with fragile instances, humanize marginalized figures. As a form of political assertion, these writers' emphasis on inner city life calls attention to socio-cultural experiences that have historically have been ignored or vilified by the dominant culture. Their focus on lower case people from the margins of society brings everyday inner city experiences, such as encountering police abuse and witnessing crime, to the attention of mainstream society.

**Chapter 1:  Social Marginalization and Public Transit in Ferréz's Novels**

*Estamos na rua, loco, estamos na favela, no campo, no bar, nos viadutos, e somos marginais mas antes somos literatura, e isso vocês podem negar, podem fechar os olhos, virar as costas, mas, como já disse, continuaremos aqui, assim como o muro social invisível que divide este país.*

*We are in the streets man, we are in the favela, in the fields, in the bar, in the overpasses but before anything else we are literature, and you all can deny that, you can shut your eyes, turn your backs, but, like I already said, we will continue to be here, just like the invisible social wall that divides this country.*
                                                                                -Ferréz

By complicating representations of the *criminoso*, Ferréz reevaluates citizenship in Brazil's *periferia*[39] through the banal moments of public transit.  Social stigma and institutionalized racism shape *periferia* residents' relationship with governmental organizations, which are characterized by experiences of racial profiling, police brutality and cyclical poverty.  Socio-economic adversity, social stigma and institutionalized racism prevent residents in peripheral communities from escaping cyclical poverty. Social mobility seems possible through crime and its promises of quick wealth.  By examining the social conditions faced by protagonists who might otherwise be perceived of as solely deviant, Ferréz critiques associations of criminality with the *periferia*.  In Brazil's *periferias*, the stigma of being poor and non-white classifies *periferia* residents as dangerous, limiting the rights of and criminalizing certain citizens based on race and social class. While a life of crime is not a viable alternative to the crushing poverty of the *periferia*, Ferréz complicates the negative imagery of criminality associated with the *periferia*.  Ferréz recontexualizes the *periferia* as a site of civic engagement instead of

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[39] The *periferia* includes the outlying communities of the São Paulo metropolitan area.  These communities are typically working-class neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty and crime.

one based solely on violence and desperation.[40]   Moreover, endless cycles of coming and going, of struggling to survive and of chance encounters characterize public transit in São Paulo's *periferia*.  The mundane episodes that transpire in this public space foster brief instances of spectacle, which rupture the uneventful space of public transit.   The repetitive mechanization of the bus and transfers embodies the banal, which amplifies the desperation of living in underserved locations.  The monotony of the public transit system offers insight into the ways that *periferia* residents endure the daily obstacles of cyclical poverty and racial profiling, which complicates the perception that criminality is the urban periphery's primary defining characteristic.

In Brazilian Portuguese, the word *marginal* not only translates to the English word marginal, or on the margins, but the term is also used to classify someone as a social outcast or a criminal.   The words *criminoso* (criminal) and *marginal* are interchangeable.   Ferréz's adoption of the term *Literatura Marginal* to refer to the literature of the *periferia* appropriates a pejorative category and reinterprets it to index the political conditions of Brazil's marginalized communities.[41]   *Literatura Marginal's* appropriation of the term *marginal* problematizes the *periferia's* association with crime and danger.[42] In "Terrorismo literário" (Literary Terrorism), which serves as the

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[40] See Nelson de Oliveira's introduction, "Infinita falas," in the anthology *Cenas da favela: as melhoras histórias da periférifa* (2007) for additional commentary on the multiplicity of views and experiences found in the *periferia* and *favela*.  The *periferia* is not only a space of violence and crime; other experiences transpire in this location.

[41] Ferréz coined the term *Literatura Marginal* to classify literature being produced by writers from Brazil's urban peripheries.  He organized a series of three special issues through the magazine *Caros Amigos* titled *Literatura Marginal* to showcase literature and art from the *periferia* in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and other major urban centers in Brazil.  Following this partnership with *Caros Amigos*, he created the anthology *Literatura Marginal: Talentos da escrita periférica* in 2005.  For additional information on Ferréz and his endeavors with *Literatura Marginal*, see Marcos Zibordi's article "Literatura Marginal em revista" (2004), Heloísa Buarque de Holanda's article "Literatura Marginal" (2012), Érica Peçanha do Nascimento's *Vozes marginais na literatura* (2009) and Alejandro Reyes' *Vozes dos porões: a literatura periférica/marginal do Brasil* (2013).

[42] Scholars of this literature do not agree on a single term for periphery literature, emphasizing its status as a fairly new literary movement.  Several scholars of contemporary Brazilian literature, including Heloisa

introduction to the anthology *Literatura Marginal: Talentos da escrita periférica* (2005),

Ferréz notes:

> A Literatura Marginal…Literatura feita à margem dos núcleos centrais do saber e da grande cultura nacional, isto é, de grande poder aquisitivo. (12-13)

> *Literatura Marginal…* it is a literature created on the margins of the centers of knowledge and of the grand, national culture, in other words, of great acquisitive power. (My translation)

Ferréz's acknowledges the creation of literature and knowledge on the margins of society, which complicates the misconception of the *periferia* as a location only known for poverty and criminality. The term *marginal* indicates that literature not produced within institutions of power has the potential to criticize from the outside the meta-narrative of Brazil's national culture and to evoke histories that have been excluded.[43] This literature emerges on the margins of the centers of acquisitive power, or the national financial and political institutions controlled by the elites. [44] Because of this social

Buarque de Holanda, Karl Erick Schollhammer (*Ficção*) and Tânia Pellegrini (*Despropósitos*), adopt the term *Literatura Marginal* when discussing literature from São Paulo's *periferia*. While *Literatura Marginal* circulates as the most widely accepted term in the general public, other writers from the periferia do not agree with this label. The terms Literatura Periférica, Literatura Periférica Negra and Literatura Brasileira represent the most commonly used labels among writers from São Paulo's periferia. Ferréz uses the expression Literatura Marginal to describe literature from the periferia. He argues that since writers from the periferia have experienced some form of economic, geographic or social marginalization, the term, Literatura Marginal, accurately describes this literary movement (Peçanha do Nascimento). See Ferréz's blog, http://www.ferrezblogspot.com, for more on his reason for using the polemic term, Literatura Marginal.

[43] *Literatura Marginal* itself belongs to the long history of excluded groups in Brazil, as evidenced by Mario Augusto Medeiros da Silva's study, *A descoberta do insólito: literatura negra e literatura periférica no Brasil (1960-2000)*. This literary movement is located within the historical trajectory of Afro-Brazilian literature that experienced marginalization throughout the 20th century. These writers emerge from Brazil's lower classes, representing a wide range of experiences: prostitutes, maids, *periferia* residents, prisoners, manual laborers and even street children (Roncador 186). Regardless of their background, all of these individuals face social stigma, which they overcome to share their experiences to the wider audience of Brazilian literature (Roncador 187).

[44] Ferréz has collaborated on projects that bring visibility to writers from the *periferia*. Through his partnership with the magazine *Caros Amigos*, he organized three special issues for *Literatura Marginal*, a series that included poetry, prose and visual art from *periferia* writers and artists throughout Brazil. The first issue included writers from the greater São Paulo metropolitan region while the second and third issues

position, *Literatura Marginal* offers narratives about social inequality that impact the inhabitants of the *periferia*.

## CRIMINOSO MARGINAL

According to the law, *perferia* residents are Brazilian citizens, but *de facto* levels of citizenship associated with individuals based on race and social class results in pervasive social inequality. Throughout the 20th century Brazilians of African and Amerindian descent were given little assistance to adapt to living in the nation's major urban centers, which forced them into the slums. Due to few opportunities for social mobility, they took poorly compensated jobs shunned by the elite, white population. The social disparity between rich and poor areas grew as the police and other enforcement agencies assured that marginalized populations remained invisible to the upper classes in order to minimize inequality. The systematic removal of working class inhabitants living in Brazil's city centers to the outskirts contributed to the growth of the *periferia*.[45][46] The

invited writers from other Brazilian cities (Zibordi). In 2005, Ferréz edited and published the literary anthology *Literatura Marginal,* a compilation of works selected from the three special issues published by *Caros Amgos*. In 2008, he established *Selo Povo,* a non-profit publishing company that focuses on giving visibility to authors from peripheral communities throughout Brazil. Ferréz's collection of *crônicas* was one of the first books published by the independent publisher. Marcos Teles, Katia Cernov and Cidinha da Silva have also published their works through Selo Povo.

[45] See Teresa Caldeira's *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation and Citizenship in São Paulo* (2000) for in depth anthropological study on the marginalization of poor communities in the São Paulo metropolitan region.

[46] Raised in the neighborhood with the same name as the novel's title, *Cidade de Deus,* Lin's work, a fictional ethnography, tells the story of the community's transformation into a *favela* from the 1960s to the 1980s (Schwarz; Resende, *Contemporâneos*). Founded in 1960, *Cidade de Deus* resulted from the systematic removal of *favela* inhabitants living in the city center who were relocated to government housing projects on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. The neighborhood's population increased significantly during the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in makeshift housing built around and on top of the existing government housing. *Cidade de Deus'* population boom and physical changes came with drugs, crime, police abuse and a lack of economic opportunities. Paulo Lins' novel resulted from personal accounts he gathered with sociologist Alba Zaluar. Zaluar has published numerous studies on Brazil's *favelas* (Osava). Under the tutelage of Zaluar, Lins learned the craft of ethnographic field research and collected oral

*periferia's* population increased significantly during the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in makeshift housing being built around the existing city infrastructure.[47] The population boom and abrupt physical changes came with drugs, crime, police abuse and a lack of economic opportunities. Ferréz has published several fictional works on Brazil's *periferias*. Using images of violence, drug trafficking and poverty, Ferréz's novels convey the daily challenges of *periferia* life.

By associating preconceived notions about origin and behavior with marginalized classes, society limits *periferia* youth's opportunities for social participation. Erving Goffman explains how stigma dehumanizes the individual it affects:

> By definition, of course, we believe that person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. (5)

Stigma-theory provides a framework for understanding the systematic oppression of *periferia* residents. Since danger becomes associated with the *periferia*, social stigma becomes deeply rooted, negatively impacting the life trajectories of *periferia* residents. In Brazil, stigma-theory functions as a system of beliefs used to rationalize the subordination of certain social classes over others. Residents from the *periferia*, therefore, are viewed with animosity based on the assumption that they live in unsafe, impoverished conditions due to personal choices and behavior. The larger socio-economic processes that determine *periferia* residents' lower social status are overlooked or minimized. These misconceptions exacerbate the belief that *periferia* youth are a

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histories of many residents from *Cidade de Deus* for his novel (Pellegrini, *Despropósitos*). Using images of violence, drug trafficking and poverty, Lins' novel conveys the daily challenges of *favela* life.

[47] Paulo Lins' novel, *City of God,* provides a historical fiction account of the growth of peripheral communities, particularly *Cidade de Deus* in Rio de Janeiro, during the 1960s and 1970s.

societal problem that needs to be resolved, instead of considering them as valued members of society.

Oppressed individuals and nations may rebel against a system that exploits them, but the cycle of inequality continues as they repeat what is familiar: a social hierarchy based on economic exploitation (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique*).[48] The upper classes in Brazil have created a system that benefits the wealthy at the expense of peripheral communities. In order to improve their financial circumstances, *periferia* youth take advantage of the resources available to them – regardless of legality. *Periferia* youths' experiences have been shaped by squalid living conditions, violence and institutionalized racism, and it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to change their subordinate status in society. Systemic inequalities based on race and social class established by the Brazilian state reinforces the cycle of oppression experienced by *periferia* residents.[49] The unequal distribution of power limits fair representation in the government, which contributes to the *periferia's* political invisibility and increased social stigma.

Abuse of power by the ruling class and systemic inequality regulate civic participation in Brazil's *periferias*. In *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil,* James Holston analyzes how the ruling elite created laws riddled with exceptions that limited the political power of non-whites and the working classes, fostering a differentiated citizenry.[50] Under this notion of citizenry, every

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[48] In *Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon provides powerful examples of revolutionary uprisings unfolding in Africa during the 1950s. For him, the leaders of the newly formed African nations mimicked the oppressive tactics that they suffered under the previous European colonial occupiers.

[49] See Robin Sheriff's *Dream Equality: Color, Race and Racism in Urban Brazil* (2001) for the connections between cyclical poverty and racism.

[50] One particular example given by Holston, the Saraiva Law of 1881, stripped most Brazilians of the few political rights that they previously possessed through discriminatory electoral laws that placed almost all power in the hands of regional oligarchies (100-102). The ruling classes could now proceed with their political and economic endeavors unchecked by the general population. More importantly, they could

Brazilian is a citizen, but the rights and privileges associated with national citizenship are distributed unequally. Limiting the lower social classes' access to land rights, voting and political office permitted morally corrupt dealings by the elite who used their unchecked power to solely benefit themselves. *Periferia* residents experience the hierarchical structure of citizenship rights in Brazil, which stigmatizes them based on their socio-economic circumstances, and permits action by the authorities regardless of whether or not they were engaging in an illegal act. Marginalized subjects have few opportunities for social mobility. Participating in manual labor, such as the domestic maid service and brick laying, does not allow *periferia* residents to better their precarious economic situation (Roncador 185). Terms like *fazer um bico* (complete small, odd jobs) becomes synonymous with the unstable job market experienced by Brazil's working class populations. The existing social structure's unequal distribution of political rights and resources amplifies the impossibility for the *periferia* to escape its subordinate status in Brazil.

Working outside the limits of the law through drugs and violence offers the possibility of a better life that cannot be achieved by following the rules of the system. Many *perferia* youth experience powerlessness in relation to the existing hierarchical structure in Brazil that does not allow them to have access to the same educational and financial opportunities as the upper classes. The criminal figure struggles between feelings of "revoltado," or being disgusted with the system's inequities and "marcado," or engaging in illegal activities for personal profit (Leu 182, *Spaces of Remembrance)*. Despite the high risk of incarceration and death, banditry becomes an attractive option that comes with a feeling of control. Ferréz provides an example:

engage in activities that were ethically questionable, such as fixed elections and intimidation tactics that favored their land interests.

Régis sentia-se um herói, estava jogando certo no jogo do capitalismo, o jogo era arrecadar capital a qualquer custo, afinal os exemplos que via o inspiravam ainda mais, inimigos se abraçavam em nome do dinheiro na Câmara Municipal e na Assembléia Legislativa, inimigos se abraçavam no programa de domingo pela vendagem do novo CD, os exemplos eram claros e visíveis, só não via quem não queria. (154)

Régis felt like a hero, he was doing everything right in the game of capitalism. The game was to collect funds at whatever cost since the examples he saw inspired him even more; enemies hugged each other in the name of money in city hall and the legislative assembly; enemies hugged each other on the Sunday television program in order to sell a new CD. The examples were clear and visible, those who couldn't see it, did not want to. (My translation)

Resources and social power become the central focus, and how Régis and his crew achieve that goal becomes secondary. For Régis, criminal enterprises are no different than the strategies employed by the elite. The criminal underworld offers vulnerable *periferia* youth opportunities that they cannot attain through the legitimate means. The illegality of producing and selling drugs raises their value, which translates into the possibility of easy, quick money (Zaluar 154). The large sums of monies exchanged for drugs reinforce the idea that criminal endeavors, despite their danger, are more lucrative than working a blue-collar job.[51]

The flashy lifestyle, which is possible through illicit means, is seductive to *periferia* youth who face the probability of unemployment or low-paying jobs. However, the major risk factors associated with a life of crime, high rates of incarceration and death, underscore the unlikelihood of permanent escape from cyclical poverty and violence in the *periferia*. The chance of being arrested due to working outside the parameters of the laws limits opportunities to establish lasting wealth. Since capital gains were attained through illegal means, *periferia* youth cannot publicly use them, which

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[51] See *Cabeça de porco* by MV Bill, Luis Eduardo Soares and Celso Athayde, which examines Brazilian urban youth's reasons for participating in the drug trade and gangs.

means they must continue to live in the shadows. If arrested, the police can take possession of their assets, and they can lose their business dealings to local competitors. Once in the penitentiary system, these individuals become trapped in a cycle of delinquency and poverty (Zaluar 32).[52] Having a criminal record limits job opportunities, and therefore, makes the world of crime unavoidable. Moreover, violence becomes normalized among individuals competing for the same resources outside the regulations of the law. Competing gangs or drug dealers, for example, are eliminated by physical force in order to take control of their territory and resources. Inflicting great physical harm becomes the principal means to resolve disputes among individuals and groups functioning in the criminal underworld. The everyday violence experienced by those individuals involved in clandestine activities becomes normalized among urban youth who encounter death on a regular basis in the world of crime (Soares, MV Bill and Athayde *Cabeça de porco*).[53] Short life expectancies among youth involved in illegal activities reinforces the precarious nature of high-risk undertakings, such as drug trafficking and gang involvement.[54] The high probability of being detained by authorities or of being assassinated by competitors outweighs any advantage of temporarily obtained money and power.

The organic intellectual in Ferréz's works questions the viability of crime in the *periferia* by evoking his community's ancestral roots. Paulo Freire's work, *Pedagogy of*

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[52] See André du Rap's *Sobrevivente André du Rap: (do massacre do Carandiru)* (2002), Jocenir's *Diário de um detento: o livro* and Luiz Alberto Mendes' memoir *Memórias de um sobrevivente* (2001) and his collection of short stories *Cela forte* (2012). João Camillo Penna's essay, "Testemunhos da prisão: trauma, verdade juridical e epitáfio," provides insightful analysis on the social impact of testimonial literature emergring from the penitentiary system.

[53] José Padilha's documentary, *Bus 174* (2004) provides an in depth look at the effects of violence in the lives of marginalized youth through the story of an individual young man from Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*.

[54] See MV Bill and Celso Athayde's documentary *Falcão: meninos do tráfico* (2006) and accompanying book with the same title that conveys the uncertain life expectancies of urban youth involved in drug trafficking.

*the Oppressed*, defines critical consciousness as a concept rooted in the belief that individuals and communities can replace internalized negative images with "iconic representations that have a powerful emotional impact in the daily lives of learners" (96-97). This consciousness building allows the individual, in Freire's words, to "read the world," which signifies the ability to question and critically think about one's surrounding environment. Ferréz reads the world of the *periferia* by questioning criminality as a viable solution to the problems of cyclical poverty and racial prejudices that plague his community.

Ferréz introduces the intellectual figure as a way to complicate the world of crime and to explore other experiences in the *periferia* related to pride in one's culture and history commonly overlooked by urban youth. In Ferréz's novel, *Manual prático do ódio*, Paulo, a young man who spends his time reading books and educating himself about his ethnic roots, functions as a foil to other protagonists who engage in criminal activities. Positioned within the *periferia*, Paulo lives among the same poverty and crime as the *bandido*, but he chooses a different path. Replacing negative images of criminality, Paulo embodies Paulo Freire's idea of critical consciousness through the insertion of symbolic representations related to Afro-Brazilian popular culture:

> Paulo era negro, sabia tudo sobre a história de seus ancestrais…mostraria a história dos oprimidos que nunca se entregaram, mas desmantelaria para os futuros filhos os mitos falsos dos opressores, os memo falso heróis que matavam indios e negros e depois ganhavam estátuas espelhadas pela cidade. (Ferréz, Manual Práctico 82)

> Paulo was black, he knew everything about the history of his ancestors…he would show the history of the oppressed that never gave in, but would dismantle for his future children the false myths of the oppressors, the same false heroes that killed the Indians and the blacks and later on received statues throughout the city. (My translation)

The first phrase of the passage, "Paulo era negro" (Paulo was black), is a powerful

declaration, as Ferréz accentuates the racial background of *periferia* youth.  Historically,

the Brazilian government implemented policies that negated blackness and marginalized

non-white ethnic groups.[55]  By openly adopting racial categories, such as *negro,* the

organic intellectual from the *periferia* questions the social inferiority long associated with

being Black in Brazil.  In the process of deconstructing figures, such as the colonizer who

oppressed the indigenous and afro-descendant populations, Paulo identifies leaders, such

as Zumbi dos Palmares[56] and Clementina de Jesus,[57] who resided on the margins of

society.  Referencing these cultural and political leaders may not change the

institutionalized racism that *periferia* youth encounter in their daily lives, but Paulo

challenges the perception that crime, violence and economic despair are the primary

historical legacies of marginalized communities of color.  These examples are meant to

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[55] Staring in the 19th century, Brazil's elite intellectuals began to adopt Europe's ideas related to eugenics and social Darwinism.  They wanted to whiten Brazil's general population, which, to them, meant racial superiority.  Politicians encouraged immigration from Europe, particularly northern Europeans, envisioning a whitening of the population over several generations.  In the 1930s, anthropologist Gilberto Freyre advanced the idea of racial democracy in his seminal work, *Casa-grande e senzala,* to describe Brazil's history of racial mixing and of the different races cohabitating with each other, specifically the masters and the slaves during colonial period and the 19th century.  Terms such as *pardo, mulato* and *café com leite* became common terms to identify one's race if not white.  A new hierarchy of non-white categories emerged, yet they were always below whites.

[56] Zumbi represents a non-conciliatory approach towards ideologies like *cordialidade* that silence any identity or history that challenge the image of the homogenous state (Sergio Buarque de Holanda).  Zumbi, the leader of the *quilombo* Palmares, a settlement founded by escaped slaves in Brazil during the colonial era, was known for leading his community to the height of its power and notoriety in northeastern Brazil. He was recognized not only as an important political leader, but also as a warrior who would fight against oppressors, like the slave traders.  While Zumbi and the settlement of Palmares eventually fell to the Portuguese crown, his legend lives on in the present day through Brazil's official Black Consciousness Day, which is celebrated on his birthday (November 20).

[57] Clementina, considered one of the greatest singers of samba during the 20th century, is known for her ability to show the connection between Africa and Brazil through music.  Brazil's link to Africa reveals to the reader that the artistic practices found in the *periferia* belong to a larger historical trajectory that reaches beyond the boundaries of the *periferia*.  References to Clementina point towards a larger musical tradition rooted in the African Diaspora.

invoke pride in *periferia* residents' ethnic heritage.  The intellectual figure does not change the racial and class hierarchical structure in Brazil, but his knowledge of the *periferia's* racial past can provide ways to rethink the urban periphery as a place that fosters delinquency.

In the 1980s with Brazil's return to democracy during the *Abertura,*[58] non-white Brazilians began to demand more recognition of their racial and ethnic background. Demanding integration into local and national politics, this new generation of activists during the 1980s wanted opportunities to serve in government administrations on the municipal and state levels (Hanchard 133-34).  In *Afro-Brazilians: Cultural Production in a Racial Democracy,* Niyi Afolabi argues that Afro-Brazilian cultural production has functioned as a response to exclusionary practices by the state.  Present inequalities, past injustices and social contributions tied to race become more visible through the cultural productions of Afro-Brazilians. In Brazil's northeast region, for example, black activists helped in the creation of the *Blocos Afros* (African Blocs), "race-first" entities, which called on the music, art and theater that came to dominate the culture and political atmosphere of the region during this same time period (Hanchard 138).  The establishment of ethnic-centered organizations, both in the government and in local communities, would have a lasting effect on future generations of non-whites, as the recognition of Black culture and its contribution to Brazilian history became institutionalized.

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[58] The *Abertura* (in English means the "opening") refers to Brazil's transition to a democratic form of government during the 1980s following two decades of being under a military dictatorship.

