

## The Dire Streets of Marcelino Freire's *Angue de Sangue*

*Leila Lehnen*  
*University of New Mexico*

Brazilian society experienced increased urbanization in the twentieth century, especially since the 1940s, when the country saw a surge in industrialization during Getúlio Vargas's presidential tenure. Vargas sought to promote Brazil's industrial growth through import-substitution policies. The ensuing expansion of the industrial sector brought large numbers of people into the urban centers of the Southeast. Anthropologist Teresa P. R. Caldeira remarks that, "industrial growth was associated with intense urbanization. The population of the metropolitan region of São Paulo grew at a rate of around 5.5 percent a year between 1940 and 1970" (41).<sup>1</sup> Caldeira, citing Sonia Regina Perillo, observes that this increase was fostered principally by internal migration which was "responsible for 50 percent of this increase: it brought more than one million new inhabitants to the region in the 1950s and 1960s" (41). These internal relocations continue in the present time and are augmented by the exodus of inhabitants from small size towns located in the interior to larger metropolitan centers.

Nonetheless, in these large urban agglomerations, the dislocated poor from the interior do not necessarily find economic prosperity, but rather are often confronted with the continuation of their socio-economic woes. As a result, many migrants remain at the economic margins of Brazilian society. They join the ranks of millions of peoples who live in the *favelas* that proliferate at the fringes of the nation's megalopolis.<sup>2</sup>

While the urban centers experience an increase in their low-income populace, the affluent inhabitants of cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, feeling threatened by the propagation of urban misery, progressively auto-segregate themselves into high-security buildings and gated communities. Confronted by the perceived and real menaces of an insecure urban terrain, the upper and middle social echelons isolate themselves from the cityscape behind the shields of locked doors and bulletproof glass. As anthropologist Néstor García Canclini indicates, this division of the

contemporary polis produces a fragmented territory. García Canclini affirms that for more affluent city dwellers, “(e)n las dos últimas décadas, el crecimiento cuantitativo de migrantes y el aumento de la inseguridad impulsan a atrincherarse en barrios cerrados y bajo sistemas deslocalizados de vigilancia, que van asemejando el uso del suelo y la fragmentación de las interacciones al modelo estadounidense” (*La globalización* 166) (In the last two decades, the quantitative growth of migrants and the increase in insecurity caused [the middle classes] to barricade [themselves] in gated communities and under delocalized systems of surveillance that increasingly resemble the use of space and the fragmentation of interactions of the North-American model) [*This and all subsequent translations mine*]. The consequence of this metropolitan partition into largely disconnected sectors, separated by socio-economic criteria, is the breakdown of community within the urban sphere.<sup>3</sup>

This essay proposes to examine the portrayal of the metropolis in the short stories of Marcelino Freire’s *Angu de sangue* (2000) (*Blood Gruel*),<sup>4</sup> demonstrating how the collection’s narratives articulate the urban landscape as a sphere of social and personal anomie. The plots and language of the stories highlight the fragmented existences that prevail in the present-day Brazilian metropolis. The short stories that make up *Angu de sangue* are thus concise, written in a succinct, almost telegraphic style that conveys the fast-paced rhythm and segregated/segregating social organization of Brazil’s largest cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Recife.

Freire’s texts speak of the encounters between the socio-economically disenfranchised urban dwellers and their more privileged counterparts. In the framework of unequal social organization as well as the dissolving of a social network of citizen support (i.e. adequately functioning public schools and day care centers, community centers, etc.), the individual frequently constructs her/his identity through a discourse of violence. Within this discursive framework, the socio-cultural other (as the defining element) becomes both the subject and the object of aggression.

In the context of *Angu de sangue*, difference runs mainly across class lines. The subaltern populace stands in contrast to the bourgeoisie and the *haute* bourgeoisie. And, even though the two segments are divided by economic and geographical boundaries, both groups meet uncomfortably at the city’s literal and metaphorical intersections, as for example in the title story “Angu de sangue.” In this text, various types of violence (physical, psychological, discursive, and social) taint the encounter(s) between several urban subjects.

Freire’s collection shows how violence has become one of the primary identificatory discourses available to the city’s dwellers. For it is through the narration and enactment of violence, that the subjects of the urban spaces articulate exclusionary socio-cultural identities. Josefina Ludmer, in her important study of crime in Argentine literature, signals the role of

transgression in the formulation of both social and cultural identities. Ludmer maintains that “(d)esde el comienzo mismo de la literatura, el delito aparece como uno de los instrumentos más utilizados para definir y fundar una cultura: para separarla de la no cultura y para marcar lo que la cultura excluye . . .(c)on el delito se construyen conciencias culpables y fábulas de fundación y de identidad cultural” (12–13) ([f]rom the very beginnings of literature, crime appears as one of the preferred mechanisms used to define and found a culture: to separate it from non-culture and to mark that which a culture excludes . . .[w]ith crime, guilty consciousnesses, foundational fables, and stories of cultural identity are constructed). But, if violence articulates cultural and/or national identities, it can also express the dissolution of these. Whereas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discourses of aggression promoted nation building vis-à-vis a common enemy (that could be located either inside as well as outside the national sphere);<sup>5</sup> in the late twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, violence regularly enunciates the suspension of traditional social structures such as family and moreover, of the directives that dictate social behavior. Subjects of the globalized, post-national metropolis thus frequently resort to aggression in order to attempt to locate themselves within the social vacuum with which they are confronted.

Freire's narratives, such as for example “Socorrinho,” (“Little Socorro,” or “Little help”) in which a young beggar girl is kidnapped and raped, reveal the dystopian side of the urban landscape and its conflictive encounters. The vanishing of the child into the smog-filled air of the metropolis transmits the notion of the city as a social black hole, where crime is in part possible due to the apathy of its inhabitants as well as the inherently dehumanizing nature of the urban territory. In the tales of *Angue de sangue*, the polis is imagined as a cannibalistic monster that devours its inhabitants to quench the material(istic) hunger exacerbated by the spread of a late capitalist economy. In the contemporary city, in which voracious logic of market economy dictates the civil as well as the spatial organization, the social fabric (*Angue*) coalesces through the blood of its victims (*de sangue*).<sup>6</sup>

Freire's representation of the city as a social battleground reflects the erosion of the traditional social structure experienced by many Latin American nations particularly within its urban centers, in the wake of neoliberal politics and changing attitudes towards family and community. Neoliberal measures, imposed in various countries in Latin America in the aftermath of the military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>7</sup> led to a heightening of material instability as economic procedures such as the freezing of personal bank assets (implemented in Brazil during Fernando Collor de Mello's administration) and repeated attempts to curb runaway inflation did not achieve the desired results of economic growth.

On the other hand, pressures from international monetary organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund lead to the passing

of “austerity policies” in various Latin American countries, including Brazil. The Brazilian government, particularly that of ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994–98 and 1998–2002), was concerned about cutting public debt. As a result, the social infrastructure was negatively affected: public school budgets were cut, pensions were devalued and public assistance programs were either eliminated or drastically reduced.

Moreover, the new economic climate of “transnational capitalism,” with its emphasis on profit and the increased global competitiveness also eroded workers’ salaries and rights. In this atmosphere, the subjects at the material fringes of society are pushed further into the socio-economic periphery. The augmented material gap in Brazil,<sup>8</sup> as well as the breach (during the period of military rule) and subsequent withdrawal of the state from its civic obligations (both during and in the aftermath of the dictatorship); including that of guaranteeing the physical and economic security of its citizens, resulted in a profound disenchantment vis-à-vis the democratic system. Micael Herschman, in his study of the identity politics of Brazilian rap, observes that there is a “crescente insatisfação dos indivíduos com o ‘regime democrático’ que, mesmo reinstalado desde a década de 80, não conseguiu concretizar de fato a cidadania nem oferecer melhores condições de vida” (36) (growing dissatisfaction on behalf of the populace with the ‘democratic regime’ that, despite it having been in place again since the 1980s, has not been truly able to establish the notion of citizenship nor has this regime been able to offer better conditions of life [to the majority of the population]). Even though the political democratization of Latin American nations in the 1980s did allocate expanded political and citizenship rights to its populace, with the neoliberal turn, increasingly citizens’ rights (such as the right to information, education, healthcare among others) are related to purchasing power. This transformation in the conceptualization of citizenship as primarily a process of consumption and not of civil participation<sup>9</sup> is thematized in Freire’s story, “Volte outro dia” (Come back another day).