Violence and limited citizenship rights from the colonial period to the present have negatively impacted people of color, particularly Brazilians of indigenous and African ancestry. Brazil has a long history of negating blackness and the ruling elites have downplayed the social inequalities between whites and blacks by espousing ideologies, such as racial democracy, that claim that all races in Brazil live or interact in close proximity with each other without conflict. Regardless of their legal status as citizens, the notion of differentiated citizenship in Brazil explains the subordinate social standing of *periferia* residents due to their classification as non-white and poor. The imbalance of power contributes to the cycle of inequality that afflicts the *periferia.* Ferréz challenges the negative connotations of criminality and marginality associated with the *periferia* through literature that exposes the racial and social stigma experienced by its residents. Considered an option to escape poverty, criminality does not offer a long term, viable solution to marginalized communities. This critique of the crimnoso figure by Ferréz challenges the assumption that the *periferia* can only be a site of danger, which leads to deeper reconsiderations about the relationship between marginality and citizenship found in the banality of the city's public transit system.

## EN ROUTE: MARGINALIZED SUBJECTS & PUBLIC TRANSIT

In Ferréz work, public transit's oppressive conditions reinforce the subordinate status of *periferia* residents who suffer daily injustices. The cramped quarters of the bus and metro amplify the adversity of urban life as *periferia* residents endure physically and emotionally taxing commutes to and from the city's center. Interrupting the enveloping

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despair of urban environments, moments of spectacle emerge from the banal and public transit functions as an unlikely catalyst for delicate experiences. Ferréz's portrayal of *periferia* residents' inner-thoughts echoes a trend in contemporary Brazilian literature where the author examines everyday life (Schollhammer, *Ficção* 15; Cândido 211). Seeing beauty in ordinary objects and places results from examining the world with fresh eyes. The *periferia* residents in Ferréz's works escape the monotony of urban life and negotiate the isolation that they experience within the space of the bus. Ultimately, narratives set in or around public transit offer insight into social conditions of marginalized communities in Brazil's major urban centers, such as São Paulo.

São Paulo's residents are citizens who are always on the move. Public transit provides a window into the *periferia* resident's life.[59] A massive, complex network, the public transit system allow *periferia* residents to have access to locations throughout the greater São Paulo metropolitan area, and, in theory, provides them with more mobility. São Paulo's public transportation system spreads out across the city as a complex web of routes that intersect with each other and reach into the outskirts and obscure neighborhoods of the city. Bus terminals located throughout the city serve as transportation hubs. Public transit in the *periferia* fosters mobility across cities, yet confines marginalized subjects to specific routes and locations. The amount of time required to arrive at a destination creates an oppressive experience. City inhabitants crowd the same space but do not interact with each other. Separated from family and community during laborious commutes, the passenger may sit next to other commuters, but no deeper bond forms from the forced physical proximity. The city's transportation infrastructure shapes experiences of alienation. Confined to the monotony of sitting or

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[59] Janice Caiafa's ethnographic study of the bus system in Rio de Janeiro, *Jornadas urbanas: Exclusão, trabalho e subjetividade nas viagens de ônibus na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (2002) offers a deeper understanding about the quotidian aspects of the population that uses public transit.

standing in the same position and waiting at the same bus stop or metro station adds to the exhausting ordeal of navigating the public transit system.  The multiple transfers necessary to arrive at the center of São Paulo, the frequent running from the train they exited in order to catch another line about to leave and the time spent waiting at each transfer, exacerbates the isolation of using public transit.

A central mode of transportation for *periferia* residents, São Paulo's public transit system connects, however inadequately, the working class population to the city center.[60] The public transit system allows working class individuals to live far distances from their work sites in order to have access to more affordable living conditions.  In the *periferia* land and services are typically cheaper, and therefore, more affordable for someone on a limited budget.[61]  Because the *periferia* is located on the edges of the city, public transit becomes essential to many residents who work in the city center.  Primarily located in the city center, financial resources remain out of reach for most *periferia* residents who must travel long distances to find employment.  The bus and the metro connect residents with locations throughout the entire metropolitan area.  The *periferia's* substantial geographic distance from the central core of the city of São Paulo equates to the socio-economic gap between rich and poor, as working class residents find themselves far from resources and wealth. The tiring commutes and multiple transfers required to arrive at places of employment and commerce reinforce the social inequality between the *periferia* and the upper classes of São Paulo.  The physical and emotional demands of riding the public

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[60] Public transit may provide access to the city for *periferia* residents, but the local government cannot adequately address all their transportation needs.  Bus services have increased dramatically to the *perferia* during the first decade of the 21st century, but it cannot keep up with the ever-growing demand for public transit in the outlying communities of the São Paulo metropolitan area.  The need for buses and metro rails in the *periferia* reiterate the challenge of offering all city residents accessible transportation and illustrates how important public transit has become for Brazil's working class population in major urban centers, such as São Paulo.

[61] See James Holston's *Insurgent Citizenshp: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (2008) for additional information on the development of the *periferia* in São Paulo.

transit system day after day places a heavy burden on the working class populations who struggle to etch out a living in the city.

For Ferréz, the bus and the bus stops function as urban spaces that evoke delicate moments to examine the social inequality of the *periferia*. In contemporary literature the delicate refers to experiences that move past the physical world and into a space that intensifies one's emotions. Focusing on ordinary moments in urban contexts, Denilson Lopes' notion of the delicate emphasizes the power of moments experienced in uneventful spaces, such as public transportation. For Lopes, these transcendent moments occur in the most unlikely of places, such as the celebration of superficial objects, images of the body and seemingly emotionally shallow social practices like hedonism (41). Lopes contextualizes urban spaces as possible catalysts for critical consciousness.[62] Ferréz uses the bus as a setting that reverberates the confinement that *periferia* residents experience during their daily travels and accentuates the ways in which public transit functions as a vehicle of social disconnection, amplifying estrangement among youth as they traverse the city landscape. The protagonists in *Ninguém é inocente em São Paulo* frequently become lost in contemplative thought during the monotony of travel (90), seeing friends and family not physically present (49-50) and visualizing new worlds full of hope (45-46). Self-reflection satiates the yearning for belonging by disrupting the cycle of despair experienced by *periferia* youth.

Mundane moments during the commute generate a space of solitude that envelope the rider from the chaos of the city. Within this temporary sphere of internal seclusion, the marginalized subject recalls memories and experiences that challenge the limits of the

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[62] Critical consciousness in this passage refers to Paulo Freire's notion of the term found in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000).

real world.[63]  As a space of transition, the bus stops and transfer stations allow the rider to momentarily remove himself from his community.  The space of public transportation invokes a sense of liminality, and commuters from the *periferia* can be viewed as what Mary Douglas classifies in her study, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*, as threshold people, or individuals who reside on the margins of society and are regarded as "polluted" or "dangerous" since they fall outside any clear criteria of classification determined by society.  As an ephemeral location, public transport occupies an "in-between" space where the individual inhabits a place that is not entirely fixed.  Travel occupies a liminal space, where the ghosts of loved ones haunt the living (Derrida; Turner).  In liminal spaces, the rules and procedures of society are typically suspended, which allows the participant to move beyond the limitations of the real world and to enter into a new realm of experiences.  The liminal phase lasts a short period of time, but it offers the rider the opportunity to experience their environment in new ways that permit him or her to endure the hardships of poverty, violence and racism in the *periferia*.

Traveling the same route day after day, the bus emphasizes the banality of urban life for many *periferia* residents who find themselves trapped in the endless cycle of commuting and poorly compensated work.  Ferréz portrays the repetitive movement of public transit, emphasizing the disconnection that *periferia* residents experience with their environment and with other passengers.  In "Terminal (nazista)," the narrator waits in one of São Paulo countless bus terminals.  He contemplates the commuters' chain of travel:

> Olhei o letreiro, o destino era o mesmo.
> Gente que ia cedo, gente que vinha tarde.

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[63] See Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira's essay "De paso por la Ciudad de Dios: Repensar las representaciones sociales de las comunidades pobres en el cine brasileño actual" (2008) for additional analysis on the intimate moments found between urban youth in public transit.

>Gente que ia cedo, gente que vinha tarde.
>Gente que ia cedo, gente que vinha tarde. (90)

>I looked at the sign, the destination was the same.
>People that left early, people that returned late.
>People that left early, people that returned late.
>People that left early, people that returned late. (My translation)

The repetitious phrase accentuates the oppressive nature of traveling in the *periferia*. By using the imperfect tense in the stanza's repeating phrases, Ferréz captures the mechanical nature of urban travel -- people repeating the same action without end. Everyday, commuters engage in unchanging, exhausting movement -- never deviating from the routine.[64] The mechanization of engaging in the same action while using public transit results in a disconnection with the surrounding environment. People leave early and return late, referencing long commutes and time absent from home. For members of the *periferia,* the constant travel has a social cost. Their continual absence from home prevents them from developing deeper bonds with family and community.

During the monotony of riding the bus, Ferréz inserts moments of spectacle, which interrupt the hardships of navigating impoverished living conditions and violence in the *periferia*.[65] Engaging on a daily basis in the same mindless task, the drudgery of commuting on the bus provides the possibility of creating a space distinct from the real world and its problems. While on the bus, the rider finds himself separate from the outside world for a period of time until he arrives at his destination. These occurrences

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[64] For millions of inhabitants, the metro system provides a principal means of daily transportation. As such, residents endure long commute times as they journey from one side of the city to the other. In the *periferia,* most residents ride the same route and schedule everyday, trapped in a never-ending flow of commuters.

[65] See Marcus Vinicius Faustini's memoir, *Guia afetivo da periferia* (2009).

that transpire within the bus echo Denilson Lopes' poetics of everyday life, which interprets these splendid incidents as a response against the violence and socio-economic disparities urban dwellers are forced to endure ("From a Return of the Real" 4).  These unexpected moments that appear during monotonous bus rides function as a temporary reprieve from the *periferia's* precarious living conditions.  Through the bus, the rider establishes a space that resists the distractions of the city in order to find fleeting moments of tranquility.  These intense personal experiences on the bus are not about "spectacularizing the trivial," but are focused on "retrieving affection in [the space's] fragility" (Lopes,  "From a Return of the Real" 8).  The banality of the bus typifies the vulnerability of urban spaces, which allows the rider to encounter experiences in unexpected places that complicate the *periferia's* problems.

Typically viewed as a vehicle that transports city inhabitants along a specified route to predetermined destination, in Ferréz's texts, the bus takes on the unconventional role, disturbing the system of meaning.  In the short story "O ônibus branco," the protagonist boards a bus -- like he does most days.  He soon realizes that the passengers are people who have passed away:

> Desce, Nal, eu sei que você sente minha falta, nós sentimos a sua também, mas esse ônibus por enquanto não tem destino pra você, vamos pegar outro ali na frente, tchau, Nal. (51)

> Get off here, Nal.  I know you miss me, we miss you too, but this bus for the time being is not your destiny.  Let's grab you another bus up ahead.  Goodbye Nal. (My translation)

The word "destino" can be translated as either destiny or destination.  The bus destination symbolizes human destiny, emphasized by Nal's friend explaining to him the need to

switch buses since his life's journey is not yet complete.[66]  The destinations of the

narrator and the ghosts of loved ones travel diverging paths.  The protagonist's encounter

with the specters of lost loved ones lasts briefly as he must eventually return to the real

world.  This brief encounter with specters from the *periferia* disrupts the bus as a vehicle

that transports commuters to physical destinations, and transforms it into a space that

traces the trajectory of urban youth's life paths.  Mortality looms heavy over *periferia*

youth who are surrounded by an unstable environment and know that their life has a final

destination that could end in an untimely death for them or for their friends and family.

Like the bus, the bus stops and transfer stations can function as public spaces that

embody the sense of desperation surrounding the banality of urban life through long

lines, endless waiting and deterioration of facilities.  The bus stations, or *terminals,[67]*

serve as major points of transfer for *periferia* residents who typically cannot find a single,

direct route from the city center to their neighborhood.  Ferréz's short story, "Estção

Terminal (Nazista)" provides a stark portrait of commuters desperately trying to board

the bus to return home after a long day at work.   Waiting becomes a normalized practice

for marginalized subjects who are forced to experience hindrances in all aspects of their

life.[68]  Lingering in line to board a bus after working a full shift and having ridden

another bus of the metro to arrive at the terminal amplifies the frustration of not knowing

when one will arrive at their final destination.  Long lines contribute to the exhaustion

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[66] Nal is a reference to Ferréz's real name, Reginaldo.  Nal appears throughout Ferréz's short stories, novels and crônicas, which further emphasizes the author's personal connection to the *periferia*.

[67] Terminals are major transfers stations found in different areas of São Paulo where dozens of buses stop at a given moment.  Some terminals also have connections to the metro system.

[68] See Javier Auyero's *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina* (2012) for analysis on how the poor view the dynamics of waiting long periods of time in government institutions.

experienced by *periferia* residents who must remain standing for an unknown amount of time until they can board the bus. The combination of these challenging environmental factors creates a space where the daily repetition of monotonous actions tied to standing and waiting wear down the individual physically and emotionally. Spread throughout the city, bus stops are individual posts that signal to residents where to wait for the bus among the poor living conditions of the *periferia*. Unclearly marked and not updated, the bus stops fall into disrepair, mirroring the physical decay of the *periferia*. In the short story, "Era uma vez," the bus stop serves as the principal setting and focus of attention for the protagonist who lacks purpose in his life. This space encapsulates the urban decay of peripheral neighborhoods that are overlooked by society. Through depilated conditions and endless waiting, the bus stops and transfer stations become sites that convey the hopelessness of surviving the *periferia*.

Moments of splendor interrupt the dehumanizing effects of precarious living conditions in the *periferia*. In the story "Era Uma Vez" (Once Upon a Time), Era Uma Vez is captivated by the beauty of a spider web hanging from the bus stop post: a rupture in nihilistic existence. He starts the evening by going to a local bar only to see "cadeiras cheias de carne morta, sonhadores de um futuro agora já primitivo" (Ferréz 45). Era Uma Vez's view of the bar patrons as "chairs filled with putrefied meat" illustrates the rupture experienced by the protagonist.[69] The passage captures the dehumanization of

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[69] One particular location used as a setting in the works of *Literatura Periférica* the bar is a gathering space for *gente minúscula* to engage with literature as a form of social empowerment. The bar is viewed not only as a location to drink, but also as a place where friends and neighbors come together to fraternize and to participate in activities such as listening to music, dancing or playing games. The bar can also serve as a restaurant where local residents eat lunch or dinner. These social characteristics of the bar in Brazil's urban

fellow *periferia* residents as the main character cannot connect with his surrounding environment. Everything loses meaning and purpose for him. Era Uma Vez does not want to fall victim to the decaying existence of urban life. On his return trip, he encounters a spider web. During the night he cannot stop thinking about the splendor of the web. The following morning Era Uma Vez returns to that same bus stop:

> Chegou e todos ficaram olhando para aquele homem com uma picareta na mão. Começou a cavar em volta do ponto de ônibus. Conseguiu tirar e o colocou nas costas. Chegou em casa e deitou o ponto no meio da sala. A teia estava pendurada nele. Deitou ao lado do poste e ficou olhando fixamente para a teia. (47)

> He arrived and everyone remained staring at that man with a pickaxe in his hand. He began to dig around the bus stop post. He successfully pulled it out and placed it on his back. He arrived at home and laid the post in the middle of the living room. The spider web was hanging from it. He lay down next to the post, staring fixedly at the spider web (My translation)

The protagonist's obsession with the spider web creates a sense of de-familiarization not only with his everyday routine, but with that of the onlookers as well.[70] The spider web shocks the protagonist's view of the neighborhood landscape, causing him to change the meaning of objects through the dislocation of the bus post. This destabilization of the urban landscape allows for alternative perspectives of the same environment that include noticing the splendor in the details of ordinary spaces like the bus stop (Süssekind 17).

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areas allow it to serve as a cultural institution that provides a space for local commerce, entertainment and a sense of community. As such, writers and artists from the *literatura periférica* movement use the bar as a location for education and artistic engagement (Peçanha do Nascimento).

[70] See Victor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" for the destabilizing effects of art in everyday life.

Era Uma Vez's ability to see intense beauty in a dreary environment interrupts the normal

flow of an urban society where individuals typically experience a bleak existence.[71]

Era Uma Vez's capacity to enter a reflective space through the bus post

demonstrates Denilson Lopes' idea that the delicate transpires in the most unlikely of

social contexts (42-44). The spider web on the bus post serves as a mental portal that

allows the protagonist to enter a metaphysical space where possibilities for a more

meaningful existence present themselves. Framed as a piece of artwork that transcends

the beauty of this world, the spider web impacts the protagonist's worldview. The

interaction between the spider and Era Uma Vez illustrates art that "transcends [its]

subject matter," and evokes "possibility out of limitation" (Bradley 91). A simple object,

the spider web transforms into a mechanism that disrupts the despair of poverty, which

plagues the *periferia.* The spider web surpasses the immediate desolation surrounding it.

The distraction that Era Uma Vez experiences permits him to reexamine the city's bleak

reality by allowing him to visualize an unexpected and beautiful landscape.

In Ferréz work, the oppressive nature of public transit amplifies the subordinate

status of *periferia* residents who encounter injustice on a daily basis. Cycles of

commuting amplify the desperation of living in the *periferia* as bus routes parallel the

*destino* of marginalized subjects' lives in the *periferia.* Through the delicate, Ferréz

evokes moments of defamiliarization that interrupt the repetition and monotony of using

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[71] This experience parallels other characters from Brazil's literary canon. Clarice Lispector's novel *A hora da estrela* (1977), recounts the story of a poor typist, Macabéa, from Brazil's poverty-stricken northeast region who migrates to Rio de Janeiro in search of a better life. Despite the despair that constantly surrounds Macabéa, she seems to always find some glimmer of hope in the most bleak of situations. She may appear naïve in the face of so much hardship, but she imagines a hopeful place in the squalid conditions of Brazil's urban metropolises.

public transit.  In the liminal space of the bus, Ferréz disrupts the system of meaning by introducing spectacular moments that enable the rider to rethink how he sees the world around him.  Unexpected moments also unfold within the space of bus stops and transfers while waiting in long lines for unspecified amounts of time.  During these emotionally and physically taxing experiences, ordinary objects within the *periferia* allow the commuter to re-envision the desolation of the surrounding environment, reframing the socio-economic hardships of the *periferia*.  Providing an interruption in urban life, spheres of liminality and instances of spectacle in public transit reframe the normalized routines of the stigmatized residents of the *periferia*.  Providing insight into the social conditions of marginalized communities in São Paulo, Ferréz's call upon public transit as a site of social exchange.

## CONCLUSION

Ferréz reevaluates the image of criminality associated with the *periferia* by examining the cyclical poverty and racism that contributes to its subordinate citizenship status.  He complicates negativity of being from the *periferia* by actively using the term *Literatura Marginal* in attempt to change the pejorative ideas of crime and danger attached to Brazil's lower classes. The formation of the *favelas* and *periferia* results from an unequal distribution of citizenship rights based on race and social class.  The stigma that accompanies the *periferia* leads to discriminatory practices by the state and ruling classes, such as racial profiling, lower wages, limited educational opportunities and underfunded schools.  The expulsion of non-white, working class citizens to the margins

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of the city severely limits their life chances since they remain out of reach of adequate resources to ensure their safety and stability. By providing the illusion of wealth and power, crime becomes an attractive option for *periferia* youth to overcome social inequality. Ferréz cautions against crime's false promises of escape from poverty due to the high risk of violence, death and incarceration connected to it. He introduces the organic intellectual figure to serve as a foil to the negative image of the *criminoso* by replacing crime with historical references that evoke the *periferia's* rich cultural history. The intellectual represents the recent emergence of Afro-Brazilian cultural and political organizations that strive to increase the visibility of the social problems that afflict their communities.

The public transit system further explores the subordinate status of *periferia* residents through the monotony of daily commutes. Cramped quarters and extensive travel times on the bus emphasize the precarious conditions *periferia* residents face in all aspects of their life. Transfer stations and bus stops also convey the desperation of navigating the harsh environment of São Paulo's outskirts. Endless waiting in long lines and the gritty physical surroundings amplify the dreariness of urban life that is physically and emotionally taxing. Within the banality of public transit, Ferréz inserts events uncharacteristic to the *periferia,* which momentarily interrupts the rider's drab existence. Brief moments of beauty or otherworldly interactions with deceased community members allow the commuter to deeply examine the social stigma, institutionalized racism and marginalization they experience as *periferia* residents. These unusual occurrences provide them with the strength to endure the endless cycle of economic hardship tied to their lower racial standing in Brazilian society.

## Chapter 2: Criminality and the Perua: Social Stigma in the *Periferia*

*Quero dar voz àqueles que não tinha voz na versão oficial. Como Saramago, odeio qualquer tipo de injustiça.*

*I want to give voice to those who have not had a voice in the official version. Like Saramago, I detest any kind of injustice.*

-*Sacolinha*[72]

Mediating spheres of order/governmental systems and the liminal space of clandestine transportation, Sacolinha's *cobrador*[73] reconceptualizes *malandragem* as a way to demand equal citizenship rights for the *periferia*. Economic adversity, an inefficient infrastructure and wide spread discrimination make life in the *periferia* a constant challenge. The *cobrador* takes on attributes of the *malandro,* such as guile and manipulation, to address the social inequalities that plague his community without completing disrupting the established social order. The *malandro* in Brazilian literature and culture has constantly subverted authority through indirect ways in order to have his immediate needs addressed and leave the existing power structure intact. He seeks favorable circumstances through adaptation or escape when the present situation no longer benefits him. The *cobrador* uses a similar strategy to not only meet his personal needs, but also the necessities of his fellow *periferia* residents that remain unmet by the government and the upper classes. He many not be able to change the unequal distribution of wealth and power in Brazil, but the *cobrador* can use his cunningness to

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[72] See Érica Peçanha do Nascimento's study, *Vozes marginais na literatura* (2009) for an in depth examination of Sacolinha's literary, social and cultural projects in the *periferia* of São Paulo's *zona leste*.
[73] The *cobrador* can be found in both legal and clandestine transportation systems. This individual typically collects fares from passengers when they board the bus or the *perua*. In clandestine transportation, the *cobrador* is usually an adolescent male who lives and works in the *periferia*.

manipulate the system to make it provide some temporary benefits for the *periferia*. The *cobrador's* covert actions in conjunction with his fellow clandestine transportation co-workers create a sense of community among themselves that enables them to withstand the stigma of being from marginalized communities of color, such as the *periferia*.

Applying the concept of *malandragem* to the *cobrador* and clandestine transportation provides a framework for not only understanding how marginalized subjects negotiate with systemic inequalities, but also points out the cyclical poverty and violence that they cannot escape due to unequal citizenship rights. The *malandro's jeitinho*, or cleverness, demonstrates how individuals in subordinate social positions can manipulate the authority of the state and of the ruling classes in indirect ways that will not bring attention to the hierarchy of Brazilian society. In order to accomplish this goal, the *malandro* negotiates the spheres of order (the state) and disorder (the margins) in such a way that he can inhabit the same space as other classes without causing conflict. His ability to share a location with the upper classes symbolizes the reconciliation of race and class differences between Brazil's social groups that primarily benefits the elite. The *malandro* may deceive authorities, but he does so only to meet his personal needs. His actions do not challenge the existing division of power, which merely reiterates the unequal distribution of citizenship rights. Beginning in the 1960s, the *malandro* experienced a modification in his approach to Brazil's social problems. He transitioned from an individual who used a conciliatory stance to someone who became more confrontational towards inequity. His transformation mirrored the emergence of the counter culture movement that used art and literature to openly critique the dictatorial government and its repressive tactics. Sacolinha's *cobrador* and his methods to deal with the poverty and racism of the *periferia* resemble the *malandro* of the second half of the 20th century. The *cobrador* uses his *malandragem* to manipulate the system to gain

access to better services and resources for the *periferia*. He no longer focuses on his self interests, but instead seeks out the well being of his community. Unfortunately, the *cobrador* cannot escape the eventual fate of many *periferia* youth despite his charm and resourcefulness: poverty, violence and in some cases, death. The lack of infrastructure in the *periferia* reinforces the cycle of inequality that the *cobrador* and other residents experience in their daily life. Clandestine transportation and other forms of informal economy become an option for *periferia* residents to respond to the government's inability to provide adequate public transit and resources to the margins of the city. The principal vehicle of unauthorized transportation, the *perua*, [74] function as a liminal space that symbolizes the displacement of the *cobrador* as a deterritorialized worker. Another worker, the *ambulante*, inhabits the threshold positioning of the *terminal*, which emphasizes the stigma he experiences as an outsider to São Paulo. Both the *cobrador* and the *ambulante* seek out ways to create support networks among themselves to withstand the isolating effects of being a working class, non-white person from the *periferia*.