In this text, the disenfranchised segment of the populace makes its hubristic appearance in the form of a beggar that stubbornly refuses to leave the narrator’s door until he is given something to eat. But the narrator, who leads a “modern” life (“Não sei cozinhar. Minha vida é moderna. Nem vegetais endurecidos eu tenho” [40]) (I do not know how to cook. My life is modern. I do not even have vegetables), does not have anything to give to the mendicant besides a cup of water. The encounter of the two men, marked by an absence of exchange, either material or communicative, discloses the social anomie in which the inhabitants of the urban center live as well as the economic volatility that haunts middle-class Brazilians.

The narrator, a member of the petite bourgeoisie, is conscious of his own precarious material situation, which he defends from the encroachment of abject poverty represented in the figure of the indigent man at his doorstep and, by extension, of those other miserable subjects that roam the

metropolitan territory. The narrator's (albeit unsteady) social positioning within the legitimate sphere of those who have a job and permanent residence endows him with the basic rights of citizenship, from which the beggar is excluded because he lacks the material requisites that could/would transform him into a full fledged member of consumer society. The narrator points toward the indigent's marginality as he calls attention to his own rights to privacy and privilege: "Eu tenho direitos. O Governo que se ocupe. Porra, e logo eu, solteiro e sem compromisso, depois de ter trabalhado o dia inteiro" (41) (I have rights. The government should take care of this. Shit, why me, I am single and have no obligations, after having worked all day long). The individualistic mentality expressed in the use of the first-person "Eu tenho" ("I have") connotes a frame of mind shared by the general population that is unwilling to recognize their cooptation in an exploitative socio-economic system. Caught in a struggle to maintain a modest level of economic stability, social concerns become irrelevant in comparison with one's personal comfort ("nenhum cidadão é obrigado a servir o próximo. Quando não tem. Quando não quer. Quando não está a fim de emprestar bondade a Deus" [40]) (no citizen should be forced to serve his fellow man. When a person has nothing. When this person does not want to. When this person does not wish to lend its good will to God).

In the climate of socioeconomic instability promoted by the profit driven neoliberal rationale, the subject retreats into the private sphere and into a consumer culture mediated by mass media. As indicated by Néstor García Canclini, in his book *Consumidores y ciudadanos. Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (1995) (*Consumers and Citizens. Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*), the contemporary subject utilizes the rituals of consumption to enact citizenship, to connect with a community of equal minded consumer citizens and, simultaneously, disconnect from the disagreeable theater of social injustice being performed on the urban streets. "Volte outro dia" ends with the narrator watching mediocre television programs ("Hebe Camargo, novela das oito, Macaulay Culkin. Macaulay Culkin. Macaulay Culkin" [42]) (Hebe Camargo, eight o'clock soap opera, Macaulay Culkin. Macaulay Culkin. Macaulay Culkin) and ordering take-out pizza. The repetition of the North American child actor's name, synonym with the "family-entertainment" films of the *Home Alone* franchise, connotes the alienation effected by the uncritical ingestion of mass-mediated culture. And whereas the narrator mindlessly devours the facile products of mass culture (fast food and "fast food" amusement); the mendicant is consumed by the hungry entrails of the neoliberal metropolis. He disappears into the "stomach of the world" (41). The marginal, emerging temporarily from the dark edges of the metropolis, is once again relegated to invisibility. There is no space for the economically disenfranchised populace in the landscape of consumerism that pervades the city's public spaces in the form of shiny display windows and within its private territories in the

equally glossy exhibits of wares announced on television commercials (or through product placement).

“Volte outro dia” broaches the demise of the city as a location of civic participation. The streets of the “post-social” city of *Angu de sangue* serve not as a point of confluence for its manifold residents, but rather as the arena of civil and cultural segregation. In the metropolitan arena, identities: be they cultural, social, or even individual, are not formed any longer by the idea of belonging to a larger national community, but rather through the association with specific groups. The city ceases functioning according to the logic of the polis and becomes instead “tribalized”<sup>10</sup> as the state retreats from its responsibilities as mediator of social relations. As signaled by Beatriz Sarlo, the diminished presence of the state within the national sphere also leads to the absence of a collective identity that (potentially) fosters notions of community. Sarlo comments that:

[L]as bases de nuestra relación con los otros están erosionadas ya no hay creencias colectivas que nos comprometan como miembros de una comunidad más amplia que la de un grupo inmediato de pertenencia. Vivimos en pequeñas tribus, aceptando sus pequeñas lealtades y sus pequeños rituales. Los indígenas de estas tribus no se reconocen como parte de una nación más extensa. (86)

([T]he foundations of our relations with others are eroded and there no longer exist collective beliefs that bind us as members of a community larger than the group to which one is most immediately associated. We live in small tribes, accepting their small loyalties and their small rituals. The Indians of these tribes do not recognize themselves as a part of a larger nation.)

The formation of alternate, often subaltern, communities within the urban sphere is the theme of the story “Muribeca,” where the “urban tribe” of garbage collectors articulates a sense of identity in contrast to those, ironically anonymous, “legitimate” segments of the population that produce the trash. While the former are excluded from social discourse because, similar to the beggar in “Volte outro dia,” they are disqualified from the official cycle of economic exchange; the latter are inserted within the legitimate social sphere because they consume and produce the waste that will foment the unofficial consumerism in which Muribeca’s inhabitants engage. The landfill narrated in Freire’s story is located in a homonymous suburb in the Northeastern capital of Recife (state of Pernambuco) and is described as a city within the city. Paradoxically, it is in this location where the “legitimate” metropolis discharges its waste that Freire creates a sense of collectivity that is lacking from the hegemonic metropolitan space. The story, narrated in the first-person by one of those “subalterns” that,

according to postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravoty Spivak, “cannot speak,” reveals both the excess and the lack of consumer society. Living from the city’s refuse, Muribeca’s inhabitants carnivalize their existence by transforming the miserable landscape of trash into a contradictory and ultimately perverse utopia of “abundance,” “Você precisa ver. Isso tudo aqui é uma festa. Os meninos, as meninas naquele alvoroço, pulando em cima de arroz, feijão” (24) (You should see. This here is a party. The boys, the girls all excited, jumping on top of the rice, the beans). In this carnivalization, societal order is temporarily and critically destabilized. Refuse, instead being a sign of abjection, is transformed into a symbol of problematic bounty. The narrative voice explains that not only can the residents of Muribeca satisfy all their needs by recycling from the remnants of conspicuous consumption, but furthermore, she notes that “lixo dá lucro, que pode dar sorte, que é luxo, que lixo tem valor” (24) (garbage is lucrative, it can bring you luck, it is luxury, it is valuable). It is precisely this potential to transform the waste into a lucrative commodity that threatens the communal existence of Muribeca. The story articulates the narrative voice’s concern over impending eviction from the garbage “paradise.” According to Fredric Jameson, transnational capitalism distinguishes itself by the infiltration of the capitalist logic into realms previously exempt from it.<sup>11</sup> Jameson specifically cites the aesthetic/cultural framework. In “Muribeca,” Freire shows how the market rationale permeates society’s entire fabric, from the socio-economic to the aesthetic and reaches into the peripheral realm of the waste disposal. In this process of value assignment, those who live on the margins of the metropolis must be expelled entirely from its boundaries unless they are active consumers of “legitimate” surplus. As the city’s limits become progressively rigid, following the precepts of capitalist logic, the urban centers experience an increased geographic and social segmentation.

In her study about the “walling in” of the city of São Paulo, anthropologist Teresa P. R. Caldeira compares the sociability of public spaces within the modern and the postmodern metropolis. Whereas in the former, public areas were territories where heterogeneous social groups came together and interacted, mostly in a peaceful manner, in the latter, these places have either been increasingly privatized or have been transformed into a field of conflict and misunderstanding. Additionally, as Jean Franco points out, the massive growth of many Latin American urban centers also undermine the “communitarian” aspect of the contemporary city.