## MALANDRAGEM AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN THE PERIFERIA

Given the historical context of *malandragem* and using João Cezar de Castro Rocha's dialectic of marginality, I analyze the ways in which Sacolinha's *cobrador* manipulates the system in order to negotiate the social inequalities that exist in the *periferia*. The characteristics of the *malandro* can also be applied to the *cobrador* who uses guile and manipulation to meet his and the *periferia's* socio-economic needs. Cleverness defines the *malandro's* demeanor, as he deceives authority figures without

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[74] Also known as *kombis*, *peruas* typically are vans that serve as informal public transit for residents of the *periferia* and other outlying sectors of the city.

drawing attention to himself.  Even though he originates from the margins of society, the *malandro's* ability to inhabit the same social space as the ruling classes leaves the hierarchical structure intact.  Traditionally, the *malandro* will not disrupt the system as long as his needs are met, and his manipulation masks the racism and social disparity that affects the marginal classes in Brazil.[75]  A shift in the *malandro's* approach to inequality occurs in the 1960s, as more writers and artists adopted a confrontational tone to address Brazil's social problems during its years as a military dictatorship.[76]  Taking a combative stance, Sacolinha's *cobrador* cannot change systemic inequalities, but he can use his *malandragem* to manipulate the system in order to provide basic needs for himself and his compatriots.

The *malandro's jeitinho* (cleverness) has roots in the cordial man since he does not respect authority, but engages with individuals of power in indirect ways as to avoid conflict.[77]  The origins of the term *jeitinho* comes from the expression *dar um jeito* (find a way), and implies that the individual must use creativity, available resources and personal connections to achieve one's goal.  He must find a way to circumvent the rule of law and social conventions without drawing attention to himself.  His cunningness allows him to be resourceful in the presence of authoritative figures that restrict access to power and wealth.  The *malandro* may not have instruction from formal educational institutions, but his *jeitinho* alludes to someone who uses common sense, knowledge of hierarchical

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[75] See Roberto DaMatta's *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma* (1991) for additional commentary on the social and political dynamics that surround the *malandro* figure in Brazilian society.

[76] The Brazilian counter culture gained prominence during the 1960s, as it produced music, film and literature, which addressed the political repression and social inequalities downplayed by the government. See Roberto Schwarz's *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (1992) for additional essays on the culture and art of the 1960s.

[77] The importance of being cordial has origins in what Sergio Buarque de Holanda classifies as the cordial man in his seminal work on the formation of Brazilian society, *Raízes do Brasil*.  The cordial man values friendship and informal relationships with men of power over the ritual authority of the state (DaMatta).

structures and naturally gifted intelligence to acquire resources. He is a street-smart figure who knows how to avoid the pitfalls of social class and race that limit access to resources for individuals from the margins of society.

Published in 1970, Antônio Cândido's essay, "A dialética da malandragem" proposes, through his analysis of Manuel Antonio de Almeida's novel *Memórias de um sargento de milícias,* that Brazil's social formation was based on a negotiation between the spheres of order and disorder.[78] This comprise was accomplished through the figure of the *malandro,*[79] whose ability to interact with institutions of order (i.e., government, landowners, military) permitted people from different social classes to inhabit the same social space without conflict, or at least to make the lower classes more controllable. The *malandro* negotiates interactions between different social spheres, thereby establishing a society that reconciles social inequality through obscuring it. The *malandro* makes the real world violence and poverty that affects many Brazilians less threatening to the ruling classes.

Always resourceful, the *malandro* blends into the social context before him or abandons it for something better. The *malandro* is a "ser de otro mundo" (being from another world) that successfully subverts the same laws and rights that he is denied in society (Arroyo-Martinez 209). He operates in Brazilian society labels him as an outsider who does not follow the norms of society. His ambiguous social position gives him a certain sense of freedom since he can adapt to whatever social context currently before

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[78] Manuel Antonio de Almeida's novel, *Memórias de um sargento de milícias*, was published in 1852.

[79] The *malandro* uses charm and aloofness to fool authority figures, and he employs different strategies, typically illicit, that allow him to gain advantage over the other party in a specific situation that usually involves individuals or institutions with money and power, such as politicians, businessmen or the military. His cunningness does not limit itself to cheating only those people with wealth, as he uses it in all aspects of his personal and social life. The *malandro* may use his trickery to win in gambling, to avoid arrest, to gain the upper hand in business dealings and to commit adultery by feigning fidelity to different women. His deception of others demands great skill, as the execution of his plan requires that he manipulate his mark for the best possible outcome with the least amount of work and risk.

him, or in more risky circumstances, find a way to escape to a more favorable situation. As a social chameleon, he conforms to the social structure in order to avoid drawing attention to himself. This façade allows him to deceive others for his personal benefit. If his mischievous intent is discovered, or if he cannot find a way to manipulate the surrounding environment, the *malandro* will abandon his plan at first opportunity. The *malandro's* personal safety and comfort comes first, and assuring the well being of others or fostering a sense of solidarity is not his priority.

As a concept, *malandragem* can be understood as a strategy to gain advantage over other individuals and the state while leaving the power structure intact. To execute this strategy well, the *malandro*, or the individual engaging in *malandragem*, needs charisma. He needs to be a smooth talker that can convince others that he is a friend, or be able to bypass unexpected predicaments that befall him due to his mischievous behavior. The best form of *malandragem* occurs when the *malandro* tricks his victim without the victim knowing that they have been hustled. According to Roberto da Matta in his study on Brazilian culture, *Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, the *malandro's* subversive behavior reflects attitudes of avoiding conflict and "the harsh reality of life" found in the "domain of the street" (138-39). For example, instead of publicly denouncing the corruption of politicians and the landed elite, the *malandro* may meet his immediate needs through deception. His goal is not to overthrow the system. As long as he finds a solution to his problems, the *malandro* is fine with continuing to engage in the current social structure regardless of its oppressive tactics. Moreover, the *malandro's* carefree, easy-going approach to making ends meet allows Brazilians, both rich and poor, to minimize the cyclical poverty and violence that exists in the nation's urban centers.

Brazil has a long history of the ruling class passing contradictory statutes as a way to work around the limits of their legal system. In his seminal work on the notion of citizenship in Brazil, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, James Holston characterizes the practice of making exceptions to the rule as a dichotomy: powerlessness for most Brazilians and immunity for a select few (16). Powerlessness refers to those individuals who lack power in relation to others. In Brazil, everyone is considered a citizen, but an unequal distribution of rights exists. Therefore, the powerless are subject to the law while the powerful experience's Holston's idea of immunity, or a lack of accountability to the state and its regulations (16). Through his ability to manipulate authority figures, the *malandro* experiences a certain degree of protection from the political power structure. Despite some reprieve from consequences, his social and racial background, and the imbalance of power between the elites and the working class population of color, limit his potential for social mobility.

Typically in Brazilian literature, the *malandro* reveals the corruption of the state, which results in him being seen as folk hero. More importantly, his *malandragem* exposes the corruption and hypocrisy of the state. His resistance to the state transforms him into a heroic figure among the lower classes since he is able to fool representatives of power for his benefit while being well liked.[80] Lorraine Leu notes that after Brazil's

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[80] One classic example from Brazilian literature, the novel *Memórias de um sargento de milícias*, written in narrates the tale of Leonardo, a problem child who loves mischief rather than following the rules of society. Antônio Cândido, in his essay, "A dialética da malandragem," argues that this novel is one of the first literary works to introduce the figure of the *malandro*. The *malandro* figure appears in other literary works such as Lima Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos*, Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* and Jorge Amado's *Capitães de areia*. All of these examples highlight the importance of the *malandro* in Brazilian literature as a way of dealing with the inequalities of life. For example, João Cezar de Castro Rocha notes in *Capitães de areia* how the author focuses on the protagonists' *malandro* mannerisms as they navigate the streets of Salvador, Bahia, but ignores the details of what they are wearing, which is probably tattered clothing since they are street children. This subtle omission by the author reinforces how Brazilian society avoids a direct approach through the *malandro* with the everyday poverty and violence that plagues many communities in urban areas.

military coup of 1964, the criminal or *malandro* figure acquired more heroic qualities as he was seen as the "avenger of his class" and an "oppositional figure to order" imposed by authoritarian governments. The military dictatorship created a stark divide between who had control and who had no political power that could no longer be hidden by the conciliatory rhetoric of the past. The government's tactics, such as censorship and unwarranted arrests, fostered political unrest as more Brazilians became outspoken about the blatant social oppression that was unfolding in their country. Literature that emerged during this time period echoed this political change, as many writers increasingly created works that criticized the government and brought more attention to the larger socio-economic gap between the rich and poor.[81] In these literary works, the marginal characters no longer embodied the jovial nature of the *malandro* interpreted in fiction from past generations. Uncensored images of violence, hunger and crime defined the experiences of these protagonists who no longer attempted to negotiate with the ruling classes. The *malandro* was replaced by a figure that directly confronted the social injustices that affected him and his community.

Positioned on the margins of society the *malandro* and the *cobrador* both subvert the system. Sacolinha's *cobrador*, unlike the *malandro* who works alone, seeks out fellowship in order to counter the isolation he experiences in his own community.[82] The

[81] Multiple writers during this time period reflect the rise of the counter culture movement of the 1960s in Brazil. See Plínio Marcos and his theatrical plays *Barrela, Dois perdidos numa noite suja* and *A navalha na carne* as well as João Antônio with his collection of short stories, *Malaguetas, perus e bacanaços*.

[82] The absence of family characterizes the daily experiences of many street youth, particularly males, who Derek Pardue notes travel the streets searching for acceptance (125). Other scholars have also emphasized the impact of the street in the lives of peripheral youth in Brazil, such as MV Bill and Celso Athayde's *Falcão: meninos do tráfico* (2006), Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Daniel Hoffman's article "Brazilian Apartheid: Street Kids and the Struggle for Urban Space" (1998), Thomas G. Sanders' two volume work, *Brazilian Street Children* (1987), Grácia Maria Fenelon's *Meninas de rua: uma vida em movimento* (1992) and Irene Rizzini and Alexandre Bárbara Soares' *Vida nas ruas: crianças e adolescentes nas ruas: trajetórias inevitáveis?* (2003). Urban youth struggle to survive in these unforgiving conditions of the streets of Brazil's urban areas.

*cobrador's* tough exterior merely masks the emotional pain of rejection that afflicts him. He turns to other urban youth who experience similar feelings of being an outsider in an attempt to create community. Zygmunt Bauman notes that marginalized individuals search for community is a quest to find what is unattainable or lacking in their lives (3-4). In the case of the *cobrador*, he seeks out the elusive goal of finding acceptance in the *periferia* and beyond. The harsh reality of the streets, coupled with the loss of family and friends, amplifies the *cobrador's* sense of vulnerability. He will look to others who find themselves in the same situation in order to establish a protective network that provides a sense of safety. While unstable, the communities of *cobradores* offer protection against the challenges of violence, poverty and racial profiling that commonly occur in Brazil's urban periphery.

Using subversive tactics, Sacolinha's protagonist, Pixote,[83] functions as a leader in his neighborhood. Pixote's *malandragem* is rooted in Holston's notion of insurgent citizenship, where *periferia* residents demanded full civic membership (i.e., property claims, city services, better infrastructure) (9). Pixote identifies with a Che Guevara quote: "Se você é capaz de tremer de indignação diante de uma cena de injustiça, então somos companheiros" (If you are capable of trembling with indignation before a scene of injustice, then we are companions) (18). He utilizes his *malandragem* to deal with the inequalities and oppressions that he witnesses in the *periferia*. In *Estação Terminal*, the *cobrador* Pixote manipulates the system in order to assure that his fellow workers have access to the same legal rights that the middle and upper classes receive from the police

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[83] The name Pixote references previous books and films that contained protagonists with the same name. José Louzeiro, a Brazilian crime fiction author wrote the novel *A infância dos mortos* (1977) that has as its main character a young boy named Pixote who lives on the streets with a group of youth. The 1981 film, *Pixote*, directed by Héctor Babenco and based on Louzeiro's novel, also follows the lives of young men living on the streets of Brazil.

and the insurance adjustors. An insurance claims adjuster refuses to pay for a van lost during a flood belonging to Carlão, Pixote's colleague, but Pixote helps him strip the van of all its parts and makes a false police report. The police will not investigate extensively an insurance claim submitted by a wealthy individual, but they will do so if the person is from the *periferia*, which happens to Pixote and Carlão:

> Após rodar desmanches por toda a cidade de São Paulo e oferecer dinheiro como recompensa aos policias que achassem a van, a segurdora resolveu pagar o cliente. Com quarenta e cinco dias Carlão recebeu uma van zero quilômetro. (Sacolina 19)

> After picking apart the entire city of São Paulo and offering money as recompense to the police officers who found the van, the insurance agent decided to pay the client. (My translation)

Pixote's initiative includes working around the legal system in order to gain economic benefits. Pixote needs to know the law and the tactics of the insurance adjustor extremely well in order to gain full rights to what is owed to him and Carlão. Pixote gains notoriety among the *perua* drivers for this plan as well as other acts of solidarity that he performs for them and the *cobradores*. He may not be able to change the system or the rules, but he understands how the system works. Pixote uses that knowledge to make the policies favor himself and his friends. Needs are met and problems are resolved.

Traditionally, the *malandro* took advantage of vulnerable individuals for personal gain, but the *cobrador* uses his *malandragem* to manipulate the system and not fellow community members who reside in the *periferia*. In the opening story of Sacolinha's Estação Terminal, "A malandragem de Pixote," Pixote takes on the role of mentor to new *cobradores*. He could easily deceive these young workers and still be well liked by them, but his mentorship of the *cobradores* indicates that he will take advantage of the system, not his own people. Pixote embodies leadership qualities typically not found in the

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*malandro*. His *malandragem* will benefit individuals in the *periferia*. His mischievous behavior is reserved for manipulating the system to benefit him and his colleagues.

The *cobrador's* inevitable death highlights the cycle of poverty and despair found in the *periferia*. In his essay, "The 'dialectic of marginality': preliminary notes on Brazilian contemporary culture," João Cezar de Castro Rocha argues that contemporary Brazilian literature, particularly literary works about urban experiences, deconstructs jovial ways of dealing with social inequalities found in the figure of the *malandro*.[84] Pixote confronts the problems of the *periferia* through violence and poverty instead of with a smile on his face. Moreover, poverty and violence persist despite Pixote's best efforts to bypass it through his use of *malandragem*. Pixote faces the same fate as all poor Brazilians, regardless of his guile. He experiences a horrible death due to mistaken identity, when he is confused for someone who committed a horrible crime against the family member of his perpetrator. Ironically, his murderer also worked outside the limits of the law to seek justice for his family. Pixote's unexpected death functions as a powerful image that reflects the harshness of the *periferia*. His death is an act of what Leila Lehnen's classifies as insurgent culture, echoing the injustices that permeate the *periferia* (14-15). The everyday violence that reaches the lives of *periferia* residents is not sanitized, and the power of the text comes about through unsettling imagery of hardship.

The *malandro's* ability to negotiate the spheres of order and disorder allows him to use deception to acquire the most favorable circumstance possible while leaving the hierarchical structure intact. Circumventing the rule of law and social norms may give the *malandro* access to resources, but his actions do not remedy the cyclical poverty and

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[84] João Cezar de Castro Rocha's essay is a response to Antônio Cândido's classic essay on the role of the malandro in Brazilian literature and culture: "A dialética da malandragem."

racism that oppress working class communities of color, including the *periferia*. Unlike the *malandro*, the *cobrador* directly opposes the systemic inequalities that affect the *periferia*. Through his use of *malandragem*, the *cobrador* deceives authority figures to provide resources for his comrades. He cannot change the system, but he can manipulate it in order to offer a fleeting sense of social justice. Although the *cobrador's malandragem* allows him to acquire some financial resources, he cannot escape violence and death.

### THE PERUA AND CLANDESTINE TRANSPORTATION

By providing a foundation for understanding São Paulo's infrastructure inequalities, I analyze how the liminal space of the *perua* and the *terminal* embody the uncertain social status of *periferia* residents. The lack of an adequate infrastructure system in the *periferia* reiterates the social and political invisibility of its residents. Sacolinha explores the responses by both *periferia* residents and the municipal government to public transit shortages found in the outskirts of the city. Clandestine transportation offered *periferia* residents a viable transportation option that the city could not provide for them. In response, the government tried to regulate, and eventually, outlaw the use of the *perua*. Despite these legal obstacles, the *perua* flourished in the *periferia* from the 1980s until the beginning of the 21st century. The *perua* also symbolizes the precarious social conditions of the *cobrador*, a marginalized individual. As a deterritorialized workers, the *cobradores* engage in hazing rituals in order to establish a sense of community and to counter social displacement. Similarly, the *terminal*, where buses and *peruas* go to drop off and pick up passengers, functions as a liminal space inhabited by a threshold person: the *ambulante*. Another marginalized

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figure, the *ambulante* also uses informal networks provide social support and to avoid persecution by the authorities. Ultimately, the liminality of the *perua* and the *terminal* exemplify the precarious conditions faced by *periferia* residents.


**The Perua and Clandestine Employment**

During the 1980s and 1990s, inadequate infrastructure in the São Paulo's outskirts, particularly in regards to public transportation, amplified the social inequalities of the *periferia*. The main bus system did not run regularly and did not have sufficient routes that reached many areas of the *periferia*.[85] The scarcity of bus routes and metro stations in the *periferia* exacerbated the geographical and social separation residents experienced in relation to the city center. Since most adequate employment and educational opportunities are located in central area of São Paulo, not having access to those resources added to the sense of desperation in the *periferia*. The introduction of the *perua* in the *periferia* during the 1980s provided a solution to the lack of readily available public transportation to commercial districts. *Peruas* are privately owned vans that function as a mini-bus to transport *periferia* residents to work, school and home. It was used as a form of clandestine transportation in the *periferia* from the 1980s-2000s.[86] Due to the high demand, this business was lucrative. The *peruas* offered *periferia* residents an alternative to a government-approved transit system that was not reliable or easily accessible.

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[85] From 2001-2010, new regulations and government funding allowed the mass transit system to be revamped, which provided safer, more accessible transportation to the *periferia*.

[86] *Peruas* provide an essential transportation service to *periferia* residents. Some drivers became successful entrepreneurs owning several *peruas* and/or the rights to certain routes. Other drivers would pay a fee to drive a route.

Despite their illegal status, *peruas* flourished due to demand for their services. The *perua* represented a resourceful response to residents' need for access to the city due to the absence of public transit and infrastructure in the *periferia*. The enormous demand for alternative transportation results in non-authorized practices that benefit the everyday life of marginal subjects who live without inadequate infrastructure. This service allows them to have access to other areas of the city; combatting isolation from social and economic opportunities due to government negligence. Clandestine transportation created opportunities for *periferia* residents to be integrated with the city's social and cultural happenings; a right enjoyed by upper social classes who were free to move about the city. The use of *peruas* results in a work force that is exclusively from the *periferia*. The *periferia* historically has had higher unemployment rates and lower wages in comparison to other areas of the city. By creating a work force solely from the *periferia*, the *perua* assures economic growth. Despite its unlawful status, the *perua* offered a viable option for *periferia* residents who could not wait for the municipal government to take an unknown number of years to address their needs.

The local government's eventual response to the issue of public transit in the *periferia* further contributed to the marginalization of residents who sought integration with the city. Through São Paulo state government's licensing program, *perua* drivers were able to become legal operators of public transit. However, the state's procedures made the process burdensome, therefore, the *perua* drivers did not obtain the licenses. The city of São Paulo attempted to outlaw the use of *peruas*, but "devido ao aumento do número de peruas, a cada dia se tornava mais difícil acabar com este meio de locomoção" (due to the increase in the number of *peruas*, each day it become more difficult to do away with this form of transportation) (Sacolinha 79). The bus companies launched a campaign to counter the wide spread use of *peruas* by showing the dangers of using

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clandestine transportation. The police also instituted a large-scale operation to arrest as many *perua* drivers as possible.[87] The government's actions reflect the negative perception of alternative transportation regardless of the crucial service that it offered to residents of the *periferia*. It is deemed criminal because it reduces the profits of licensed transportation that ironically does not provide adequate service. The routes created by *peruas* become criminal spaces. The city government will not recognize their needs; therefore the residents of the *periferia* must create spaces and practices to fill those needs. The government attempts to shut down the non-authorized commerce, but that does not stop the *perua* drivers from finding ways to work around the system.

The narratives in *Estação Terminal* intersect with each other to reveal a larger account about the *zona leste's* history from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Many of Sacolinha's characters search for innovative ways to work around the system. The *perua* drivers in *Estação Terminal* exemplify how marginal subjects attempt to subvert the system. Batata, for example, creates his own advertisement, which he places on the back of his *perua,* to counter the negative publicity created by the government:

1 ÔNIBUS = 80 PASSAGEIROS POR VIAGEM:
2 EMPREGOS
1 LOTAÇÃO = 10 PASSAGEIROS POR VIAGEM:
2 EMPREGOS
NO CASO PRECISAMOS DE 8 PERUAS PARA
CARREGAR IGUAL AO ÔNIBUS = 16 EMPREGOS
E AÍ, QUEM TÁ GERANDO MAIS EMPREGOS? (Sacolinha 92)

1 BUS = 80 PASSENGERS PER TRIP:
2 JOBS
1 VAN = 10 PASSENGERS PER TRIP:
2 JOBS
IN THIS CASE WE NEED 8 PERUAS TO

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[87] During this time period, *perua* drivers used radios to communicate with each other to provide warnings of potential traps set by state authorities.

TRANSPORT THE SAME AS THE BUS = 16 JOBS
AND SO, WHO IS CREATING MORE JOBS? (My translation)

His public announcement creates a public dialogue with the city government for all of São Paulo's residents to witness.  Batata and his fellow *perua* drivers do not have a voice when it come to debates on the future of the city's public transit system, therefore, the streets are the best location to address the unfair treatment of *perua* drivers and *cobradores*.  This subversive marketing campaign simultaneously brings unwanted attention to the problems of government infrastructure and showcases the contributions of their profession.  Working around the system, as well as outlining arguments to legitimize their activities, the *perua* drivers and *cobradores* portrayed in Sacolinha's work find ways to survive and even flourish in the *periferia*.

The *cobrador* resides in the *periferia*, however, Sacolinha portrays him as an individual who does not have clear social ties to any specific person or group, mirroring the ambiguous social status of urban youth in the *periferia*.  Moreover, his continual travel in the *perua* symbolizes the challenge that youth experience in their attempts to establish permanent social ties in their neighborhood.[88]  The *perua* driver and the *cobrador's* terminology for classifying different kinds of riders indicate the social distance they experience with the surrounding community.  Always on the run from authorities, the *cobrador's* role in the underground economy forces him to hide in the shadows of the *periferia*.  He spends most of his time on the street, which further isolates him from family, friends and neighbors.  Sacolinha's *cobrador* cannot find permanency in mainstream society or in the *periferia*, resulting in his position on the margins as a

[88] See Ricardo Elias' film, *Os 12 trabalhos,* for additional artistic representations of marginalized Brazilian youth's struggles to connect with family and community through the space of public transit.  Emanuelle K. F. Oliveira's essay, "De Paso por la Ciudad de Dios: Repensar las representaciones sociales de las comunidades pobres en el cine brasileño actual," offers analysis on this film, and how it offers a refreshing take on marginalized communities primarily portrayed through images of violence and crime.

threshold person.[89]   Seen as polluted, or out of place, the *cobrador* must look to the uncertain space of the *perua* as a place of stability.