In this context, members of the lower economic strata are often construed as social others that, with/in their lack threaten the security of the middle classes as well as the elites. According to this logic, the poor are often perceived as potential criminals who invade the sheltered areas of material stability (as depicted for example in “Volte outro dia”). In the bourgeois imaginary, these marginal subjects are the products of the abject

places that they inhabit (waste disposal sites, *favelas* or other types of low-income neighborhoods). For Caldeira, “Crime and criminals are associated with the spaces that supposedly engender them, namely *favelas* and *cortiços* (low income housing). Both are liminal sites: they are not considered proper residences” (78).<sup>12</sup> In *Angu de sangue*, Freire thematizes the transgression of spatial and societal boundaries within the divided polis. The “improper” city comes into contact with the territory of the proper city, invading its protected spaces as for example in “J.C.J.”

In this story, narrated in the indirect discourse, a street kid, J.C.J., mugs a woman in her car as she waits at a traffic light. The incident, common enough in contemporary Brazilian urban centers, reveals the multifarious modes of violence resulting from socio-economic misery that permeates and disrupts the daily routine of the cityscape and its inhabitants. The liminal city of the slums and the abject poor such as street kids and homeless aggressively spills into the “legitimate” city of the bourgeoisie and the moneyed.

Economic contrast creates a fragmented space in which conflict prevails in the everyday interactions of the urban subject. Indeed, as Caldeira points out, São Paulo’s metropolitan area has experienced an increased rift in social as well as material terms especially since the 1970s. Caldeira asserts that already “By the 1970s, São Paulo had become a city in which people from different social classes were not only separated by large distances but also had radically different housing arrangements and quality of life” (228). This acute separation by economic strata leads to a discourse of otherness, in which the poor sections of the populace become criminalized and the elites retreat into secluded enclaves (condominiums and gated communities).

Nonetheless, the disenfranchised as well as the middle and upper classes inevitably do coincide in the public spaces of the metropolis. “J.C.J.” exemplifies such an encounter taking as its narrative background a busy intersection, which, in the context of the text symbolizes not encounters but rather collusion. The metropolitan thoroughfare becomes the stage of explicit and implicit violence. This violence is the result of social disparity and its contagion of the polis as the boundaries between the public and the private crumble.

In the framework of “J.C.J.,” the public/socially abject is represented by the disoriented and disorderly presence of the street kid who invades the “private” and supposedly secure (and “legal”) sphere of an idling car in which a woman waits for the traffic light to change. Freire demonstrates that, in the contemporary Brazilian metropolis, formerly “safe” personal spaces are being taken over by violence.<sup>13</sup> Thus, even as she sits in the “private” sphere of her car, the woman in the story is not protected from the chaos that surrounds her in the open realm of the avenue. The exterior is described in Freire’s story in terms of contamination, indicating the insidious danger that exists within it. As soon as the female character opens her



window to insult the child who begs outside the pane, the fumes of the urban jungle penetrate the formerly “clean” atmosphere of the vehicle (“Ela não sabe e abre a janela para a morte” [124]) (She does not know and opens the window to death). At the same time, the open window also permits the tainting touch of the street kid to enter the car.

The division of the street into a public and a private realm reveals the disruption of the urban landscape as a space of sociability. Instead of civic interaction, “J.C.J.” encodes the urban territory as a context of miscommunication, of physical, verbal, and material aggression. It is also a territory that reinforces social differences, demarcating the boundaries between the have and the have-nots. Therefore, the latter are able to, at least apparently, extend their socio-spatial separation from the lower strata by isolating themselves in the “sheltered” and relatively comfortable interior of their automobiles. Caldeira comments that “(s)ince middle- and upper-class people circulate in private cars while others walk or use public transportation, there is little contact in public among people from different social classes. No common spaces bring them together” (310). But, as Freire’s story demonstrates, the seemingly secure frontier between classes is, at best, fragile and the division is prone to conflictive breaches.

In the frame of reference of Freire’s “J.C.J.,” the exacerbation of the social rift becomes evident particularly in the lack of communication between the members of different classes. In the story, the “dialogue” between the woman and her attacker is reduced to mutual denigration, as each of the characters spews insults at the other. The verbal exchange between them indicates that none of the figures in the story recognizes the other’s humanity; they are construed as total “others.” What ensues from this mutual perception of absolute difference is a performance of physical and psychological violence.