The *cobrador* creates community through ritual acts to counter the displacing effects of being a deterritorialized worker in marginalized spaces.[90]   For the *cobradores* in Sacolinha's stories, hazing serves as a mandatory rite of passage for entry into their closed community.  The *cobrador* forms relationships with other transit workers in São Paulo to recreate the sense of community that they lack in their personal lives due to what Deleuze and Guattari call the "deterritorialized worker," an individual who distances himself from family, his environment and the economic system he engages with daily (224-25).  The opening story of Estação Terminal illustrates how young men from the periferia attempt to recreate a sense of community through hazing:

> Pegam o calouro, e…cumprem a tradição.  Dois seguram o galeto desinquieto, enquanto outros dois puxam a cueca dele pra cima até rasgar…abrem o carro de um perueiro qualquer, jogam o fulano lá dentro e juntando todos os outros que no passado foram batizados, começam a segunda parte: chinelada na bunda. (Sacolinha 16)

> They grab the newbie…to complete the tradition.  Two grab the fidgeting chicken, while two others pull his underwear up until it rips…they open the car belonging to a random perua driver, throw the guy inside and gathering the rest of the cobradores who were baptized in the past, commence the second part: kicking him in the buttocks. (My translation)

Rejected by society, these young men look to each other to create a group with their own rules, rituals and roles.[91]   Sávio, the initiate, is now an accepted member of this

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[89] Threshold person originates from Mary Douglas' examination of individuals who violate the social order, which can be further explored in her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966).

[90] See Paul Willis' *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* for an in depth study on urban, working class youth's strategies to find social and cultural practices that provide meaning in their lives despite being excluded from mainstream society.

[91] David Crouch's essay "The Street in the Making of Popular Geographical Knowledge," found in the edited volume, *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space* (1998), argues that the

wandering family. These *cobradores* are not a gang per se, but their actions resemble one. For these *cobradores*, hazing is a rite of passage that they must pass through in order to be accepted. Entry into the closed group is not free. An offering must be made, and in the case of Sávio, it is himself. However, Pixote explains to a crying Sávio that he will get to repay the favor in the future: "-Num esquenta, depois chega outro, aí você desconta" (16). (Don't get mad, another one will come and then you can take it out on him). The cycle of receiving and inflicting violence unites them.[92] Violence functions as an invisible badge that grants them membership into an exclusive group. Sávio will be able to physic'ally express his frustration on the next initiate as an indication of his insider status among the *cobradores*. The *cobradores'* hazing ritual becomes normalized, a necessary function in order to maintain stability in their group.

**The Terminal & The Ambulante**

As a site of constant transition, the *terminal's* liminal nature permits marginalized subjects to find ways to survive outside the social limitations placed on them by society. Located throughout the São Paulo metropolitan region, *terminals* serve as major commuter hubs where riders can board or exist buses, *peruas* and in some cases, the metro. The continual movement of people, vehicles and goods through the *terminal* contribute to the experience of being in a threshold position, as they leave one location in order to arrive at another. While most city dwellers do not remain in this in-between space for very long, other inhabitants, particularly from the *periferia,* remain to find ways

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street can be a place where urban subjects can create networks and practices that provides meaning in their lives.

[92] See René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1979) for insight into the connections between violence, ritual and mimetic desire. Sacrifice keeps violence out of the community through the use of the scapegoat in ritual that substitutes it.

to meet their basic needs.  Sacolinha provides a long list of the individuals who regularly

inhabit the *terminal:*

> Chegariam por ali traficantes, taxistas, promotores de venda, perueiros, bicheiros, catadores de ferro-velho, ciganos, mendigos, pedintes, ladrões, prostitutas e homosexuais (*Estação Terminal* 52).
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> Drug traffickers, taxi drivers, sale promoters, *peruas* drivers, illegal gamblers, junk collectors, gypsies, beggars, pan-handlers, thieves, prostitutes and homosexuals would pass through there [the terminal]. (My translation)

These suspect individuals utilize the *terminal's* threshold positioning to engage in

informal or clandestine activities since they are typically shut out from opportunities in

mainstream society (Itikawa 341).[93]  The areas where *peruas* congregate, the sidewalks

where *bicheiros*[94] run their gambling enterprises and even the spaces under the pedestrian

bridge used by prostitutes, drug dealers and homosexuals illustrate the economic and

social importance of the *terminal* to these individuals.

Mary Douglas' notion of threshold people applies to the marginalized subjects who

regularly use the *terminal*[95] for personal and financial purposes.  Viewed as polluted or

threatening in relation to the existing social structure, threshold people inhabit the

margins of society.  Douglas' analysis of the concept of dirt clarifies how certain

individuals are viewed as polluted in society:

> If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left

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[93]  Itikawa's study, "Geometrias da clandestinidade: o trabalho informal no centro de São Paulo " provides a brief overview of the informal economy sector in the center of São Paulo, particularly in areas surrounding public transit stations.

[94] *Bicheiros* typically run illegal gambling enterprises known as *jogo do bicho* (Game of the Animal), a lottery/bingo style game played by individuals throughout Brazil.

[95] In Sacolinha's novel, *Estação Terminal*, the transit station *Terminal Itaquera* serves as the principal setting.  *Terminal Itaquera* is located in the *zona leste* of São Paulo and opened in 1988.

> with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place…It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systemic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (36)

In symbolic terms, threshold people are equivalent to dirt. Instead of matter, they are individuals out place in society who violate the system of order. Something or someone considered dirty is entirely relative. For example, a shoe by itself is not considered dirty, but by placing it on a clean carpet the system of meaning surrounding it changes. An object or person becomes polluted when it confuses or transgresses the boundaries of classification that maintain order (Douglas 37). Society classifies the individuals who inhabit the *terminal* as dirty, or polluted since their appearance in public disrupts accepted norms of behavior, as well as who is allowed to enter certain spaces. Their existence acknowledges the division of categories that places certain populations in a higher social status over others.

One particular threshold person who frequents the *terminal,* the *ambulante,*[96] exemplifies the polluted status of *periferia* residents through his status as a migrant, and as someone who participates in the unauthorized, informal economy of São Paulo. Many *amubulantes,* and *periferia* residents in general, migrated from the rural and impoverished states of northeast Brazil to the southeast metropolitan regions of São Paulo

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[96] *Ambulantes* are street vendors that sell beverages, snacks and other miscellaneous items ranging from pens to batteries. Diego Coletto's study, *The Informal Economy and Employment in Brazil: Latin America, Modernization, and Social Changes* (2010) provides extensive ethnographic narratives on the work and personal lives of *ambulantes* in Brazil.

and Rio de Janeiro (Perlman 55, 67, 120).[97]  Sacolinha comments on this fact in *Estação*

*Terminal:*

> Na década de 1990, alguns autônomos, a maioria nordestinos, foram chegando timidamente…a maioria desses trabalhadores era de outros estados, aqueles que vinham tentar a sorte em São Paulo.  (52)

> In the 1990s, several freelance workers, the majority northeasterners, were timidly arriving…the majority of these workers were from other states, those who came to test their luck in São Paulo.  (My translation)

This excerpt indexes the migrant status of many workers who came to reside in São Paulo's *periferia* in the hopes of finding employment or other forms of income.  Not being a native of São Paulo amplifies the stigma that the *ambulante* already experiences as a *periferia* resident.  In her seminal work on *favelas* and their transformation from the 1960s to the 2000s, Janice Perlman notes through interviews with working class residents that after the stigma of living in the *favela,* having a birthplace in another state, particularly in the northeast region, is one of the top sources of perceived discrimination among the interviewees (153-54).  Due to regional differences, the *ambulantes* variance in speech, conduct and dress makes him an outcast in the cosmopolitan world of São Paulo.  His outsider status becomes magnified through his involvement in the informal economy found at the *terminal*.  Municipal police and other government agents occasionally show up to the *terminal,* which adds to the unpredictability of his profession (Cotello 130).  He must constantly be on the move in order to avoid having his merchandise seized by the authorities, be given a fine or face incarceration.  The *ambulante* views his profession as legitimate work that provides an income for his family, but unfortunately, governmental organizations consider him a nuisance and

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[97] Many literary works in *Literatura Periférica* movement in São Paulo offer references to family and cultural ties to the Brazilian *nordeste*.  Ferréz's edited volume, *Literatura Marginal: talentos da escrita periférica* contains several narratives of protagonists migrating from the *nordeste,* or having family ties with the region.

categorize clandestine economic activities as criminal (Coletto 137). His status as a migrant from the *nordeste,* or Northeast Brazil, combined with participation in the informal economy contributes to the *ambulante's* precarious position on the margins of society.

The creation of collaborative networks among the *ambulantes* in Sacolinha novel, *Estação Terminal,* echoes the growth of complex, informal organization within Brazil's marginalized communities that enable them to provide for their families despite the stigma of being poor and non-white. By establishing these support systems, the *ambulantes* attempt to meet their needs that the state will not or cannot address adequately. These networks "contrast with the centrally organized, extremely hierarchical public policies that failed to resolve social inequalities or reduce them to a desirable level" (Bentes 29).[98] Since governmental agencies are unable to provide solutions to impoverished conditions, *periferia* residents must rely on themselves to generate income and social services. The *ambulantes* start off small, but soon develop their mobile businesses in order to offer a wide variety of products and to increase profits:

> Começaram com balas e sorvetes, logo depois passaram para cervejas, refrigerantes, água e sucos. Mesmo com os guardas no encalço, os ambulantes, mais conhecidos como marreteiros, conseguiram faturar um dinheiro. (Sacolinha, *Estação Terminal* 52).

> They started with candy and ice cream, and soon after moved on to beer, soda, water and juice. Even with the guards on the hunt, the *ambulantes,* better known as *marreteiros,* were able to earn some money. (My translation)[99]

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[98] Bentes' study, "Collaborative Networks and the Productive Precariat," focuses on informal networks in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas,* but the ideas she outlines in her essay can be applied to other marginalized communities in Brazil's cities, namely São Paulo's *periferia.*

[99] See Ana Paula Maia's collection of novellas, *Entre rinhas de cachorros e porcos abatidos: duas novelas* (2009) for additional fictional works from contemporary Brazilian literature that focus on individual figures from the working class economy.

Their ability to avoid the authorities while simultaneously selling their merchandise to commuters indicates the presence of support systems that allows them to grow their informal enterprises.  In his study on the informal economy in Brazil, Diego Coletto observes how the *amublantes* establish unofficial organizations and unions to offer support to each other and to protect their economic interests (130-137).  These informal social associations operate in a "horizontal, de-centralized and rhizomatic form," which allows them to organize their own production (Bentes 29).  They do not use a formal, hierarchical structure that resembles state institutions.  The *ambulantes* introduce networks that mirror the informal and adaptive nature of clandestine economies in the *periferia* in order to survive.

The *perua* and the *terminal* capture the threshold positioning of the *cobrador* and the *ambulante* who negotiate their uncertain status through clandestine activities that address the infrastructure inequalities of the *periferia*.  Due to public transit shortages to the *periferia*, the *perua* offered residents an alternative means of transportation that connected them with the heart of São Paulo.  The municipal government's negative response to the *perua* contributed to the *periferia's* precarious position as a community distant from adequate resources and stability.  Drivers and *cobradores* attempted to showcase the *perua's* vital role to the *periferia's* economy through guerilla advertising that contested the government's anti-*perua* propaganda.  The marginalization of the *perua* amplifies the personal struggles of *cobrador* who represent *periferia* youth's experience with social stigma.  He attempts to create a sense of community with other

*cobradores* to counter the social isolation that defines his life. Similarly, the *ambulante* encounters discrimination, and therefore, turns to the liminal space of the *terminal* to create networks with other clandestine workers. While the *ambulante* and the *cobrador* fail to change their subordinate status as *periferia* residents, they establish informal organizations that allow them to survive the unforgiving dynamics of racial prejudices and cyclical poverty.

## CONCLUSION

The *cobrador's* negotiation with the spheres of governmental systems and the liminal space of clandestine transportation to address the cyclical poverty of the *periferia* mimics some of the tactics employed by one of Brazil's iconic cultural figures: the *malandro*. Full of mischief and guile, the *malandro* uses his cunningness to manipulate the rules of the system to favor himself without drawing attention to systemic inequalities. As long as his needs are met, he will leave the existing power structure intact. The *malandro's* preference to avoid conflict with authority allows the unequal distribution of power and wealth to continue in Brazil, as the ruling class can reconcile differences in a way that favors them. Confrontation does, however, become more a part of the *malandro's* manipulation during the years of Brazil's military dictatorship. Writers and artists shifted the *malandro* from a conciliatory approach to a more combative stance in their works. They openly addressed the poverty that afflicted rural and urban areas in order to bring attention to long neglected social problems downplayed by the elite. The *malandro* became a type of folk hero for the masses by avenging the wrongs committed against the poor and vulnerable populations. The *cobrador* embodies

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the qualities of the post-1960s *malandro* as his interactions with authoritative figures and institutions uncover the inherent inequality that pervades Brazilian society. In the past, the *malandro* only cared about his personal needs and desires, but now the *cobrador* in Sacolinha's works exhibits genuine concern for his colleagues in an effort to create a sense of community in the insecure environment of the city. Sacolinha uses him as an example that even the *malandro,* with all his charisma and intelligence, cannot escape the violence and socio-economic disparity that impacts the *periferia*. Unable to change the system, the *cobrador* can only use his cleverness temporarily provide basic needs for himself and his fellow *perua* workers.

The *cobrador* and other workers involved in the clandestine transportation world seek out the elusive goal of community through the creation of collaborative networks that offer protection from the city's unforgiving conditions. Underdeveloped infrastructure in the *periferia* forces local residents to generate their own solutions to the lack of adequate public transit to and from their neighborhoods. The *perua* becomes a symbol of marginalized subjects' response to the infrastructure inequalities that segregate the *periferia* from the rest of the city. The government's reaction to the *peruas* further marginalizes and criminalizes the efforts of *periferia* residents to overcome the physical limitations of their underdeveloped communities. Clandestine transportation's unstable situation in São Paulo emphasizes its liminal, or threshold positioning that constantly finds itself between the legitimate sectors of the city center and the marginalized *periferia*. Within this liminal space, the *cobrador* and another clandestine worker, the *ambulante,* establish supportive networks to counter the stigma they experience as polluted individuals. The *cobrador's* utilizes rituals, such as hazing, to appease the uneasiness they experience in relation to their difficulty to find a secure sense of community. The *ambulante* formulates tactics with other illegal vendors in the *terminal*

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to avoid the authorities and grow their fledgling businesses. Both individuals may never fully escape the stigma of being outsiders, but their strategies demonstrate efforts to survive on the margins.

# Chapter 3: Racial *Desencuentros* and Stigma: Dominican American Youth as the Perpetual Outsider

> *White supremacy is the great silence of our world, and in it is embedded much of what ails us as a planet. The silence around white supremacy is like the silence around Sauron in The Lord of the Rings or the Voldemort name, which must never be uttered in the Harry Potter novels. And yet here's the rub: If a critique of white supremacy doesn't first flow through you, doesn't first implicate you, then you have missed the mark; you have, in fact, almost guaranteed its survival and reproduction. There's that old saying: The devil's greatest trick is that he convinced people that he doesn't exist. Well, white supremacy's greatest trick is that it has convinced people that, if it exists at all, it exists always in other people, never in us.*
>
> *-Junot Díaz*

For Junot Díaz, *desencuentros* in the U.S.'s black-white racial binary shape experiences of stigma among Dominican American youth, resulting in emotional creolization and alienation from both the space of the street and the space of the home. Dominican American youth's ambivalence towards notions of race in the United States originates from their families' immigrant status as Dominicans coming to the New York City metropolitan region during the second half of the 20th century. [100] Unable to fully integrate into American or Dominican society, Dominican American youth find themselves divided between two cultures. The dominant American culture views them with suspicion, which results in racism and limited access to resources. Family and friends in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic also consider them outsiders since they redefine Dominican identity in relation to race. Junot Díaz's protagonists embody the fractured identity of Dominican American youth that resist preexisting Dominican and

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[100] See Jess Hoffnung-Garskof's *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950* (2008) for a comprehensive analysis of Dominican American communities with ties in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic.

American national discourses on race and ethnicity. Dominican American youth's *desencuentros* with mainstream American society and with their family's culture results in their subordinate status as the other.

Dominican American youth's divided racial identity references their family's immigrant background and contributes to their outsider position as non-white Latinos from the inner city. Díaz's protagonists, who are of African descent and from a working class family, index the profile of Dominican migrants relocating to the U.S. during the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century as a result of precarious economic and political circumstances. Interpreted as a threat to the narrative of assimilation, Dominicans strong ties to their homeland contributed and isolation from mainstream society contributed to their political invisibility. The decline of the city from the 1970s to the 1990s further added to the stigma of being from inner city Latino neighborhoods, as communities of color were blamed for many of the U.S.'s economic problems. Dominican American youth's ambiguous relationship to U.S. racial categories further complicated their marginal status as non-white, working class individuals. Due to their mixed racial heritage and adoption of African American culture, confusion ensued on how to classify Dominican American youth. They navigate the cultures of the U.S. and the Dominican Republic but never fully incorporate themselves into either one. Through their home, Díaz's protagonists experience the endless cycle of expulsion and oppression. Social ostracization and loneliness characterize their life in the inner city. These social dynamics contest past Latino immigrant narratives of acculturation, as Dominican American youth are treated as strangers in both cultures. The inability to shed the shadow of being an outsider amplifies their experience as the other. Díaz's ghetto nerd turns to the world of comic books and science fiction, which epitomizes Dominican American youth's strategies to resist the alienating effects of the U.S. racial order. His

hobbies provide metaphors for the racism and poverty urban youth experience in the inner city and offers a temporary interruption from the hardship of being an adolescent of color. The internal networks created by the ghetto nerd through his reading and writing of genre fiction functions as a coping mechanism for his divided, racialized identity as a Dominican American youth from the unsafe streets of the inner city.

**FROM SANTO DOMINGO TO NEW YORK: DIVIDED DOMINICAN IDENTITIES**

Dominican American youth's ambivalence towards U.S. racial categories indicates the formation of a marginalized, hybrid self. Dominican migrants experienced increased social stigma after their arrival to the New York metropolitan region due to their racial background and social class. Maintaining strong cultural ties with the Dominican Republic also contributed to the suspicion that outsiders had of them, as their ethnic pride was perceived as a threat to U.S. narratives of assimilation. The marginalization of Dominicans in New York continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s when many Latino and Black communities experienced significant economic decline and political invisibility. Their children were also misunderstood by mainstream American society due to their ambiguous positioning in relation to the U.S.'s black-white racial binary. Dominican American youth's mixed racial ancestry complicated U.S. racial categories, as whites saw them as blacks, and African Americans viewed them as Latinos. They eventually began to adopt aspects of African American urban culture into their everyday speech and mannerisms in order to navigate the complex racial and class dynamics of the inner city. This negotiation between different cultures and constructs of race points to the hybridization of Dominican American youth in the United States. Their *desencuentros*, or inability to reproduce the cultural norms around them, result in a formulation of Dominican identity that is characterized by expulsion and social anguish.

Unable to conform to the dominant conventions of race and culture in both the United States and the Dominican Republic, Dominican American youth are viewed as a stranger in both lands. Dominican American youth's racial identity remains misunderstood, relegating them to the margins of U.S. society.

The arrival of tens of thousands of Dominicans to the New York metropolitan region ushered in a new generation of immigrants in search of a better life.[101] Dominicans established communities in the United States, Puerto Rico and Spain, but New York ended up having, by far, the largest Dominican immigrant population. Carlos Ulises Decena views New York "as the logical conclusion in the teleological narrative of

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[101] Prior to Trujillo's fall in 1961, most Dominican migrants to the United States were predominately from the nations' intellectual, political and economic elite who opposed the regime or who could afford foreign travel. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández observe how many intellectuals did not want to censor their work due to the Trujillo dictatorship, and therefore fled to New York, which included Andrés Requena, Angel Rafael Lamarche and Hector Díaz (112). Their reasons for migration were not prompted by economic opportunities to increase the social mobility of their family and community, but solely ideological and political. They relocated to the United States in order to freely pursue their intellectual projects and continue their critique of the Trujillo government. The intellectual elite were not the only ones who sought refuge outside their homeland, but they were the only ones who had the resources and the social connections during this time period to flee the country.

Dominican migration was relatively small before Trujillo's death, but the end of his regime "unleashed social, political and economic pressures that had been accumulating for decades" and that would continue for the next several decades as thousands of Dominicans moved from the interior to the capital, and then from the capital to the United States (Sagás and Molina 1). The political upheaval following the fall of the Trujillo regime continued throughout the 1960s as the first democratically elected president of the Dominican Republic, Juan Bosch, was deposed from his seat of power due to a military coup in 1963. Two years later, a civil war broke out as the Constitutionalists attempted to restore Bosch to power and succeeded in overthrowing the military junta. However, their victory was short lived as the United States dispatched the Marines to the island in 1965 to restore order and safety to the country (Hoffnung Garskof 120). One of Trujillo's former political puppets, Joaquin Beleaguer won the U.S. controlled election in 1966. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Beleaguer recreated the repressive tactics of his political mentor. The constant changes unfolding in the Dominican government during this period fostered a sense of insecurity among the population as social well-being and job security seemed tenuous at best.

As economic instability, the lack of social mobility and dramatic political shifts plagued the Dominican Republic, many working class Dominicans left their homeland in search of greater opportunities in the United States. Trujillo's death changed who could leave the island and made international migration a possibility for all. After the dictator Rafael Trujillo's assassination in 1961, a mass migration of Dominicans to the United States ensued during the 1960s. Dominicans immigrants already resided in the United States before the 1960s, but an unprecedented number of them relocated during the second half of the 20th century (Mendez 18-20). From 1931-1960, only 16,674 Dominicans immigrated to the United States. That number jumped significantly from 1961-1970 to 93,292, which illustrates the large increase in migration following the collapse of Trujillo's government.

progreso through migration" (81-82).  Dominicans were searching to better their

economic situation, and New York represented the epitome of social mobility for

immigrants coming to the United States.  Moreover, their arrival to this region occurred

specifically at a time when the New York City was going through a major socioeconomic

restructuring that resulted in the need for and valuing of labor (Torres-Saillant and

Hernández 63).  The Northeast region of the U.S. has always been an industrial hub for

the country, and because of these social factors, the New York metropolitan region

seemed to be the ideal location for Dominican migrants, particularly from working class

backgrounds, to seek out opportunities that could potentially lead to social mobility for

their families and communities.  The socioeconomic and racial profile of New York

Dominican immigrants changed significantly in the 1960s as darker-skinned, poor

peasants and residents of urban ghettos quickly became the overwhelming majority of

migrants (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 112).[102]  The intellectual elite, usually of

European descent, were no longer the only Dominicans traveling to New York.  The

lower classes in the Dominican Republic, the majority of African descent, were seeking

to better their lives in New York, not for intellectual pursuits, but for factory and other

blue-collar jobs available to recently arrived immigrants.  Sagás and Molina view the

mass displacement of Dominicans as formative in the creation of a Dominican diaspora,

where individuals live and work in newly adopted homeland while maintaining contact

with their country of origin.[103]  Their children, raised in the United States, speak Spanish

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[102] Contemporary Dominican fiction conveys the experiences of working class, non-white Dominicans.
Rey Emmanuel Andújar's novels *Candela* (2007) and *El hombre triángulo* (2005), Rita Indiana
Hernández's novel *Papi* (2005) and Pedro Antonio Valdez's novel *Palomos* (2009) are examples of this
recent fiction.

[103] Sagás and Molina's edited volume, *Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives* (2004), provides
additional studies on the historical, cultural and economic dynamics of the Dominican diaspora.

at home, send remittances to family back on the island and, for some, travel to Santo Domingo to visit relatives.[104]

The volatile nature of inner city Dominican communities became evident beginning in the late 1970s. According to the New York mayor's task force on the Washington Heights in 1978, many white residents "complained about new Dominican immigrants who 'were not being forced to assimilate as earlier immigrants had done'" (Hoffnung-Garskof 163). The myth of past immigrants willingness to assimilate into American culture and to forsake their homelands in exchange for economic stability and security suddenly seemed to be challenged by Dominicans' desire to maintain strong cultural ties with their country of origin. Liberal politicians upheld the story of immigrant assimilation in order to counter xenophobic attitudes towards these populations, and they viewed Dominicans' hesitancy or ambivalence towards being American as a threat to their political narrative (Hoffnung-Garskof 163).

The issues of the 1970s continued through the 1990s, when municipal and national governments further marginalized Dominican American youth through draconian policies that treated them as criminals and not citizens. Ed Koch, mayor of New York City, and President Ronald Reagan drastically cut spending on social services, such as welfare, housing and education. Their strategies represented sentiments among the general public that blacks and Latinos, as well as irresponsible government spending, had led to the decline of U.S. cities (Hoffnung-Garskof 200). The effects of such

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[104] In his landmark study on Dominican migration, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950,* Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof analyzes the complex network of the Dominican diaspora through the example of Leonel Fernández, who was elected president of the Dominican Republic in 2004. Hoffnung-Garskof notes that Fernández moved with his family to New York in the 1970s and continued to help out in his family's *bodega* in Washington Heights during the summers even after he returned to the Dominican Republic to attend law school in Santo Domingo (5). His election became possible through *dominicanos ausentes,* or absent Dominicans, who lived in the United States but who could vote in presidential elections at polling stations established on the mainland.

economic policies primarily benefited white and wealthy New York neighborhoods, like Soho, while predominately working class and increasingly Dominican communities, such as Washington Heights, experienced widespread closures of hospitals and schools in addition to major increases in crime and unemployment (Hoffnung-Garskof 201). Dominicans inability to stop this widespread social change reflected their political invisibility.[105] Dominicans' needs continue to go unheard, which makes them more susceptible to social problems that negatively impact the inner city: crime, poverty and drugs.

Due to the fact that they experience exclusion from the U.S. national discourse on race and culture, Latino youth represented in this recent fiction inhabit a perpetual space of marginalization. In her book, *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity,* Lyn di Iorio Sandín notes that Latino youth represented in urban Latino fiction cannot find a place in the black-white binary of U.S. society's racial dynamics. Their ambivalent identity becomes the focus of Díaz's works as his protagonists seem unsure as how to classify themselves and what direction to take with their life.[106] Irizarry argues that writers like Junot Díaz provide a forum for exploring issues of identity (93-94). His protagonists represent Latino youth's quest to understand who they are and how they fit into society in terms of race and social class. The black-white binary racial politics in the United States complicates the social standing of Dominican Americans. Most Dominican immigrants to the United States have some degree of African ancestry,

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[105] The Dominican American population has increased significantly since the 1960s, but legislators have viewed them as a group that does not regularly vote, and, therefore, is expendable over other groups (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 96). The number of Dominicans arriving in the United States continued to increase every decade evidenced by data collected from 1971-2000 when 335,251 Dominican immigrants relocated to the U.S. (Sagás and Molina 2).

[106] Other writers have explored the urban Latino youth's ambivalence towards the black-white divide. Piri Thomas, in particular, captures how he and other Puerto Rican youth dealt with the U.S.'s complex racial dynamics in his autobiographical novel, *Down these Mean Streets* (1967).

but they do not share the same cultural heritage as African Americans.  They are also commonly categorized with Latinos, since they speak Spanish and come from a Latin American nation.

The rigid hierarchies of race used in the United States and the mixed racial ancestry of Dominican American youth contribute to their marginalization.  Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández observe that Dominicans commonly view themselves as the possessor of an alternative identity due to the confusion that arises as to how to categorize them within binary racial labels of the United States.  He provides the example of Rosa Bachleda, a Dominican woman and founder of Not Just Black and White, to illustrate how Dominicans experience racial dynamics in the U.S.: "I was black to white America; I was some strange Spanish-speaking person to black America" (145). Dominicans possess European and African ancestry, yet blacks and whites frequently see them as the other.  Whites assume that they are black due to the strict racial lines in the U.S.  Blacks do not typically see them as part of their community, since they speak Spanish and participate in Latino cultural traditions.  The racial lines drawn in the U.S. do not take into account the cultural hybridity of Latino immigrants who commonly have a combination of European, indigenous and/or African lineages in the same family.[107] Dominicans, therefore, find themselves on the margins of the race debate in the United States as their ethnic identity complicates established racial categories.

Dominican American youth's complication of the black/white racial binary in the U.S. underscore the social impact that Afro-Latinidad identities have on existing racial

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[107] See Agustín Lao-Montes' essay "Afro-Latin@ Difference and the Politics of Decolonization" in the edited volume, *Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the 21st Century U.S. Empire* (2005) for analysis on the racial complexity of Afro-Latino identity in the United States.

hierarchies. The term Afro-Latino[108] emerged in Latin America during the 1970s as a way to recognize racial differences that have resulted in socio-economic marginalization and to bring attention to predominately Black communities silenced by their respective national governments (Jiménez Román and Flores 2, 10). By openly adopting the term of Afro-Latino, Afro-descendant communities unmask the long history of racism they experienced, as well as deconstruct romanticized and exoticized images tied to Blackness in Latin America. Individuals and communities who identified as Afro-Latino did not only complicate racial categories in Latin America. The term migrated north as it began to appear publicly in the U.S. during the 1990s (Jiménez Román and Flores 2). By highlighting the various racial and ethnic roots found in one individual, the adoption of the term by academics, activists and U.S. born Latino youth challenged the narrow scope of the black/white binary.[109]

The racial dynamics of the U.S. impact Dominican American youth's sense of self as they begin to question their ethnic identity within the U.S. racial hierarchy. Junot Díaz's protagonists face a racial system in the U.S. that does not recognize Dominican notions of race. The blanket categorization of Dominicans as black immigrants disorients Dominicans' understanding of national identity and racial difference (Mendez 132). Emphasizing their Latino identity does not necessarily mean that Dominicans were negating their African ancestry. Through his reference to historian Frank Moya Pons, Hoffnung-Garskof notes "that experiences of racism and contact with black and other

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[108] Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores define Afro-Latino as individuals or communities that belong to both Afro-descendant and Latino population. They also classify an individual as Afro-Latino who is visibly or self-identifies as African descent. Afro-Latinos can be found in Mexico, Central America, the Spanish Caribbean, South America and U.S.-born Latinos who are of Spanish Caribbean or Latin American origin.

[109] Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores also claim that the adoption of the category of Afro-Latino by individuals and communities in the U.S. challenge the notion of Latinos being a monolithic racial or ethnic group by highlighting differences.

minorities in the United States caused Dominicans to discover their black roots" (113).

Dominicans, particularly the generation that was born and raised in the U.S., increasingly

adopted aspects of black culture in the U.S. because of the social realities that they

faced.[110]  Differences across racial and ethnic lines became increasingly hard to

distinguish among second-generation Afro-Latinos, such as Puerto Ricans and

Dominicans, and African Americans (Decena 104).  Díaz's protagonists, for example,

commonly use language and expressions that mimic the speech of African American

youth from the inner city.[111]  Their adoption of black culture, however, does not

necessarily mean that they identify themselves as black.  The U.S. census of 1990 and

2000 reveals that ninety percent of Dominicans in the United States categorized

themselves as "white" or "some other race," usually "Dominican" or "Hispanic"

(Hoffnung-Garskof 114).[112]  Dominican identity in the U.S. may initially seem

contradictory, but their actions underscore how they navigate complex racial dynamics in

the U.S.

Dominican youth's intersections with African American youth subculture in the

U.S. forces them to have more awareness of their racial background, which results in the

formation of a identity that can no longer be clearly labeled as Dominican, American or

African American.  Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas, in her seminal work on urban Latino

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[110] In *Street Therapists: Race, Affect, and Neoliberal Personhood in Latino Newark* (2012), Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas comments on Latino youth's adoption of Black culture: "young Latinos and Latin American migrants also acknowledged the importance of acquiring a form of racial knowledge that would enable them to better navigate Newark's urban landscape.  They recognized that African Americans possess that desired form of 'urban competency,' and the modernity, hipness, and cosmopolitanism globally associated with Blackness" (2-3).

[111] In an interview with Edwidge Danticat for *Bomb Magazaine* titled "Junot Díaz," Junot Díaz discusses the liberal use of the "N-word" in his novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* and how his protagonists' use of the term mirrors the language of inner city Dominican American youth in the New York metropolitan region.

[112] See Ginetta E. B. Candelario's study, *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (2007) for more information on the complex racial dynamics of Dominicans.

youth in the urban northeast of the U.S., *Street Therapists: Race, Affect, and Neoliberal Personhood in Latino Newark* (2012), argues that metropolitan regions like New York-Newark, which have a significant Black population, force U.S. Latinos and Latin American immigrants of African descent to recognize their own "racial and class subjectivities" (6).  Afro-Latino youth in the U.S. experience similar racial prejudices congruent to their African American counterparts in public spaces, including schools, commercial venues and the street.  They adopt characteristics of African American urban culture to navigate and understand these racial encounters (Ramos-Zayas 2-3).  As Dominican, Puerto Ricans and other youth of Caribbean descent mimic the speech and behavior of African American youth, their identities becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish.  Even Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas acknowledges the near impossible task to confine research projects to one specific nationality in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan region, as Latino youth no longer solely base their identity on their families' ethnic origin (5). African American culture combined with Dominican youth's Latino heritage establishes the foundation for an urban, Black identity that cannot be classified by nationality or their families' existing notions of race.

Dominican American youth's struggle to make sense of their racial identity exemplifies the negotiation of two opposing worlds: "the migrant's world in the host country" and the "traditional world left behind" (Sagas and Molina 8).  Exposed to these two worlds, Dominican children raised in the United States do not necessarily experience a full cultural connection with either one.  In her analysis of a transnational consciousness in Junot Díaz works, Janira Bonilla analyzes the use of "Spanish and Dominicanisms" by writers who struggle to belong to two cultures.  They write primarily in English -- as they were raised and attended school in the United States -- but they express their Dominican identity through Spanish words and phrases.  Moreover, Sintia Molina observes that for

U.S. born and/or raised Dominican Americans "to mediate between two cultures is to feel 50-50, not totally of one or the other" (66). Transmigration between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic contributes to a divided identity as Dominican American youth function in both worlds. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández echo the sentiments of Bonilla and Molina by arguing that "Dominicans in the United States have developed cultural forms that without a doubt subvert the norms brought from the native land while simultaneously modifying the culture of the host country" (147). Dominican American youth navigate both cultures, which results in the creation of an ethnic identity that combines and modifies influences from these two worlds into something completely new.[113]

Danny Mendez's notion of emotional creolization explains Dominican American youth's personal struggles to navigate the cultures of the United States and the Dominican Republic as they create identities that combine and redefine cultural norms from both spheres of influence:

> …that subject which is so often split, so often suspended in the global feeling of selfhood between the island and the powerful empire. Neither of these spheres is homogeneous, despite the work of ideology that seeks to lend a homogenous appearance to the American and Dominical national character. The task set before the immigrant subject to consolidate past notions of gender, sexuality, and race acquired in the Dominican Republic (or acquired by family members in the Dominican Republic, for second-generation migrants) in the shape of present norms and expectations, while adjusting to the pressures of assimilating into the normative or dominant American cultural image. (6)

Dominican American youth, particularly the ones portrayed in Díaz's works, must confront their families' cultural baggage. Mendez emphasizes the internal and emotional aspect of this process of cultural hybridization by "analyzing the process of identity-

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[113] William Luis' *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States* (1997) for more on how this cultural divide manifests in Latino Caribbean literature in the U.S.

formation in these texts in relation to emotional ties…attentive towards the idiosyncrasies involved within different phases of Dominican migrations" (11).  The "texts" that Mendez refers to include the literary works of Junot Díaz that amplify Dominican youth's negotiations of two cultures through their personal relationships with family and neighbors as well as their social interactions with Americans from different ethnic groups.[114]

Dominican American youth's negotiation of their racial identity in mainstream American culture and in their family's immigrant community results in the development of a hyphenated, or hybrid self.  Gustavo Pérez Firmat, in his book on Latino identity in the United States, *Life on the Hyphen: the Cuban-American Way*, examines Latino immigrants' negotiations with their newly adopted home of the United States.  His study focuses primarily on the experiences of Cuban Americans, but ideas related to hybridity also provide a useful framework for understanding the Dominican American experience.  For Firmat, hyphenation represents the tension between the two identities as individuals go from "substitution" to "destitution" to "institution" as they are considered more and more a part of the United States' diverse cultural landscape.[115]  According to Juan Flores' interpretation of Firmat's hyphenation process, the hyphen signifies a "bicultural process, a pattern of cultural hybridization" (171).  The hyphen joins together two different cultures and nationalities, taking attributes from both sides that ultimately form a new Latino identity in the United States.

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[114] See Paula Moya's interview with Junot Díaz, "The Search for Decolonial Love," for additional discussions on how Díaz negotiates these cultural and racial tensions in his own life and in his literary works.

[115] For Ylce Irizarry, Latino urban youth represented in Junot Díaz's works are perpetually trapped in Firmat's state of destitution.  Additional analysis of this topic can be found in her essay, "Making it Home: A New Ethics of Dominican Migration," which is included in the edited volume, *Hispanic Caribbean Literature of Migration: Narratives of Displacement* (2010).

Junot Díaz's protagonists experience *desencuentros*, or failed encounters with society. Oscar, the main protagonist of Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, awkwardly mimics the behaviors and interests of people from both social spheres, which only exacerbate his outsider status. In fact, his clumsy efforts to fit in result in the formation of the ghetto nerd. His interest in science fiction and comic books are foreign to experiences of the Dominicans in his neighborhood, and his race and social class prevent him from fully integrating into mainstream society. The ghetto nerd mirrors Carlos Ulises Decena's idea of *desencuentros* with existing models of Dominican identity (70). Decena's research focuses on gay Dominican men in New York City whose redefinition of *Dominicanidad* exemplifies racialized subjects ability to critique and rework social categories established by Dominican national cultures (71). The *desencuentro* can be applied to Oscar and the other urban youth represented in Díaz works as they are unable, or unwilling, to imitate the cultural norms brought over from the Dominican Republic. Oscar's sister, Lola, for example, runs away from home as a teenager since she cannot understand her mother's ideas about womanhood and sexuality, which reflect the mindset of most Dominican women in their neighborhood. She shaves her head as a symbolic act of defiance to the cultural norms of her family's community. The ghetto nerd's inability, or refusal to follow the social norms established by his community and mainstream society exemplifies the cultural *desencuentro* that Dominican American youth experience.

Junot Díaz challenges ideas about assimilation through protagonists who seem to be in a perpetual state of destitution with nowhere to call home. Díaz's protagonists do not experience the immigrant narrative of having "made it" in the United States (Irizarry 93). The title of Díaz's short story collection, *Drown*, functions as a metaphor of the constant struggle Dominican American youth face to survive in the U.S. Trapped in an

endless cycle of poverty, coupled with a sense of being lost, they drown economically and culturally.  Junot Díaz's protagonists experience the effects of government social reforms as they are forced to live in impoverished inner city communities in New York and New Jersey, which further alienate them from mainstream society.  Díaz's book, *Drown,* captures Dominican American youth's challenge of living in unfavorable circumstances by presenting the Dominican experience from the perspective of social marginality and the pain of poverty.[116]  The stories "Aurora" and "Drown" illustrate the hardships that inner city youth face in their everyday life.  The short story "Aurora" captures the decay of Díaz's neighborhood as the protagonist and his girlfriend are trapped in a cycle of drug abuse.[117]  Their squalid living conditions convey the pervading sense of hopelessness that Díaz experienced in his youth.  In "Drown," the narrator's friend, Beto, managed to escape the inner city, but he remains behind in a community where he experiences loneliness since he has nowhere to go and nothing to do.  His sense of despair exemplifies how Dominican American youth from the inner city become imprisoned in their communities despite their best efforts to find a way out.  The scenes of social anguish conveyed in Díaz's short stories establish the environment for the ghetto nerd, who eventually looks to science fiction, fantasy and comic books to cope with the poverty and racism that impacts his identity.

In *Narratives of Migration and Displacement in Dominican Literature*, Danny Mendez proposes the concept of "dual expulsion" for Dominican families who are outside the typical, bourgeois viewpoint of immigrant communities and likewise excluded from official Dominican national discourse, which problematize Chandra

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[116] See Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's book, *Killing Spanish: Literary Essay on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* (2004), for additional analysis on the marginalization of Latino youth found in Junot Díaz's works.
[117] Sandín and Perez's edited volume, *Contemporary U.S. Latino/a Literary Criticism* (2007) includes essays on Díaz's *Drown*, and the struggles Latino youth face to assimilate into U.S. culture.

Mohantry and Biddy Martin's notion of home: a binary of "being home" and "not being home" (Mendez 126). For Mendez, the Dominicans' home portrayed in Díaz's works is defined by expulsion, instability and violence, therefore, the feelings of "not being home" as introduced by Mohantry and Martin, in fact, define the domestic situation of Díaz's protagonists. Janira Bonilla notes that "for many Dominicans, home is synonymous with political and/or economic repression and it is all too often a point of departure on a journey to survival…it is usually an alienating and marginalizing experience" (200). Home becomes a space where they feel out of place -- the perpetual outsider. This sense of expulsion and oppression originates in their homeland as they flee political and economic instability only to find it again in their new home, the United States, where they become marginalized due to their immigrant status.

The protagonists in Junot Díaz's works experience a fractured identity as they fail to fully connect with their American and Dominican identities. Ylce Irizarry's idea of "narratives of fracture," which she elaborates in her essay, "Making it Home: A New Ethics of Dominican Migration," problematizes the experience of exile and identity in the United States. Irizarry argues that recent Dominican American writers, such as Junot Díaz, deconstruct traditional narratives of acculturation upheld by previous generations of Latino writers, such as Julia Alvarez and Oscar Hijuelos.[118] Their protagonists lack ambition and direction with their lives, which challenges the image of the hard working immigrant who will do anything to ascend the social ladder. Additionally, they choose to engage in behaviors, such as being macho and violent, that reiterate their marginal status. These protagonists exemplify *Ghetto Fiction's* confrontational attitude, as this literature

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[118] See Alvarez's novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* (1991) and Oscar Hijuelo's novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* (1989).

no longer deals with social inequalities in a conciliatory manner.[119]  In past immigrant narratives, tensions between one's family and the culture of their adopted nation existed, but immigrants could achieve the American Dream through hard work.  For Díaz, the opportunity of becoming part of the American cultural landscape seems a distant possibility, as middle and upper classes view his protagonists with suspicion due to race and class differences.  They cannot escape the cyclical poverty that imprisons their community.  Díaz's literary works contest the traditional immigrant narrative of acculturation as the gateway to citizenship and belonging in the adopted homeland.[120]

Danny Mendez underscores the obstacles to acculturation through his idea of the "stranger," who experiences "an alienated sense of his or her place in the symbolic sphere" (117).  This sense of being a stranger is exacerbated by the formation of Dominican communities separate from the rest of the city.  These islands of immigrant communities in New York provide economic and cultural refuge from the unwelcoming attitudes of mainstream society, but the social cost is increased isolation from U.S. society.  If they step outside the boundaries of their ethnic community, they automatically are viewed with suspicion even if they have lived in that city their entire life.  If they "step out of this environment [they] become an outsider, an immigrant.  Indeed, this community has become a home for many Dominican immigrants" (Bonilla 227).  The experience of being home is characterized by feelings of exclusion.  Ironically, the experience of being a stranger stays with Dominican Americans when they return to the

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[119] *Ghetto Fiction* refers to the term coined by Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez in their study, *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-sixties Literature* (2007).  The term indexes Latino fiction in the New York metropolitan region of the 1990s and 2000s that focuses on urban life and struggles with cyclical poverty and crime.  Dalleo and Sáez limit the term to Ernesto Quiñonez and Abraham Rodriguez, but I broaden the category to include writers such as Junot Díaz and Angie Cruz.

[120] Ilan Stavans briefly addresses the problem of Latinos being left behind in regards to acceptance by mainstream American society in his book, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (1995).

Dominican Republic to visit family and friends.  Seen now as more American than Dominican, the individuals who have migrated and their American-born or raised children are considered outsiders by the locals.  They have adopted practices and behaviors that seem foreign to their Dominican relatives.  For example, in Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar's Dominican relatives and their neighbors see him as a weird, alien creature due to his large, extremely overweight body and his interest in hobbies they do not understand at all: science fiction and comic books.  Oscar represents Dominican American youth's experience of being a perpetual "stranger" in both locations.  Díaz's works bring to the forefront the outsider status of immigrants and their children.[121]

As youth experience emotional and cultural disconnection from family coupled with feeling out of place in mainstream American society, home becomes synonymous with alienation.  They are strangers in their own land, regardless of having lived there since birth or a young age.  Oscar addresses this social exclusion when he asks: "A person can't have two [homes]?" (318).  He desires belonging in both the United States and the Dominican Republic, but circumstances, such as culture, class and race do not allow it.  Dominican American youth's *desencuentros* with the black-white U.S. racial binary and with their family's culture results in a new hybrid self.  Latino youth are citizens, but do not experience the benefits of membership that society promises (Oboler 8).  The traditional notion of home for Latino youth is an elusive ideal.  Trapped in a perpetual cycle of abandonment, isolation and misdirection, their unstable social status normalizes.

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[121] The notion of stranger and exclusion associated with Dominican American youth in the United States echoes Erving Goffman's notion of stigma, which he analyzes extensively in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963).

**DOMINICAN AMERICAN YOUTH AND ALTERITY/ENCOUNTERS WITH DIFFERENCE**

Navigating the inner city streets of immigrant communities, Díaz's protagonists try to understand their ambiguous social status. Encounters with the other who is misunderstood and seen with suspicion parallels life in New Jersey's inner city. Rejection characterizes the experience of Diaz's protagonists, who represent the social marginalization of Dominican American youth from the inner city. Unable to find acceptance among the various social groups they encounter, Díaz's protagonists are the perpetual outsiders whose exclusion becomes normalized. They turn to the world of science fiction and comic books to make sense of the stigma that they experience. Science fiction's is defined by encounters with the other, and therefore, it resonates with Dominican American youth's personal experiences of social marginalization. Moreover, comic books and science fiction allow urban youth of color to explore the problems of race and social class in alternate universes. Their interest in science fiction and comic books offers a temporary interruption from endless cycles of hardship, buffering the prejudices that they encounter in the inner city.