As the woman refuses to give the young boy any valuables, he strikes out at her with a broken bottle. Nevertheless, his cutting of the woman’s body reveals that he is at the same time victim and victimizer. J.C.J. is an outcast, a wound in the social fabric being “só ferida e crosta” (123) (solely wound and scab). Nonetheless, the young boy’s “disease,” is paralleled by the illness of the woman he assaults. If J.C.J. suffers from a lack that he must fill with his violence, then his victim suffers from excess. Her face is fat, denoting an unhealthy abundance (“[e]la gorda pela tarde, come e engorda a tarde” [125]) (She, fat in the afternoon, eats and fattens the afternoon). The woman’s physical profusion suggests her immoderate consumption of food but is also metaphorical of the propagation of other forms of excessive expenditure. In this context, her corporeal obesity is symbolic for the assimilation of consumer goods that are transformed into unnecessary material: adipose flesh that stands in opposition to J.C.J.’s inability to satisfy his most basic necessities.

The contrast between the woman’s bodily abundance and the assailant’s

corporeal deficit reveals the inequity of Brazil's social structure that engenders conflictive interactions within the urban territory. In this sphere, whereas the offspring of the middle and upper classes enjoy the privileges afforded by money, the children of the economically disenfranchised are driven further into social marginality. The social and symbolic spaces of childhood, which should be protected by the state and the family, are annulled in the inequitable social order. J.C.J.'s misery robs him of his childhood, for even though "o menino nem tamanho tinha" (126) (The boy wasn't even big enough) he enters into the adult realm of criminality.

It is literally in the profusion of the woman's flesh, the symbol for her social status, that J.C.J. inserts his aggression. With the piece of a jagged bottle he cuts her neck as she refuses to give him money. He severs the superfluous flesh in order to extract from it vengeance for his own material lack.

But, echoing her social unconsciousness, the woman does not acknowledge the wound afflicting her. She chooses instead to disregard the slow flow of blood that empties her of life. By ignoring her own impending death, the woman symbolically also chooses to overlook the social problematic embodied in the figure of her attacker and in the incision in her throat. Those who surround her replicate her oversight. As she slowly bleeds, her injury is also not perceived by the people who share the street with her. In the landscape dominated by the logic of capital, everyone becomes isolated in the space of exchange ("Com tantos taxistas de lado, a ver conversão de tabela. Sozinha e Deus, nos giros dos pneus" [126]) (With so many taxi drivers next to her, calculating their fares, looking at the conversion tables. She is alone with God, in the spinning of the wheels). The once communitarian space of the streets is transformed by the logic of consumption and profit. It is a fundamentally fragmented space that promotes individual as well as social alienation and exploitation.

The absence of childhood is also the thematic in the story "O caso da menina" ("The Case of the Girl") in which a mother offers her infant daughter to a passerby. The narrative is structured as a dialogue in which the woman tries to convince a stranger to take the newborn with him in order to save her: "Cova, cova. Ela pode morrer se o senhor não levar ela embora" (93) (the grave, the grave. She could die if you do not take her away). In the story, Freire alludes to the practices of child exploitation. The stranger refuses to take the little girl and, paradoxically, the exploitation lies precisely in his rejection:

Mulher: - Socorro! (Woman: Help!)  
 Homem: - Calma! (Man: Be calm!)  
 Mulher: - Vá embora! (Woman: Go away!)  
 Homem: - Eu não fiz nada. (Man: I did not do anything.)  
 Mulher: - Fez sim. (Woman: Yes you did.)

Homem: - Eu? (Man: Me?)

Mulher: - Fazer isso com a pobrezinha. (Woman: To do such a thing with the poor little thing.) (95)