Díaz's chronicles of Dominican youth create a larger narrative of a "community of excluded subjects" (Mendez 127). Díaz's protagonist, Oscar, experiences this rejection during his freshman year at Rutgers University:

> The white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You're not Dominican. And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy Dominicano. Dominicano soy. (49)

His physical features automatically make him an outsider to the white students, regardless of how he behaves or speaks. The "inhuman cheeriness" indicates that they will tolerate his presence but will not consider him an equal. On the other hand, the students of color judge him by his actions and speech, which do not fit in their

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preconceived notions that a Latino or black person should behave as a gangster. Oscar even attempts to speak in Spanish to verify the authenticity of his Latino identity, which falls on deaf ears. Both sides have already come to a definitive conclusion on what they think of Oscar -- he does not meet the requirements of membership into their specific groups. He simply does not embody any of the cultural attributes they recognize in themselves.[122]

Díaz's protagonist, Oscar, occupies a marginalized social space: the white nerds at school view him with suspicion, and Latino youth in his own community consider him an outsider. Solitude defines the ghetto nerd's daily life as he tries to find connections in his community. The realization that he does not belong anywhere forces him to look elsewhere to find the elusive sense of community. His interest in activities that do not fit into the norms set by the neighborhood causes the ghetto nerd to be ostracized by other youth from his own community. As a means of escape, genre fiction, such as sci-fi, fantasy and comic books, allow Díaz's ghetto nerd to conceive of parallel universes where he can imagine himself as someone different and do what he desires.[123] While these literary genres may further emphasize his status as a nerd, "sci-fi and other related genres clearly provide a real source of solace for Oscar" (Bautista 44). Oscar can be himself when he engages with these genres with no outside pressures to conform to a certain image. His interests in a literature that could potentially make him the target of ostracization allows him to make sense of the feelings of loneliness he experiences in all aspects of his life.

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[122] Oscar's experience with social rejection reinforces Ylce Irizarry's claim that Dominican American youth represented in Díaz's works cannot assimilate into society, thereby emphasizing the perpetual state of destitution that defines their life,

[123] Robin D.G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2003) analyzes how Afro-diasporic subjects use art, literature and music to understand the racism and oppression that have greatly impacted themselves and their communities.

In her study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion,* Rosemary Jackson illustrates the political implications of this genre in deconstructing the restrictions of the real world:

> Fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent.' (4)

Through his writings, Oscar is able to go beyond the limits of society, where he experiences the freedom to be himself without fear of judgment. The political potential of Oscar's writings resonates with the notion of a resistance literature -- literary works that resist the hegemonic, colonial order.[124] Political resistance does not initially come to mind with the image of Oscar, but his focus on writing fantasy functions as resistance literature as he creates alternative possibilities that are not confined to the hierarchy of race and class. Oscar engages in a political act by breaking free of this mask and resisting the endless cycle of racism, violence and poverty that plague his inner city community. Ultimately, his position as an outsider allows him to critically examine society.

In his seminal work, *Science Fiction,* Adam Roberts examines this literary genre's effectiveness in looking at the other through genre fiction. Roberts argues that science fiction is a literary genre that essentially is about "encounter with difference" (183). Characters frequently come across entire races of people from other planets, or if the plot unfolds on Earth, humans are divided by extreme forms of technological advancement or encounter beings outside their frame of reference; highlighting the differences between living beings based on a range of experiences, such as technology, language, physical

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[124] Resistance literature refers to Juan Flores's notion of the term, which can be found in his study *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000). For him, resistance literature is Latino fiction that has avoided assimilation into and cooptation by mainstream American society.

features and cultural practices. In *The Mirror and the Killer Queen: Otherness in Literary Language*, Gabrielle Schwab notes that literary works fulfill a cultural function of encounters with otherness. Science fiction accomplishes this role by exposing characters to other peoples and worlds that challenge one's understanding of their own identity. Genre fiction's relationship with the other, therefore, functions as a powerful medium for exploring minority youth's marginalized social position.[125]

Díaz's protagonists, such as Oscar, can relate to the narratives of "difference" found in science fiction. The world of science fiction provides a rich repository of metaphors for the immigrant experience, particularly the experiences of urban youth. Daniel Bautista reinforces Roberts argument by indicating that science fiction has a growing number of minority and women writers who engage with the genre in order to explore issues dealing with race, gender and social class (45). Notable writers such as Octavia Butler, Colson Whitehead and Junot Díaz can be included in the list of writers of color who use science fiction to address the idea of difference through themes of race and gender in their literary works.[126] Oscar's interest in science fiction echoes a long tradition among writers of color who engage with this genre in order to critically examine complex issues of racism and social disparity in U.S. society.

One of the epigraphs to Díaz's novel is a quote from the *Fantastic Four*, a Marvel comic that features a team of humans who possess supernatural abilities: "Of what import

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[125] Junot Díaz is currently writing a science fiction novel, *Monstro*, which explores the complex racial dynamics of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and calls attention to the marginalization of non-white bodies in these two countries. An excerpt from the novel was published in a special edition of the *New Yorker* dedicated to science fiction for the June 4 & 11, 2012 issue.

[126] See Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy also known as Lilith's Brood, which is comprised of the novels *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*. Her most well-known novel, *Kindred* (1979), explores the legacy of slavery in the United States, as the protagonist, a young African-American woman, is transported from 1970s Los Angeles to 19th century Maryland. Colson Whitehead's novels, *The Intuitionist* (1998) and *John Henry Days* (2001), also explore the problems of race and class in the United States.

are brief, nameless lives…to Galactus??"[127]  Galactus is a god-like figure that consumes

entire planets for sustenance.  Human beings would seem insignificant to him since he

exists on a much larger plane that encompasses entire galaxies and universes.  The

reference to Galactus parallels the powerlessness that Oscar and other urban youth

experience before the larger forces of poverty, violence and racism that impact their lives.

Again, encounters with other worldly beings highlights science fiction's importance in

emphasizing social and ethnic difference (Roberts).  Oscar and his fellow Dominicans

become the silent Other before the great and powerful Galactus, or in other words, the

dominant forces of politics.

Genre fiction has been used to address pertinent social issues in American society,

such as racism, social inequality, and political corruption. A.O Scott, writing in the *New

York Times Review of Books*, sees in Díaz's novel a reflection of a larger trend among

contemporary American writers that include Michael Chabon, Dave Eggers and Jonathan

Lethem.[128]  These writers combine science fiction and fantasy with realism to tackle the

difficult issues affecting their communities and society as a whole (Scott 2008).  By

reframing complex societal problems in alternate universes through a genre such as

science fiction, one can better understand the issues that affect their community by

viewing them from a distance.  Redefining real world societal problems in a context that

seems foreign allows the writer to freely explore different outcomes within the text,

which indirectly introduces critical questions about the world they inhabit.

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[127] Galactus, as well as other Marvel comic characters have been used to analyze bigger social problems.
For example, Iron Man, was introduced in the 1960s to critique the industrial military complex and Cold
War politics.  The X-men, also created during the 1960s, uncovered the social prejudices that plagued U.S.
society.

[128] See Michael Chabon's novels, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) and *Telegraph Avenue* (2012),
*Dave Eggers'* novels, *What is What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006) and *Zeitoun*
(2009), and Jonathan Lethem's novels, *Gun, with Occasional Music* (1994) and *The Fortress of Solitude*
(2003).

The blurring of the real world with attributes of the fantastical in literature about marginalized populations allows Diaz's protagonists to endure the oppression they experience. Fantastic qualities in literature about Latino neighborhoods function as a way to deal with the suffering found in marginalized communities (Sandín and Perez 3). Episodes of hardship too overwhelming to face directly can be addressed through imagery that goes beyond the limits of the environment, providing a temporary respite from the endless struggles of life. The power of the marvelous does not hinge on whether it is picturesque, but rather it manifests itself in anything or anyone within the literary work that conjures the abnormal or the extraordinary. Carpentier comments on the marvelous real, and he points out that it's characteristics result in amazement:

> So we should establish a definition of the marvelous that does not depend on the notion that the marvelous is admirable because it is beautiful. Ugliness, deformity, all that is terrible can also be marvelous. All that is strange is marvelous. (Carpentier 102)

Whether interpreted as beautiful or ugly, the marvelous interrupts the hardships of urban life experienced by the protagonist in the text, forcing him or her to reevaluate how they perceive the world around them.[129]

Science fiction functions as a coping mechanism for experiences of fracture in gritty urban locations. By situating the challenges of urban life in a foreign setting, problems can seem more bearable. While at Rutgers, Oscar shares some of his writings with his roommate, Yúnior:

> Picked up some his writings, five books to date, and tried to read some. Wasn't my cup of tea—*Drop the phaser, Arthurus Prime!*—but even I could tell he had chops…Showed him some of my fiction too, all robberies and drug deals and *Fuck you, Nando,* and BLAU! BLAU! BLAU! (173).

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[129] José David Saldívar also comments on the power of the marvelous in Latin American and U.S. Latino fiction in his study, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991).

Both students write about violence in their writings. Oscar writes about a battle in space, and Yúnior recounts an episode of inner city crime. However, I argue that they are writing about the same issue, but from different approaches. Yúnior uses realism to convey exactly what he observes in the neighborhood where he grew up, while Oscar replaces guns with phasers and Nando or José with obscure sounding names that do not belong on Earth. Yúnior focuses on dirty realism[130] in contrast to the Comic Book Realism[131] that Oscar adopts to address the same issues. Oscar employs the techniques of science fiction to write about the same violent conflicts that Yúnior sees so that they do not seem as overwhelming. Oscar's tactics are not meant to minimize his or Yúnior's experiences of living in difficult urban environments, but rather they are adopted in order to place a buffer between them and an unforgiving world by placing the challenges of the inner city in a different universe. Life's problems seem more bearable when examined from a distance.

Junot Díaz examines Dominican American youth's position as the other through references to science fiction and comic books that explore racial and social class difference. His protagonists' inability to assimilate with different social groups, including students of color and other nerds, illustrates Danny Mendez's observation that Dominican American youth are a community of excluded subjects. Despite the protagonists' best efforts to show friendship, others view them with suspicion. Science fiction and comic books provide a temporary outlet to the racism and poverty that they encounter. Urban Dominican American youth may never stop experiencing racial

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[130] Dirty realism refers to literature of the 1960s and 1970s by Charles Bukowski and Raymond Carver, as well as literature of the 1990s that includes Bret Easton Ellis, who focus on the gritty aspects of contemporary American society. In *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* (2004), Lyn Di Iorio Sandín examines the similarities and differences between dirty realism and contemporary urban Latino fiction.

[131] Comic Book Realism is a term coined by Daniel Bautista that refers to Junot Díaz's mixing of genres, such as realism with comic books and science fiction.

prejudices, but their interest in the world of genre fiction allows them to cope with this social problem.

## CONCLUSION

Dominican American youth's *desencuentros* with U.S. racial hierarchies and Dominican ethnic identity indicates a hybrid self commonly misunderstood by mainstream society and their families' immigrant community. Working class, nong-white Dominicans migrated in large numbers to the New York metropolitan region post-1960 in search of a stable economic life. This new generation of U.S. Latinos, as represented in the works of Junot Díaz, encountered marginalization and an unstable sense of home since they did not fit into the dominant narrative of assimilation. They experienced increased stigma and political invisibility due to perceptions that Black and Latino communities contributed to the economic decline of the American city during the last decades of the 20th century. The uncertainty surrounding Dominicans' racial background in the U.S. further contributed to their marginal/outsider status. Dominican American youth adopted aspects of African American culture into their everyday life in order to endure and make sense of the prejudices they encountered as individuals of African descent. Their navigation of American youth of color subculture together with influences from Dominican immigrant communities results in cultural hybridity. In the case of Díaz's protagonists, this hybridization equates to cultural *desencuentros* with their family's Dominican identity and with established U.S. definitions of race. Their disconnect with accepted norms of Dominican and American culture exemplifies Dominican American youth's experience of being a stranger in all social circles. Unable

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to fully participate in any specific social group, Díaz's protagonists reside in a perpetual state of destitution on the margins of society.

Dominican American youth's failure to integrate into the social groups found in their community and mainstream society accentuates their position as the other. The urban spaces of the street and the home in the inner city come to the forefront in Díaz's works as his protagonists inhabit these real world places in the struggle to make sense of their identity as urban youth of color who experience exclusion from other non-white communities and from the white, dominant culture. Díaz's ghetto nerd, a Dominican American young man from the inner city, uses his interests in comic books and science fiction to create alternative possibilities that resist the hierarchical order of racial and social class in the U.S. Science fiction commonly deals with themes tied to encounters with the other, which resonates with the marginalization of Dominican American youth. Through the ghetto nerd, Junot Díaz creates metaphors related to race and class in the inner city that explore social problems in less overwhelming contexts. Interest in comics and genre fiction may further stigmatize the Díaz's protagonists, but these activities simultaneously allow them to understand their outsider status that is frequently misunderstood and endure the impoverished living conditions commonly overlooked by mainstream society.

# Chapter 4: Urban Decay, *Bodegas* and *Botánicas* in Ernesto Quiñonez's Novels

*To be able to just walk around the neighborhood is my secret revenge on all those forces and policies that tried to erase me. A secret revenge too, on the privileged who grew up safely in healthy streets like those of the Upper East Side, who felt so intelligent reading Balzac and Dickens, not caring that those same stories were happening in their neglected backyards. Their visions of the city are always of a magical place, where you see Sarah Jessica Parker eating in a chic restaurant, where there is always jazz playing, just as in a Woody Allen movie. I, too, have seen those visions. I, too, believe in that glorious New York City.*

-Ernesto Quiñonez

In the context of urban decay, cyclical poverty and gentrification, Quiñonez's Spanish Harlem residents contest their colonialized, racialized status as Puerto Ricans in New York through suspect enterprises, capitalist endeavors and spiritual practices that provide solutions to social mobility. The social ills that continually afflict Spanish Harlem from the Civil Rights era of the 1960s to the turn of the 21$^{st}$ century creates a historical framework for understanding racism and cyclical poverty in New York's inner city communities.[132] Desperation ensues as Latino urban youth encounter limited opportunities to rise out poverty. Quiñonez illuminates the ways in which youth use the *bodega* and the *botánica* to serve as "space[s] of community where Puerto Ricans find a cultural refuge from the social and racial discrimination that occurs on the 'outside'" (Domínguez Miguela 171). Given that crime is a means to achieve legitimacy within an

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[132] For more information on Quiñonez and his novels' connections with the past, see Chris Wiegand's article, "Ernesto Quiñonez: Bodega Dreams: Spanglish Stories" in *Spike Magazine* (2001).

impoverished community, Ernesto Quiñonez explores the feasibility of such actions through protagonists in Spanish Harlem who evoke the idea of the *bodega* to promote economic stimulation. By introducing the political ideals of the past coupled with the spiritual practices of their ancestors, Quiñonez forces his protagonists to reconsider crime and capitalism as the only strategies to deal with the encroaching forces of poverty and gentrification that negatively impact their community.

Spanish Harlem residents' myriad of responses to the constant dislocation they experience in their community throughout the second half of the 20th century characterize marginalized subjects endless search for stability and respect. Their lower social class status results from cyclical poverty and endemic racism. Quiñonez captures the social inequality experienced by Puerto Ricans in New York City by resuscitating the tragic history of Spanish Harlem. Episodes of families living in deplorable conditions caused by the purposeful neglect of slumlords illustrates the urban decay that has plagued this inner city Latino neighborhood. Adversity continues into the 1980s as government housing projects further segregates Puerto Ricans from the rest of the city. Displacement occurs again in the 1990s with the gentrification of Spanish Harlem, which raises rents and property costs to an unaffordable rate. Slumlords, public housing and urban renewal convey the different forms of institutionalized racism Spanish Harlem residents encounter in Quiñonez's novels, *Bodega Dreams* and *Chango's Fire*. The repeated housing problems emphasize unequal distribution of political power and economic resources that limit Latinos from improving their inferior social standing in society. Underground capitalist endeavors become an attractive option for Quiñonez's protagonists to end the cycle of inadequate housing and racism. The *bodega* serves as a symbol of economic revitalization for them, as they interpret their actions as a gateway to legitimate wealth. Another important site, the *botánica,* serves local residents with artifacts and products

tied to their spiritual practices. For Quiñonez, the *botánica* provides Latino youth with answers to the racial subordination they experience that western religion fails to adequately address. Spiritual practices connected to their African heritage reinforce a cultural identity that has long been stigmatized by mainstream society. Quiñonez's introduction of practices tied to the *bodega* and the *botánica* calls upon Spanish Harlem residents' search for solutions to the cyclical poverty that has impacted their community for generations.

Ernesto Quiñonez has published multiple articles in the New York Times and Esquire Magazine that bring attention to social issues that impact minority communities, such as Latinos in Spanish Harlem. His New York Times article, "The Fires Last Time," chronicles his childhood in Spanish Harlem during the 1970s and 1980s, which was one of the darkest times in the neighborhood's history. His personal experiences with poor housing conditions, the threat of arson to his home and the prevalence of heroin and crack on the streets represent the typical experience of Latinos living in New York's marginalized communities. By publishing his childhood memories in a mainstream newspaper, such as the New York Times, Quiñonez recovers the lost experiences of his community that commonly stay unknown to middle and upper class U.S. residents. For Esquire Magazine, Quiñonez wrote the article, "The Black-Brown Divide" that addressed racial tensions between Latinos and blacks in the United States. He further notes that many Latinos carry racial baggage from their homelands to the United States as they attempt to downplay or even ignore completely their African ancestry. This internalized stigma of their non-white racial features becomes externalized when they encounter African Americans whom they view as beneath them according to the West's racial hierarchies.

## The Social Context of Spanish Harlem

By providing a brief historical and social context of Spanish Harlem during the late 20th century for Quiñonez's literary works, I demonstrate how the neighborhood's urban decay and social problems highlight his protagonists subordinate racial standing as Puerto Ricans in the United States. Puerto Ricos' colonial status contributes to the social stigma that they experience in New York. The slumlords' refusal to maintain adequate living arrangements for tenants in Spanish Harlem emphasizes the cyclical poverty that plagues this Puerto Rican community. Government housing projects contribute to Puerto Ricans' political and social invisibility, as they become further segregated from the city's center. Puerto Ricans in New York attempt to preserve their cultural identity in the face of outsiders who institute economic projects that will erase their history. In Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams,* the protagonists mix Spanish into their English conversations, which allude to their family's immigrant background. Cultural institutions found in their neighborhood, such as El Museo del Barrio, symbolize Puerto Rican identity in New York. Quiñonez's protagonists experience discrimination by police and upper class residents who automatically view them with suspicion because of where they reside: Spanish Harlem. Social class and ethnic background, two social factors that characterize the literature of lower case people, shape the experiences of Quiñonez's protagonists.

The Civil Rights era was a time where political power seemed possible, and Quiñonez explores its effectiveness in Spanish Harlem at the turn of the 21st century. Despite the emergence of the political and artistic activism of the Civil Rights era, the poverty, racism and inadequate housing in Spanish Harlem persist to the present day. In their seminal work on contemporary Latino fiction in the New York City area, *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*, Dalleo and Sáez argue that

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the political legacy of the 1960s remains important for post-1960s Latino writers.[133]
However, maintaining these ideals from the past should not be interpreted as a simplistic
sense of nostalgia (Dalleo and Sáez 2-3). The revolutionary spirit of the past remains, but
contemporary Latino fiction rethinks the strategy for navigating the struggles of urban
life by negotiating the Civil Rights ideals of past decades with realities of urban life at the
turn of the 21st century (Ruiz-Castaneda). Antonio Dominguez Miguela notes: "Harlem
and the barrio were sites of constant struggle for survival and self-definition…" (167).
Writers, such as Quiñonez, provide fictional works that personalize the cycle of poverty
and social oppression that affect many of Spanish Harlem's residents. Historical
references provide a context for understanding how Spanish Harlem arrived at its current
state, and Ernesto Quiñonez's protagonists continue to face the same challenges as
previous generations of Puerto Ricans in their neighborhood.

The marginalization experienced by Spanish Harlem residents, who are
predominately of Puerto Rican descent, can be traced back to Puerto Rico's subordinate
standing during the 20th century.[134] A lower social status contributes to marginalization
as one's needs are overlooked due to a lack of access to the existing political structure.
For Puerto Ricans in New York, social stigma originates with Puerto Rico's colonial
status to the United States, always dependent and at the mercy of the political decisions
of the empire (Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop* 9).[135] This systematic disempowerment

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[133] The position taken by Dalleo and Sáez challenges Juan Flores' claim that contemporary Latino literature post-1960s is primarily apolitical and assimilationist.

[134] See Juan Flores' collection of essays, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (1993) for further discussion on the colonial status of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

[135] Although Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States since 1898, Puerto Ricans did not become citizens of the United States until 1917. Their new status as citizens came with two caveats: 1) they could not vote for the president of the United States unless they lived on the mainland and 2) the island was allowed one congressional representative with no voting privileges. The political limitations placed on Puerto Ricans emphasize their subordinate status as second-class citizens, which continues throughout the 20th century to the present.

creates a cyclical effect in which Puerto Ricans in New York cannot escape the social stigma placed on previous generations. Viewed as non-white, Puerto Ricans experience *de facto* segregation and hostile environments where they are subjected to social prejudices. The discrimination they encounter results in fewer opportunities for adequate employment and education, thereby forcing their communities, especially those in the United States, to remain in poverty.

Many Puerto Ricans migrating to New York had some degree of African ancestry, and in Western society, a darker complexion equates to finding oneself towards the bottom of the racial hierarchy.[136] The discrimination that Puerto Ricans experienced in relation to other ethnic groups exemplified the larger racial stigma that populations of color face in U.S. society.[137] The racial discrimination experienced in New York served as a microcosm of the prejudices that black, Latinos and other non-white ethnic groups faced in cities throughout the country. These racial tensions predetermined their low social standing, regardless of their character and efforts to rise out of poverty. This attitude of viewing Puerto Ricans as inferior translated into treating them poorly as they were forced to live in deplorable conditions with little chance of social mobility.

In her work *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora,* Lisa Sánchez González notes that the racism experienced by the Puerto Rican community has been one of its "major obstacles in the twentieth century," and that many "Boriuca writers have confronted and analyzed the sources, expressions, and consequences of

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[136] Two novels by Puerto Rican authors from New York clearly address the stigma of race tied to Afro-Latino identity: Piri Thomas' *Down these Mean Streets* (1967) and Marta Moreno Vega's *When the Spirits Dance Mambo: Growing up Nuyorican in El Barrio* (2004).

[137] See *Neither Enemies nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos* (2005), edited by Anani Dzidzienyo Suzanne Oboler for additional analysis on the complex racial tensions between populations of color in the United States.

racism as a social malaise in (and beyond) the United States" (3).[138] The Nuyorican movement brought attention to the impoverished living conditions and racial discrimination experienced by residents of Spanish Harlem. [139] Their poetry addressed topics that paralleled the issues that Latino political organizations were confronting, such as lack of decent housing, social prejudices and unemployment. The Nuyorican poets emerged from the very ghettos they were succinctly describing in their poetry, which enabled them to "capture the voices of the people, their outlook on life, their feelings about themselves and each other, and their hardships" (Luis 46). This poetry appealed to the masses in urban Latino communities as it mimicked the language of the streets and conveyed the emotions of frustration and despair that so many youth experienced during this time period.

In New York City, the Civil Rights era was defined by the emergence of Puerto Rican community organizations and advocacy movements that provided social services and leadership opportunities to local residents, especially young adults. One particular group, the "young turks," was for the most part New York-born, young, college educated and bilingual. They argued that "the future and politics of the Puerto Rican community should be in the hands of Puerto Rican New Yorkers" (Dávila 225). In 1969 and 1970, a regional chapter of the Young Lords was established in the same neighborhood. The Young Lords experienced first-hand the oppression their community faced as many of them were drug addicts, some were former gang members and others had served prison

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[138] Some of the key Puerto Rican authors in New York who addressed topics of race and class difference include: Piri Thomas, Bernardo Vega, Jesús Colón, Ed Vega, Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero and Abraham Rodriguez.