Unwilling to “rescue” the baby from the abject misery in which she, if she survives, will inevitably grow up, the man involuntarily partakes in the generation of an economy in which minors are exploited as underpaid labor and/or become the victims of underage sexual commerce and of police brutality. As in “J.C.J.,” “O caso da menina” relates the breakdown of the state’s social contract. Enmeshed in the processes of economic globalization, the state has reconfigured its functions and “plays a key role in the processes of ‘commodification’—whereby everything can be bought and sold including life itself—and deregulation on behalf of the economic liberalism that lies at the heart of contemporary globalization” (Munck 9). In this context, the infrastructure that should provide support for both the low-income mother and her infant are inexistent, leading to a perpetuation of the cycle of abandonment and, subsequently, potential violence of/toward poor children. This collapse is accompanied by the succumbing of interpersonal relationships. In Freire’s short story, the familial and affective relations between mother and child are severed, as the former must surrender her newborn for the latter to survive. Furthermore, the coming apart of social interaction is also indicated in the passerby’s rejection of the infant. Unwilling to take the child, and, through this act, metaphorically denying responsibility for social change, he offers the mother money to buy milk. The man’s reaction to the indigent *Pietá* with which he is confronted on the city’s streets is to abide by the consumer order and “buy” his peace of mind, which the woman refuses to sell:

Homem: Já disse, dou dinheiro. (Man: I already told you, I’ll give you money.)

Mulher: Não quero. (Woman: I do not want it.)

Homem: 10 reais. (Man: 10 *reais*.)

Mulher: Já disse, não vendo. (Woman: I already said, I am not selling.) (93)

In this discussion, the baby becomes a mere article of exchange, devoid of humanity. Her objectification is taken to an extreme when the mother, after declining to accept the man’s pecuniary offer, indicates the disposable nature of the little girl: “Jogue ela no lixo” (93) (Throw her in the garbage). As indicated by Argentine critic Beatriz Sarlo, we see the preponderance of a market driven logic where “quien no puede acceder al mercado tampoco se siente ligado por nada a la sociedad, que se ha convertido en puro mercado” (85) (those who cannot participate in the marketplace do not feel themselves linked to a society that has been transformed into pure market). In this

context, the human body itself becomes another commodity. When the commodity loses its value, or has a negative one, as is the case with the street children of Latin America's urban centers, they are expelled from the hegemonic social order. In the outside spaces, the metropolitan wastelands of garbage dumps, *favelas*, and in the thoroughfares of the megalopolis, these non-citizens of the cityscape live according to an ethics of survival, not of the dominant society, from which they are excluded.

Exclusion and violence are recurring themes within *Angu de sangu*. As the reference to blood and food in the title of the collection indicates, the daily routine of the metropolis is marked by aggressive acts such as robbery ("J.C.J.") and assault. The bloody mark of both intersects in the title story "Angu de sangue." In this text, told in the first person, the narrator is imprisoned in a spiral of violence in which he is both victim and perpetrator. Once again, the scenario is the urban street, where the narrator is apparently mugged: "Quando o bandido entrou em meu carro, eu pensava em Elisa, nervoso, tentava esquecer o inferno que foi a nossa briga. Nem tive tempo de fugir do ladrão, nem de escapar daquele pensamento. Preso no sinal de trânsito" (69) (When the bandit entered my car, I was thinking about Elisa, nervous, I was trying to forget the hell that had been our fight. I had neither the time to escape the thief, nor the time to escape that thought. Trapped at a stoplight). The emotional disruption of lovers' spat is exacerbated by the antagonistic intrusion of the mugger, of public disorder into private disorganization. The two conflictive relationships are juxtaposed in the narrator's mind as he tries to come to terms with the hostile environment that surrounds him both within the private realm and outside, in the public sphere. But, as he indicates, the animosity emerges from the individual's own neurotic psyche, as he projects his chaotic vision onto the space that surrounds him. Trying to reestablish a boundary that has been disrupted by the conflict between him and his lover, the narrator constructs difference by relegating the attacker to an abject position. Yet he must ultimately acknowledge his own inadequacy that transforms him into the (an)other of the urban landscape ("Esse sujeito nojento não tem culpa. Elisa também não tinha. Sou eu o problema. Sou eu o neurótico" [70]) (This disgusting fellow is not guilty. Elisa was not guilty either. I am the problem. I am the neurotic one). As the guilt shifts between the victim and the victimizer, both assume dual roles, creating an indeterminate narrative space.