[139] See Miguel Algarín's *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theater Festival* (1997) and *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café* (1994) as well as Juan Flores' *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000), Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez's *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voice from the Diaspora* (1998) and William Luis' *Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States* (1997).

sentences (Luis 69-70).  The Young Lords offered community programs, including Free

Breakfast for Children and Free Health Clinic for underserved Latino families, in

addition to organizing protests and occupations of public property.  They also established

door-to-door health services to detect and treat the high level of lead poisoning and

tuberculosis found among residents of Spanish Harlem's housing projects (Morales 212-

16).  The Young Lords "articulated eloquently the needs and feelings of Latinos living in

the United States and channeled their dissatisfaction into a political movement…that

observed an inequality within the system of government and justice that kept large

numbers of Latinos and blacks living in slums, unemployed, or in prison" (Luis 45).

These social projects demonstrated residents' efforts to combat the social ills, such as

chronic health problems, hunger and inadequate shelter, that afflicted their community

with no end in sight.

Many of the apartment buildings in Spanish Harlem were owned and controlled

by private "slumlords," whose "tactics of abandonment, divestment, and retrieval of

services had, by the 1970s, turned East Harlem into a prime example of urban blight"

(Dávila 35).  Landlords commonly shut down services in buildings, such as running

water and electricity, forcing residents to find creative ways to survive.  Quiñonez

experienced first hand as a child and then teenager, the inhumane conditions of 1970s

Spanish Harlem:

> THESE were dark days, days of cold dinners and colder showers, until the entire
> building grew dark and the water faucets started gargling like an old man's throat,
> and that's when we knew the water was next to go. At this point we fetched our
> water from fire hydrants, filling empty milk gallon after empty milk gallon. The
> landlord was letting his building die slowly, and since no utilities were running
> through the building whatsoever, addicts or just plain thieves could now steal the
> expensive brass pipes and copper wiring and sell them to metal junk shops. ("The
> Fires Last Time")

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During this dark period in the neighborhood's history, the slumlords would frequently set fire to the dilapidated housing projects, even with people still residing in them, in order to collect insurance money on their unprofitable assets. Vacant lots that were once vibrant neighborhoods become locations that fostered drugs and violence.[140] The lack of basic resources, such as running water and electricity during the middle of winter, fostered desperation, as residents had to find unconventional ways to survive the harsh environment. Quiñonez chronicles the precarious living situation of Spanish Harlem residents as they were forced to survive in conditions that seem unimaginable in a nation as wealthy and powerful as the United States.

Local governments attempted to address the inadequate living conditions of Spanish Harlem residents, but unfortunately amplified the social divide between rich and poor through their policies. Under the Koch administration of the 1980s, the city of New York attempted to decrease the growing number of abandoned buildings in Spanish Harlem and other marginalized communities, which led to the largest housing plan implemented by a municipal government in the United States (Dávila 36). In *Chango's Fire,* the protagonist, Julio, reflects on this time period when his family was relocated to public housing after their apartment building caught fire: "These city blocks, full of project buildings on each corner, were built not so much to house us as to corral us. To keep us in one place" (Quiñonez 6).[141] Julio's observations of the new housing projects uncovers a disturbing reality where Spanish Harlem resembles a prison complex and not a residential neighborhood where inhabitants feel safe and empowered. The city houses

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[140] In "Families and Children in Pain in the U.S. Inner City," Philippe Bourgois captures the devastating effects of drug addiction and inter-personal violence on family structures in Spanish Harlem.

[141] See Abraham Rodriguez's novels, *The Boy without a Flag; Tales of the South Bronx* (1992), *Spidertown: A Novel* (1993) and *The Buddha Book: A Novel* (2001) for similar fictional representations of Puerto Rican displacement and poverty in New York City's other boroughs.

them into the smallest geographic space possible in order free up ample real estate for development for wealthy clients.  The new public housing keeps the poor out of sight and out of mind, evidenced by Koch's housing plan, which did not improve the living conditions of existing residents, but rather overburdened the community with "social, economic, or needy populations" through special needs housing, federal senior housing and housing through the federal government's Section 8 program (Dávila 37). Government policies further marginalized Spanish Harlem residents instead of improving their community.  They became invisible, as the city did not want recognize that poverty and social inequality persisted throughout the 20th century.

Urban renewal in the 1990s brought hope as New York began to reinvest in areas of the city that had been neglected for decades, including Spanish Harlem.[142]  However, this urban renewal did not benefit the working class families of this Latino community. The new apartment buildings were designed and set at a price that only the upper middle class and the rich could afford.  Spanish Harlem residents faced more oppression, but this time in a new form: gentrification.   Quiñonez comments on the history of his neighborhood in Spanish Harlem:

> The building I used to live in sat there and sat there, empty and broken, for decades. Then the better days its landlord was waiting for arrived. In 1994, Spanish Harlem became part of the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, and government money and tax breaks provided an incentive to rebuild. It was time to renovate buildings like the ones I was burned out of and raise their rent so high that no one from their forsaken pasts could go back to inhabit their spaces again. People like my family who had lived through the worst of times would not be able to live in Spanish Harlem during the best of times. (Quiñonez, "The Fires Last Time"*)*

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[142] Arelene Dávila's landmark study, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos and the Neoliberal City* (2004) provides an in depth examination of the effects of gentrification on Spanish Harlem during the 1990s.

Now that Harlem is experiencing a season of economic revitalization, its long time residents ironically do not have the right to enjoy it. They are viewed as part of the problem as to why this neighborhood has experienced so much poverty and crime and must be purged by wealthy outsiders who intend to make Spanish Harlem resemble their home communities. These inhabitants face the same threat of displacement that previous generations faced.

The negative effects of gentrification on the Puerto Rican residents of Spanish Harlem can be found in local institutions of culture that are gradually being appropriated and redefined by outsiders who do not understand their historical significance. One place of struggle to maintain a strong community identity has been local culture centers and museums, such as Spanish Harlem's El Museo del Barrio.[143] Long seen as an institution of Spanish Harlem that showcased Puerto Rican and Latino identity, El Museo's mission changed as its board of directors wanted a "world-class museum" that reflected the multiculturalism of Latin American art (Dávila 109-110). Ironically, Puerto Rican and U.S. Latino artists were not viewed as pertaining to Latin American art, or at best, were placed on its periphery.[144] Established by local activists, a campaign soon emerged, "We're Watching You," that sought to assure that the museum would continue its community mission and recognize its Puerto Rican past (Dávila 109). This local political organization prevented the discarding of past art exhibits and important archives associated with Spanish Harlem's history. While a small victory, this action represented a greater sentiment among Puerto Rican residents that their culture and history should not

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[143] Quiñonez frequently references the important cultural sites of Spanish Harlem in his novels, such as El Museo del Barrio, the Salsa Museum of New York and the Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center.

[144] Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) can provide insight into how the valuing of certain types of art and culture uncovers the hierarchy of power in society. In the case of El Museo del Barrio, the change in preference for high Latin American art over local Latino art uncovers the subordinate status of Puerto Ricans in New York.

and cannot be erased by larger corporate and governmental forces that attempt to reinvent the neighborhood to fit a sanitized image.

The identity politics espoused by Puerto Rican activist groups have played a central, and often polemic, role in the revitalization efforts of Spanish Harlem. This political tension became evident with the creation of the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, which was introduced by congressman Charles Rangel in 1994, as a way to "stimulate the production of cultural products and services which will attract larger audiences, create jobs, and increase the economic benefits of Heritage Tourism in Upper Manhattan" (Dávila 97). The Empowerment Zone's use of culture in a business context directly challenged Spanish Harlem's past cultural projects that have served as "resources for struggles over rights, representations, and identity, and where most cultural institutions had been funded as part of such struggles" (Dávila 99). These new cultural projects minimized the important Puerto Rican social and artistic contributions to Spanish Harlem. The debates surrounding the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone represent the continuing struggle by Spanish Harlem residents to maintain their cultural identity while simultaneously finding ways to reduce the social inequalities that plague their community.

The lack of homeownership by Spanish Harlem residents emphasizes their lack of social mobility and vulnerability to forces outside their control, such as high rents and abandoned buildings by property owners. In her landmark work on Latinos and the struggle of social class, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos and the Neoliberal City,* Arlene Dávila analyzes property ownership in Spanish Harlem. Home ownership is almost nonexistent in Spanish Harlem as it "has one of the largest concentrations of public housing in New York and the fewest number of homeowners: 93.6 percent of the population are renters, among the highest numbers in Manhattan" (Dávila 7-8). The low

rates of property ownership among Spanish Harlem residents represent their inability to acquire lasting wealth as well as the powerlessness they experience to demand improvements to their community since outsiders control the land. Property owners will provide assistance to the neighborhood only if it benefits them financially, and not out of a concern for the well being of their renters. Property equals social and economic power, and Spanish Harlem residents' limited access to it reinforces their low standing in the city's hierarchy.

Spanish Harlem's long history as a marginalized neighborhood for Puerto Ricans conveys their colonial status as non-white outsiders who remain cut off from the resources of the city. New York's Puerto Rican population continues to face the marginalization and displacement experienced by previous immigrant generations who settled in East Harlem throughout the 20th century.[145] The U.S.'s racial hierarchy places Puerto Ricans in a lower socio-economic class, which limits their access to adequate resources tied to education, employment and housing. They remain powerless to change the precarious circumstances that trap them in a cycle of racism and poverty. The arsons of the 1970s, the failed housing projects of the 1980s and the gentrification of the 1990s illustrate the recurring history of exploitation and exclusion experienced by Puerto Ricans in New York. Their continued socio-economic hardships into the 21st century reiterate the legacy of racism and cyclical poverty that has negatively impacted this community during the second half of the 20th century.

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[145] See Suzanne Oboler's *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging* (2006) for additional studies on the cycle of oppression and exclusion experienced by Puerto Ricans and other Latino groups in the United States.

## SOCIAL MOBILITY AND LEGITIMACY

In the American ideology hard work equals success, yet the rules of social mobility have been pre-determined by the nation's ruling classes. For Quiñonez's protagonists, all great economic successes in the United States have a dark history full of thievery and exploitation. Obtaining status and wealth through unethical means does not originate with the urban underworld, but rather the ruling classes have a long tradition of engaging in illicit activities in order to further their economic and political agenda. Quiñonez's protagonist, Willie Bodega, points to individuals in power as the original criminals; justifying his criminal enterprises:

> "Behind every great wealth, Julio, there's a great crime. You know who said
> that?"
> I didn't.
> "Balzac."
> "Balzac? The writer?" (159)

From Bodega's perspective, the correlation between crime and social ascension is an old practice invented long before he was born.[146] Bodega emphasizes how the United States has engaged in unethical measures to further their power:

> America is a great nation, I have no doubts about that, but in its early days it had
> to take some shady steps to get there. Manifest Destiny, that was just another
> word for genocide…the Americans wanted it [the west] and called it Manifest
> Destiny and not what it really was, theft. (160)

Manifest Destiny refers to the United States' vision of westward expansion during the 19th century to what is now Texas, the Rocky Mountains region and California. Bodega interprets U.S. foreign policy during that time period as laws that enable it to steal lands

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[146] One of Honoré de Balzac's most important novels, *Le Père Goriot* explores criminality in Paris as a way to understand the corruption and social stratification that plagues French society at the beginning of the 19th century. Considered one of the founders of realism in European literature, Honoré de Balzac is highly regarded for his unfiltered representations of French society during the first half of the 19th century. Published in 1835, the appearance of Balzac's literary work during the early decades of the 19th century illustrates that the theme of criminality in literature is not a new topic.

belonging to other communities and nations. According to James Holston, the U.S. government succeeded in reducing the size of indigenous lands by the use of compulsory allotment, which was federally enforced through the General Allotment Act of 1887 (55). The federal law partially or completely abolished tribal holdings, "surveyed them into lots, assigned the lots to individual Indians, and held them in inalienable trust for twenty-five years or longer" (Holston 55). Holston's analysis of U.S. law illustrates that governments commonly manipulate the law as a way to achieve their goals, regardless of the negative consequences on the parties affected. Holston's historical reference reinforces Bodega's argument that his clandestine endeavors merely follow the precedent established by the U.S. government.

Bodega's dream of a wealthy, educated class in Spanish Harlem calls upon the creation of a parallel social system in marginalized communities that does not remain at the mercy of the U.S.'s ruling elite. According to Juan Flores, Latinos are creating a new kind of ethos not based on the existing social structure, but rather based on "the construction of a new hegemony dependent upon their cultural practices and discourses" (*Divided Borders* 216). In *Bodega Dreams*, Willie Bodega envisions a future where there will be an army of educated Latinos employed in the professional workforce, changing the social and cultural landscape of New York and beyond. His dream of an educated and financially secure Latino population does not come about on the terms of New York's rich and powerful. His involvement in drug trafficking and real estate gives him the power to work the system to his and his community's benefit. Bodega's actions have the potential to establish a parallel hegemonic structure to the one already in place, and to possibly replace it in the future. Bodega is not calling people to march on the streets or hold rallies in front of government buildings. His form of political action transpires in

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the shadows of society, making deals in abandoned buildings in order to allow future generation to do great things through his illegitimate activities.

While ethics can be debated, Quiñonez's protagonists' decision to engage in the criminal underworld represents the conflict over how to decrease poverty and to protect Spanish Harlem residents who are powerless to larger economic forces. These deeper questions exemplify Dalleo and Sáez's argument that contemporary Latino writers, such as Quiñonez, are not merely producing the "gang-banger" novel that other Latino literary scholars, such as Sánchez González fear are the main type of urban minority literature being produced by the U.S. publishing industry (47). Latino writers, such as Quiñonez, are not using a formulaic structure to romanticize criminality in the inner city. They "deploy that generic model [the gang-banger novel] self-reflexively in order to critique it limits" (Dalleo and Sáez 47-48).[147] Quiñonez directly confronts the problems that plague his community in order to deconstruct them. Quiñonez's uncensored portrayal of the shady underworld found in Spanish Harlem does not function as a simple, superficial depiction of urban life. His works use the gritty images of the inner city as a way to evoke deeper questions surrounding cyclical poverty and how to combat it effectively.

Ernesto Quiñonez's literary works narrate the murky relationships that his protagonists have with the criminal underworld in New York City's Spanish Harlem as they engage in illegal activities to improve their personal or their community's economic situation. In *Chango's Fire,* Julio wants to stop working as an arsonist, but he sees the benefits of his action as his parents can spend their retirement years in a home owned by him (Quiñonez 24). Since legitimate options remain inaccessible, engaging in crime

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[147] See *Contemporary U.S. Latino/a Literary Criticism* (2007), edited by Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez for additional information on the complex themes found in Latino literature at the turn of the 21st century.

allows Julio to work outside the legal limits of the system that prevents residents of marginalized communities from improving their socio-economic status. Julio's choice does not change the existing unequal distribution of resources in the U.S., but it allows him to provide for his family. Quiñonez does not advocate crime as a final solution to the lack of economic opportunities in Spanish Harlem. Using Julio as an anecdote emphasizes how Spanish Harlem youth remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and crime that they cannot escape. They will continue to have an ambivalent relationship with crime as long as acceptable alternatives to improve their social station remain out of reach.

Gentrification in Spanish Harlem has lasting socio-economic consequences for Quiñonez's protagonists as their options for stable housing and financial security are slowing eroded. In *Chango's Fire,* Ernesto Quiñonez represents the effects of commercialization and the Manhattan Empowerment Zone through Julio, who is powerless to stop the sudden changes that threaten to push him and his neighbors out of Spanish Harlem. He notices that his community is losing its unique identity and becoming too expensive for the Puerto Ricans who have lived there: "Empowerment zoning has changed the face of the neighborhood. Chain stores rise like monsters from a lake. Gap. Starbucks. Blockbuster Video. Old Navy…The rents are absurdly high, and it breaks my heart, because Spanish Harlem had always been a springboard" (Quiñonez, *Chango's Fire* 7). Chain stores illustrate the homogenization of Spanish Harlem as it quickly becomes the same as any other middle class community found in the United States. The *bodegas*, *botánicas* and restaurants that made Spanish Harlem unique disappear as they are replaced by stores that force it to conform to the demands of the new tenants: predominately white, upper class young adults.

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The gentrification of Spanish Harlem uncovers racial tensions between long-time residents and the new tenants in *Chango's Fire,* as Julio attends a party held by white, upper class individuals who recently moved to Harlem where he encounters negative stereotypes about his ethnicity:

> The crowd is young, and as I make my way toward Helen, a young guy in a suit and tie accosts me.
> > "Hey, amigo," he says, "you know where I can find some?"
> > "Outside," I say, "pick a corner."
> > "Can you do that for me?" he says and tries to underhand me two twenties.
> "You know, I'm new here."
> > "Sorry, man," I say, not taking his money, "I don't do that." (141).

Regardless of their supposed open-mindedness, several of the partygoers automatically treat Julio as a young man who should know about drugs and crime just because he grew up in Spanish Harlem. Their assumptions about Julio represent the long legacy of Latinos being "epitomized by the racialized, stigmatized, inner-city Puerto Rican, the 'spic,' whose only cultural cousin has been the similarly placed 'pachuco' and 'greaser' from the cities of the Southwest" (Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* 8-9). Julio is highly educated and has managed to secure a comfortable life for himself and his parents in the inner city, yet all that the rich outsiders manage to see is another Latino "thug" who sells drugs. The act of handing him some cash, as if he is an errand boy, symbolizes the unequal relationship between Julio and white, upper-class outsiders, even though they are in his neighborhood.

Quiñonez examines the systemic exploitation of working class populations in Spanish Harlem to explore how urban Latino youth respond to social inequality. Strategies of economic exploitation originated with the ruling classes that engaged in questionable policies and practices to acquire economic resources at the cost to vulnerable populations. Quiñonez's protagonists attempt to establish a parallel social

structure that will benefit their community in a similar fashion to the elites. Urban youth's ambiguous relationship with crime indicates that they cannot find safer and more stable options to improve their family's dire economic situation, regardless of their best efforts. With the advent of gentrification, they continue to encounter limited resources and institutionalized racism, limiting opportunities for social mobility. Through the space of the *bodega* and the *botánica*, Quiñonez explores how Spanish Harlem youth engage in economic revitalization and spiritual activities.

**Bodega(s)**

The word *bodega* comes from Spanish, and according to the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* of the Real Academia Española it historically was equivalent to an *almacén,* which is a storehouse for dry goods and wine. In New York, Puerto Ricans used the word to signify a convenience store, or small grocery store in their community. Presently, New Yorkers have adopted the word to refer to any kind of corner store or small grocery in the city. The *bodega* has played a key role in the local economy of Spanish Harlem as its residents, typically from working-class backgrounds, use it buy essential needs that might be too expensive in larger, chain retailers. Fernando Mateo, a spokesman for the Bodega Association of the United States, asserts that the *bodega's* role as a store accessible to the poor originates in Latin America: "in Central and South America and the Caribbean, they have bodegas on every corner to serve the poor" (Gray, "The Bodega"). Puerto Ricans brought this type of store to New York, which provided Spanish Harlem residents a convenient option in terms of prices and location as they could pay less than half-price for a gallon of milk at a store around the corner instead of traveling to a big-name retailer that would be located outside the neighborhood. The

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*bodega* also contributes back to the local economy since it is typically owned and operated by someone who lives in the surrounding community. They hire local residents as employees and provide affordable products that enable residents to survive on their limited income.

Besides its importance for the Spanish Harlem's economy, the *bodega* functions as a key communal space for its community.[148] Local residents frequent the *bodega* not only to buy groceries and other household needs, but also to meet with neighbors to talk about pertinent social issues and to get updated on neighborhood happenings. Fernando Mateo reiterates the *bodega's* significance in bringing residents together: "but also they become a place where people get together and go over their daily news, and people become part of communities" (Gray, "The Bodega"). The bodega functions as an impromptu community center where shoppers take time to build relationships with the owner and their fellow neighbors.

Puerto Rican literature from New York emphasizes the communal aspects of the *bodega,* which further solidifies its socio-cultural importance as a cultural institution of Spanish Harlem. Ernesto Quiñonez was not the first writer to reference the *bodega* as a central part of Spanish Harlem culture. Writers from the 1950s to the 1970s published works that mentioned the *bodega* in passing or placed it as the centerpiece of their text.[149] The existence of a wide range of authors and works demonstrate the long history of the *bodega* in Spanish Harlem and its prominence in the neighborhood as a social space that espouses a sense of community. This strong tradition of referencing the *bodega* appears

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[148] See Zygmunt Bauman's *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001) for a theoretical approach to the centrality of community in marginalized subjects' lives.

[149] Several of the literary works that include the *bodega* are Pedro Juan Soto's *Los perros anónimos* (1950) and *Spiks* (1956), Guillero Cotto-Thorner's *Trópico en Manhattan* (1959), José Luis González's *En Nueva York y otras desgracias* (1973) and Miguel Piñero's *La Bodega Sold Dreams* (1980).

in Quiñonez's novel in the epigraph to the final section of the book that quotes Piñero's poem, "La Bodega Sold Dreams":

> dreamt i was this poeta
> words glittern' brite & bold
> in las bodegas
> where our poets' words & songs
> are sung (202)

This stanza from Piñero's poem mentions the *bodega* as a place where poets come together to recite their poetry. His declaration is both a literal observation of what transpires in some *bodegas* where performances could unfold and it is a metaphor for the local residents who come together to share their experiences with each other. Piñero's poem illustrates the *bodega's* rich history as a space that fosters the creation and strengthening of marginalized communities, such as Spanish Harlem.[150]

In Quiñonez's novel, *Bodega Dreams,* the protagonist Chino comes across an enigmatic individual, Willie Bodega, who attempts to sell him on the idea of improving Spanish Harlem through clandestine activities that will lead to greater economic opportunities. His surname, Bodega, embodies the capitalist endeavors that he pursues in his community. Moreover, Willie's original surname is not Bodega, but Irizarry. His adoption of the name Bodega represents his goal to provide, like the convenience store, economic stimulus to his local community. Willie Bodega's effort to revitalize Spanish Harlem parallels the centrality of the *bodega* as a commercial hub for this Puerto Rican community.

Through Willie Bodega, Quiñonez represents the commercial and communal aspects of the *bodega* as Bodega's body and where he happens to be becomes the site of

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[150] Lyn Di Iorio Sandín's *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* (2004) for additional analysis on the importance of Piñero's work for Spanish Harlem and for urban Latino writers.

greater economic potential, and, therefore, social mobility for poverty stricken Spanish Harlem. He transforms himself from a hustler into someone who can provide the services of a *bodega* on a grand scale. Just as residents go to the local *bodega* for their food and household necessities, in *Bodega Dreams* they visit with Willie Bodega in order to have their immediate needs addressed, such as the lack of adequate housing, not enough food on the table or the absence of money to pay for a child's school tuition. Residents no longer have to seek assistance outside their community through government programs as they now have immediate access to social services within Spanish Harlem without the bureaucratic red tape. Willie Bodega will provide relief for their problems, which transforms him into the ultimate *bodega:* a place where the poor can have needs addressed at a low cost, or even free in some cases. By assisting his fellow neighbors, Willie Bodega hopes they will focus on building up their community and on maintaining the local institutions that define their cultural identity. Bodega's concern for the cultural welfare of Spanish Harlem parallels the *bodega's* importance as a space not only for economic vitality, but also for community events. His references to key cultural markers, such as the Young Lords and El Museo del Barrio, illustrates his embodiment of the *bodega's* communal traditions as he invites the neighborhood youth to participate with him in celebrating their contributions to Spanish Harlem's cultural legacy. Willie Bodega's concern for the economic and cultural sustainability of his community reflects the *bodega's* centrality in Spanish Harlem.

Ironically, as protagonists reinvest back into their neighborhood for legitimate projects, crime has the potential to empower Spanish Harlem. For example, in *Bodega Dreams*, Willie Bodega uses his drug money to aspire to be one of the largest property owners in New York City, not to exploit poor inhabitants as past landlords had done for personal gain, but as a way to renovate the dilapidated housing projects and to turn them

into comfortable, affordable housing for his fellow Latino residents. Bodega's economic endeavors resonates with Arlene Dávila's argument that property ownership equals political power: "purchase of place is presented as the only alternative for lasting power, even when the feasibility of such a dream is quickly fading. Rents are rapidly increasing, and buildings that a decade ago would have been abandoned or sold cheaply are being coveted by nonprofit investors and private speculators alike" (28). Bodega's shady endeavors are in fact strategies employed as a defense to the encroaching gentrification that can potentially displace his neighbors as rents and property taxes rise. Dávila sees Spanish Harlem as one of the last strongholds of Latino and Puerto Rican communities that remain on Manhattan: "East Harlem is now one of the last open frontiers for development in the city, and local residents are feeling the crunch" (28). Bodega's actions reflect the urgency by Spanish Harlem residents to protect their community from outsiders whose future construction projects could displace them. Maintaining their presence in Harlem not only has economic benefits, as it allows them to keep their sense of culture intact.

Willie Bodega's revitalization efforts in Spanish Harlem reference the *bodega's* economic and social importance to this Latino, inner city community. As a place where local resident frequent to purchase necessities and to stay updated on local happenings, the *bodega* functions as a vital resource to Spanish Harlem. Quiñonez's references to the *bodega* in his literary works emphasizes the long tradition of Puerto Rican literature in New York from the 1950s to the present that recognizes it as a cultural institution. Willie Bodega's name, therefore, calls upon the contributions of the *bodega* to Spanish Harlem. His body becomes a site of economic endeavors, which provide local residents with the possibility of social mobility. He rationalizes his involvement in the underground world

of criminality by focusing on the final goal of legitimacy, including economic stability and property rights for Spanish Harlem residents,

**Botánicas**

The *botánica* plays a central role in Spanish Harlem, as residents frequent this location to obtain religious effigies and other items that allow them to perform sacred ceremonies that emphasize their ethnic heritage. Quiñonez's protagonists do no connect with Western religion due to its failure to address the socio-economic disparity and racism they encounter on a daily basis. Within the space of the *botánica,* these disillusioned young men are introduced to a religious practice that has long been preserved by their ancestors: *Santería*. This spiritual practice embodies the history of survival that diasporic subjects experienced from the days of colonization and slavery to the present conditions of racial profiling and housing projects in the inner city. The rituals connected to *Santería* provide them with strength to endure Spanish Harlem's social problems and to counter experiences of social stigma.

By brining together individuals of African descent, the *botánica* serves as a spiritual and communal anchor for Spanish Harlem. Spiritual guides connected to the *botánica* help Quiñonez's protagonists navigate the challenges of the inner city. In the novel, *Chango's Fire,* the central protagonist, Julio, befriends Papelito, the owner of a local *botánica* and a practicing *babalawo,* a high priest of *Regla Lukumi,* or *Santería*. Papelito remains an anchor in Julio's life, by providing him with as well as reminding him of his ancestral roots and Afro-Latino identity.[151]

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[151] Many Latinos from the Caribbean have some degree of African ancestry. For further discussion on the historical and cultural legacies of Afro-Latino identity in the U.S., see *The Afr@-Latino Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (2010), edited by Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román.

Through his practice of *Santería*, Papelito reveals Christianity's false promises of equality to Julio. Julio's parents are devout evangelical Christians who attend church every Sunday, but he does not share their faith in God. As a result of Papelito's mentorship, Julio sees how organized religion has not closed the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor Christians:

> These people were Christians like me, believed in the same Christian God as I did. The Upper East Side and Spanish Harlem were two neighborhoods that existed back to back and were like the prince and the pauper. But our Christian God was the same. And our God was supposed to love us the same. Our God was supposed to bless us the same. We were supposed to live by His word and take part in the same blessings. But that's not what I saw. (Quiñonez, *Chango's Fire* 61).

Christianity's doctrine espouses equality and justice for all, but Julio perceives that these words do not carry any real meaning in his neighborhood. For Julio, organized religion has failed to empower his community by supporting the illusion that everyone is equal before God while ignoring the social inequalities that pervade New York City. Because of this realization, he mistrusts western religion, which symbolizes the frustration that urban youth have towards the existing social structure that maintains an economic hierarchy while promoting the illusion of social mobility for all.

Papelito's practice of *Santería* provides an alternative solution to Julio to western faith practices. As a hybrid religion of survival, *Santería* has adapted to the abrupt social and cultural changes that occurred during the colonization of the Americas. Papelito gives his insight into the history of *Santería*:

> It's a religion of poet priests yanked out of their beloved Africa and forced to embrace not just slavery in the new world but also Catholicism. And so these poet priests preserved their religion by hiding their gods inside Catholic saints…A

religion born out of the a need for survival, of diversity, of color and magic…It adapted and transformed itself into something new. It is this instinct of survival that lives to this day in bontánicas all over the country. (*Chango's Fire* 76)

Forcibly brought to the Americas because of the slave trade, Africans searched out ways to continue practicing their religion and cultural traditions despite threats of violence for asserting their ethnic identity. By hiding their religious practices behind the mask of Catholicism, they assured the survival of their traditions for future generations. This subversive strategy did not die with the end of slavery. As Quiñonez points out, the need to withstand oppression continues to the present in Spanish Harlem. The descendants of the African priests brought over during the slave trade continue experiencing poverty, crime and racial discrimination. Julio and Papelito must look to their ancestors' spiritual practices to survive. *Santería* has endured centuries of oppression by continually adapting, and therefore can provide rituals and traditions that will strengthen its practitioners who experience adversity.

Before his introduction to *Santería*, Julio experienced a strong disconnect with his community's culture evidenced by the massive amount of time spent on the streets instead of with family. Frustrated by the forces of gentrification taking over his neighborhood, he finds affirmation of his cultural identity through his meetings with Papelito. Lost and angry, Julio appears unsure as how to proceed with his life, which resembles the experiences of many urban youth. However, as Julio lowers his guard to Papelito's discussions on the power of *Santería,* he takes home religious items from the *botánica* in order to practice rituals that will help him to connect with the *Orishas,* or

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deities.[152]  This small action leaves a lasting impression on Julio, as the social and emotional void in his life begins to have more meaning.  These rituals that he conducts in his bedroom allow him to connect with his ancestors, and more importantly, engage in a practice that provides a clearer definition of his identity as an Afro-Latino male from Spanish Harlem.  Papelito explains how these rituals lead the follower to deeper truths about themselves.

> "Hey Papelito…why do you believe in the Orishas so much?
> …
> "Your question is easy, *mi lindo*," he says.  "Regla Lukumi is really the *patakis*, the stories I have chosen to live my life by."
> "Stories?"
> "Yes, powerful stories that teach me how to experience life, my life.  How to live my life within nature and my community."
> "Because they are beyond stories, Julio.  They hold power for all us, *mijo*. Listen.  These stories are really our search for the truth, for meaning, for significance.  These stories are us in disguise." (77, 78)

Serving as map for his life, *Santería* allows him to avoid the shortcomings of the criminal lifestyle and provides him with a means to rise out of poverty.

The *botánica* allows Spanish Harlem youth in Quiñonez's novels to reconsider society's negative perceptions of them, which results in a discovery of their rich ethnic and spiritual heritage.  Afro-Latino youth's encounters with spiritual guides in the *botánica* introduce them to the world of *Santería*.  The spiritual ceremonies Quiñonez's protagonists learn from the owner of the *botánica* serve as a life map that allow them to navigate the hardships they will continue to face in Spanish Harlem.  *Santería* also

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[152] The *Orisha, Changó,* or the god of fire, plays a central role in Quiñonez's novel.  He provides a great deal of power and self-control on his followers, which positively impacts Quiñonez's protagonists who seek guidance and purpose in their life.

provides meaning in these young men's lives, as they become increasingly aware of their ancestors' rich culture and history.  The *botánica* will not solve the social inequality that afflicts Spanish Harlem, but Quiñonez utilizes it as a space that can potentially offer strength to inner city youth through a reconnection with their cultural roots.

## CONCLUSION

The long history of oppression that has manifested in Spanish Harlem through slumlords, segregation and gentrification resulted in a sense of despair and frustration in Quiñonez's protagonists.  Their colonial standing as racialized Puerto Ricans contributes to the cyclical poverty and racism that negatively impacts Spanish Harlem.  These larger social factors determine Spanish Harlem residents' low social class, as well as their inability to undo the segregation that excludes them from the city's vast resources. Quiñonez's reference to his community's history from the 1970s to the present illustrates the continual oppressive circumstances they faced from the government and the private sector.  The slumlords of the 1970s epitomized the urban decay of Spanish Harlem, which transformed neighborhood streets from family friendly locations to spaces controlled by drugs, crime and death.  Government housing projects exacerbated the sense of displacement that enveloped the neighborhood by further segregating impoverished Puerto Ricans from the city, rendering them invisible to mainstream society.  The promise of urban renewal associated with the development projects of the 1990s merely served to repeat the displacement and the desperation that had defined the experience of living in Spanish Harlem for decades.  Quiñonez's protagonists come face to face with the racist attitudes the new, white and affluent tenants bring to the predominately Latino community.  Ironically, they are viewed as the outsiders even through they have resided in Spanish Harlem for decades.

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Quiñonez uses the *bodega* and the *botánica* as sites that exmaine the various strategies employed by Spanish Harlem youth to escape poverty and assert the importance of their ethnic identity. With limited options to improve living conditions, Quiñonez's protagonists turn to capitalist endeavors, illegal activities and spiritual practices to find a way to stop the endless cycle of dislocation that disrupts the stability of Spanish Harlem. Crime provides the lure of fast money and social power that Quiñonez's protagonists cannot achieve by following the rules of society since the existing social structure is designed to maintain their marginalized status. Despite their participation in both illegal and legitimate activities to achieve social mobility, Latino youth remain second-class citizens. A deeper understanding of the oppression they experience occurs when Quiñonez uses the image of the *bodega* to problematize the parallels between crime and capitalism in U.S. society. The image of the *botánica* also reconsiders the subordinate, colonialized status of Puerto Ricans through spiritual practices, such as *Santería*, that evoke the rich and complex cultural history tied to their community. Their introduction to these forgotten practices of the past force them to rethink how they engage with the social disparities of their community, and strengthen their sense of self as they have a better appreciation of their cultural heritage.

# Conclusion: Peripheral Literatures in São Paulo and New York

In this dissertation, I made the case that global colonization and the racial subordination of Afro-diasporic subjects structure the marginalization of urban peripheral populations in São Paulo and New York. Discriminatory practices, cyclical poverty and limited opportunities for social mobility result in urban youth seeking out unsanctioned economic endeavors as a means to counteract impoverished conditions, and their subordinate status, coupled with social stigma, threatens the stability of the social order. Positioned within the framework of the Black/African Diaspora, the literary works of Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez call upon histories of exploitation tied to race while addressing social inequality and institutionalized racism through an uncensored prose that encapsulates the precarious atmosphere of urban spaces while stressing the minutia of the urban periphery's harsh setting. Addressing the complex nature of the social issues of racism, violence and poverty that affect peripheral communities in São Paulo and New York, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez deploy a street aesthetic that examines social stigma during the 1990s and 2000s. This street aesthetic incorporates brutal and delicate features of life in urban spaces, providing a framework that humanizes marginalized individuals. Providing a lens for understanding the larger social and economic forces that shape the perspectives of marginalized subjects, this dissertation places these four writers together in the same project in order to demonstrate the larger global dynamics of racial subordination experienced by Afro-descendant populations.

Since the 1980s, both Brazil and the United States have experienced major social and cultural transformations that fostered the emergence of urban, Afro-diasporic writers. In Brazil, the shift to a democratic state during the *Abertura* ushered in a new period

where historically silenced groups, such as Afro-Brazilians, women and workers demanded equal rights and better representation in the government. In the U.S., the culture and drug wars of the 1980s forced populations of color, particularly in urban areas, to more aggressively defend their communities against marginalization. These political and cultural shifts provided the social context out of which urban writers of color emerged during the 1990s and 2000s. Coming from neighborhoods where most residents are of African descent, their texts examine social disparities related to racial difference, racism, racial profiling, police brutality, inadequate employment, underfunded schools and cyclical poverty.

In the first chapter, I used James Holston's notion of differentiated citizenship to analyze the role of racial and class differences in Ferréz's works. Ferréz complicates the image of the marginal subject through his literary works. The notion of the *marginal*[153] associated with residents of the *periferia* intersects with the view of *periferia* youth as *criminosos*. Examining the social conditions that contribute to the stigmatized status of *periferia* youth, Ferréz critique of cyclical poverty and racism questions the idea that the *periferia* is a site of danger and criminality. The formation of the *periferia* during the 20th century corralled urban residents into de facto segregation with little or no access to education, poorly compensated jobs and no voice in the government to communicate pressing concerns. Frustrated with Brazil's systemic inequalities, *periferia* youth explore options tied to the criminal underworld in order to find ways to break free from cyclical poverty. Through the figure of the organic intellectual, Ferréz introduces counterpoints negative image of criminality commonly associated with the *periferia*. The adoption of

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[153] *Marginal* in Brazilian Portuguese commonly refers to a criminal suspect from the margins of society. The word, however, becomes used as a label for anyone from the *periferia* who appears to be acting suspiciously, which can be liberally interpreted since they are being profiled based on physical features and geography.

racial categories, including *negro,* by the *periferia* intellectual echoes the political shift by Brazil's populations of color to recognize one's African ancestry. Ferréz's exploration of the systematic marginalization of non-whites and race and the role of Afro-Brazilian culture in the *periferia* echoes a political shift at the close of the 20th in which writers contest the stigma of being from the *periferia*. Ferréz's works challenge the misconception that everyone from the *periferia* is involved in crime or activities that comprise the established social order.

The space of public transit offers insight into the social inequality that plagues São Paulo's *periferia*. Cramped quarters and long commutes on the metro and bus reinforce the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor, as *periferia* residents live in communities on the outskirts of metropolitan regions and lack full access to the economic, cultural and educational opportunities offered by the city. In Ferréz's works, the bus and the bus stop function as liminal spaces that enable the commuter, in this case a person from the *periferia,* to occupy an in-between space. In Ferréz work, disruptions experienced by the rider at unexpected moments results in a sense of defamiliarizaton. Ferréz instigates moments of interruption *en route* that allow the protagonist to analyze social and economic disparities found in the *periferia*. Unfolding in unlikely locations throughout the urban landscape, moments of banality on public transit ultimately complicate the stigma of danger associated with the *periferia*. Displays of banal moments *en route* on public transit interrupt the monotony of urban life and draw attention to institutionalized oppression.

In the second chapter, I examined the relationship between the social positioning of unauthorized transportation workers as threshold people, the concept of *malandragem* and João Cezar de Castro Rocha's dialectic of marginality as a framework for understanding Sacolinha's *cobrador*. Sacolinha uses the *cobrador* as a figure who

negotiates the *periferia's* unequal power relationship with spheres of order (institutions). By navigating the limitations delineated by the state, Sacolinha's *cobrador* incorporates *malandragem* to counter cyclical poverty, racial disparity and social inequalities that are produced by the infrastructure. In the liminal space of the *perua*, Sacolinha's *cobrador* uses guile to circumvent systemic inequalities, resulting in the acquisition of resources. His ability to traverse the social tensions between spheres of order (the state and ruling classes) and spheres of disorder (the margins of society). Sacolinha's *cobrador* resembles the *malandro* of the second half of the 20th century who transformed into a folk hero, opposing the authoritarian tactics of the government. This shift from a conciliatory to a confrontational stance mirrored political changes, as Brazilian artists and activists became outspoken about the social problems that were plaguing the nation as a whole. João Cezar de Castro Rocha's dialectic of marginality explains how the exposition of violence and cyclical poverty can be understood as a way of denouncing issues that have historically been concealed in Brazil's meta-narrative of cordiality.

An inadequate infrastructure existed in the *periferia* from the last few decades of the 20th century until the beginning of the 2000s. Only a few, sporadic bus lines ran through this area of the city, which left many residents with limited commuting options, making travel to work, school and shopping districts difficult. In order to compensate for the lack of public transit in the *periferia*, residents turned to the *perua* for quick and accessible travel into and out of the *periferia*. The government responded to the *peruas* by instituting a cumbersome and expensive licensing program, but this approach further marginalized residents of the *periferia*. The bus companies initiated a public ad campaign against the *perua* system. Despite all of the government's efforts to control and to criminalize the *perua*, it did not provide additional transit services to the *periferia* until the beginning of the 21st century. The history of the *perua,* as told by Sacolinha,

demonstrates the subordinate social status of *periferia* residents. The *perua* and the *terminal* function as liminal, in-between spaces inhabited by the *cobrador* and the *ambulante* who pursue socio-economic stability to counter the stigma of being from the *periferia*. Both the *cobrador* and the *ambulante* can be viewed as what Mary Douglas classifies as threshold people, or populations that reside on the margins of society (36-37). The *cobrador's* constant travels on the *perua* symbolize urban youth's disconnection from society. As a migrant from the northeast region of Brazil and a worker in the informal economy, the figure of the *ambulante* also lives and works in the shadows of society. In the public transit terminal, he creates collaborative networks with other workers to thwart the authorities' attempts to shut down their business. The *cobrador* and *ambulante* engage with clandestine activities, which illuminate the unequal distribution of resources in Brazil and negotiate socio-economic marginalization.

In chapter three, I analyzed the identity formation of Díaz's protagonists, who are racialized and rejected subjects. Calling on Carlos Ulises Decena's concept of *desencuentros* to provide a theoretical foundation for the understanding of failed encounters with both Dominican and U.S. culture and on Danny Méndez's concept of emotional creolization to emphasize the internal aspects of the process of cultural hybridization, I examine the categorization of Dominican American youth as the other. The concept of otherness emerges as a recurring theme in science fiction through encounters between peoples from vastly different worlds. For Junot Díaz, Dominican American youth's ambivalent relationship with the U.S.'s black-white racial binary contributes to their social marginalization, which results in a divided identity detached from society and from the home. Dominican Americans are classified as Latino due to their connections with Latin America and the Spanish language. While many Dominican American youth have African ancestry, they do not have the same cultural practices as

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African Americans. Dominican American youth from the inner city do, however, adopt aspects of African American youth culture in order to better deal with the complexities of urban life in major U.S. cities, including racial profiling. Racism and impoverished living conditions amplify the social marginalization of Dominican American youth. Misunderstood by society, they become the other – forever on the outside looking in at social groups who reject them.

Junot Díaz's protagonists are the children of working class Dominicans who migrated to the U.S. to improve their dire economic situations. Most Dominican immigrants arriving in the United States post-1960 were non-white individuals from low-income communities. Their ethnic and class background would shape their children's identity formation in the United States as they encountered new forms of racial divisions. Dominicans became further stigmatized in the U.S. as they were perceived as a threat to the dominant narrative of assimilation. The strong social networks Dominican immigrant communities maintained with the Dominican Republic gave the misconception that they did not want to become a part of the American cultural landscape. Social stigma continued as many Latino and Black working class communities experienced increased hostility from local and national government agencies from the 1970s to the 1990s. Politicians viewed the social services being provided to communities color in the inner city as a major factor that contributed to the decline of U.S. cities.

In chapter four, I examined how the youth in Quiñonez's works contest their subordinate racial standing as Puerto Ricans in New York by engaging in clandestine activities and spiritual practices that provide alternate routes to social mobility. The cycle of urban decay and gentrification in Spanish Harlem reiterates the socio-economic effects of inadequate housing on Puerto Ricans living in New York. Quiñonez's use of the *bodega* and the *botánica* as sites of civic engagement exposes fresh routes for urban,

Latino youth to counterbalance institutionalized racism.    In the urban decay of Spanish Harlem, Quiñonez's protagonists seek out ways to resist their colonialized status through economic and spiritual endeavors.    Through the *bodega* and the *botánica,* Quiñonez examines the ways in which urban youth in Spanish Harlem pursue social mobility and access to resources.

Puerto Rico's colonial relationship to the imperial U.S. transfers over to the Puerto Ricans who relocate to the New York metropolitan region.    The racism that they experience in the U.S. confines them to specific neighborhoods away from the centers of commerce and education.[154]    These geographical, economic and educational restrictions contribute to Puerto Ricans' unequal social status, which impacts the availability of adequate housing in Spanish Harlem.    Throughout the 1970s, slumlords allowed their buildings to fall into disrepair, which forced residents to live in inhumane conditions.    In the 1980s they were relocated into government housing projects that further segregated them from mainstream society and restricted their access to economic and educational resources.    The urban renewal projects of the 1990s offered the momentary illusion that Spanish Harlem would finally experience the infrastructure and economic revitalization that had been sorely lacking for decades. Gentrification did improve sectors of Spanish Harlem, but long time residents were excluded from these benefits due to higher rents that they could not afford.    In addition to unaffordable housing, residents' local cultural institutions and business were appropriated by outside investors. Gentrification continues the cycle of displacement, adding to the legacy of racism that marginalizes Puerto Rican residents. Social and economic change has taken place in Spanish Harlem's during the

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[154] Besides Spanish Harlem, inner city Latino communities in the New York City metropolitan region can be found in the Bronx, Washington Heights and New Jersey.

1970s, 1980s and 1990s, but these shifts only serve to reinforce the racial subordination and colonization of Latino bodies in the New York area.

Willie Bodega embodies the *bodega's* economic and communal importance to Spanish Harlem. Quiñonez examines how Spanish Harlem residents engage with the economic system to counter the cyclical poverty that traps them. The *bodega* has served as an important institution to Spanish Harlem's local economy as residents can purchase products at more affordable prices than at the large supermarket chains, and the *bodega* also functions as a communal space where residents can congregate to discuss local issues. Willie Bodega parallels the real world *bodega*, providing economic stimulus to his community funded through criminal enterprises. With regards to Spanish Harlem's cultural institution of the *botánica,* Quiñonez explores how *santería* within this site of spiritual practice introduces urban Latino youth to their African roots, disrupting the stigma of being from a working class, migrant community. Within this space, Quiñonez critiques western religion's failure to address the socio-economic disparity found in Spanish Harlem. For him, *santería's* history as a religion of survival for Black diasporic subjects during the colonial period resonates with the cyclical poverty and police brutality that afflict Spanish Harlem youth. Reinforcing urban Latino youth's cultural identity, the spiritual rituals initiated in the *botánica* provide narratives of ancestors and deities that speak to the rich history found in Spanish Harlem. While these religious practices cannot undo the marginalizing effects of racism that urban Latino youth face on the streets, the *botánica* functions as a location where Spanish Harlem residents can connect with their racial ancestry. Spanish Harlem youth negotiate their colonized status as Puerto Ricans in New York through the space of the *bodega* and the *botánica* in order to achieve social mobility.

In conclusion, Ferréz, Sacolinha, Junot Díaz and Ernesto Quiñonez examine the stigma of living in urban, peripheral communities, which illustrates the subjugation of Afro-descendant populations throughout the Americas. Illuminating the racial subordination of urban periphery residents, these writers complicate the suspicion typically tied to the youth who inhabit the inner city. The criminalization of non-white bodies in peripheral neighborhoods reinforces their subordinate and colonized status within the modern global system. Powerless to change systemic inequalities based on race and social class, urban youth from inner cities face racial profiling by authorities, inadequate access to education and a lack of employment opportunities. Incorporating both the brutal and the banal features of life in urban spaces into a street aesthetic, the four authors discussed in this dissertation humanize marginalized individuals and addresses the complex nature of the social issues of institutionalized racism, violence, social inequality and poverty. Contextualizing the social conditions faced by their protagonists deconstructs the perception that individuals from the inner city are threats to societal order.

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**Videos, Films, Filmography**

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