The narrative unstableness of "Angu de sangue" parallels the insecure nature of the metropolitan territory. In a context where animosity is an integral part of daily life, aggression prevails in various socio-economic spheres, bleeding into the secure space of middle class domiciles. In "Angu de sangue," it is significant that the attacked subject invites his assailant into the sphere of Elisa's home insisting that "Elisa também tem cartão de crédito. Elisa tem objetos escondidos. A gente entra sem fazer barulho. Sem testemunha. Eu tenho a chave" (71) (Elisa also has a credit card. Elisa has

hidden objects. We go in without making any noise. Without any witnesses. I have the keys). The confusion between various forms of aggression that proliferate in the urban arena is taken one step further here for the assaulter is surprised by the dead body of the woman he is “invited” to rob. In “*Angue de sangue*,” Freire undoes the presupposition that it is primarily the marginal other that generates violence. Instead, the text signals towards the insidious presence of brutality within the hegemonic arena of bourgeois comfort. The narrator and Elisa are not impoverished people living at the fringes of the urban center but rather belong to the relatively prosperous social sectors and yet they are not exempt from the practices of brutality that burgeon within the cityscape.

The prevalence of violence within various socio-economic contexts becomes evident in the framework of “*Angue de sangue*” when public and private/domestic aggressions are superimposed. If in the beginning of the story the narrator reveals the violence done to him, the focus shifts as the reader learns about the narrator’s own abusive behavior towards his partner, who “*ameaçou chamar a polícia se eu batesse nela. Eu bati. Eu sofri. Eu estou sofrendo*” (71) (threatened to call the police if I hit her. I hit. I suffered. I am suffering). The narrative voice assumes and yet negates responsibility for his crime admitting the battering and yet turning himself into the victim (“I suffered. I am suffering”). Furthermore, he relegates liability for the murder of Elisa to the, as we learn at the end of the story, fictional intruder. By transferring the blame first onto the battered woman and subsequently to the criminal socio-cultural other, the narrative voice points towards the split in the narrator’s consciousness, a split that occurs due to the enmeshment of the discourses of violence and prevailing constructions of masculinity that permeate quotidian metropolitan life and culture.

Threatened of being “deprived” of his masculine status through attacks on property or acts of resistance within the private sphere (in this case, Elisa’s rejection and her prohibition that the narrator touch her), the male subject reinstates his masculinity through the very actions that menace his constitution as a masculine subject. He strikes out, attacking the female body. Freire links gendered violence that occurs inside the city’s (four) walls, with the larger social chaos and hostility. Both form part of a wider social discourse in which violence is utilized as a tool in the establishment of social, gender, and individual identities. And, as indicated by Allen Feldman, the body upon which violence is inscribed and that also produces aggression is thus an inherently political territory in which struggle for hegemonic status is fought. But it is a conflict that has no denouement as it generates further discourses and rituals of aggression. Speaking about the framework of political violence in Northern Ireland, Feldman observes that:

The manifold formation of the body by violence, political technologies, and jural ritual renders it into an inscribed text and an inscribing agent, into a defiling and defiled instrument, a 'doing' and a being 'done.' This ambivalent construction of the body and its establishment as a political form are coeval with the institutionalization of violence as a mechanism that perpetuates itself by exchange and mimesis. (144–45)

Indicating the proliferation of violence upon the (especially female) body within the hostile urban context, Freire's story describes a circular movement, ending at its point of departure: the approaching of a potentially hostile man as the narrator waits in his car at a traffic light after having murdered Elisa. The circularity of "Angu de sangue" connotes the vicious cycle occasioned by the multiple ramifications and manifestations of brutality within the urban arena.

Speaking of the "trauma of globalization," the result of voracious consumer lust and forceful profit seeking, where the worker becomes an expendable commodity, Jean Franco maintains that this strain, of which a "surplus of unemployed males" (221) is one facet, is "suffered above all by the body of women, the women victims of the serial killer, the women and children whose bodies are used for transplant, the sex-exploited girls in the sex trade in Central America, and the slain maquiladora girls whose bodies are found in the desert near Juárez" (222). To the victims of this trauma of globalization and of its ensuing social disaggregation, one can add bodies of the victims of rape that disappear in the overpopulated urban centers of (not solely) Latin America.

In "Socorrinho," Freire traces the disappearing body of a young girl in the midst of the urban pandemonium. The narrative tone imitates the frenzied rhythm of the metropolis, enumerating its various elements "[a] cidade, nervosa, avançando o meio dia . . .algumas buzinas, céu de gasolina, ozônio, cheiro de álcool, . . .o ônibus elétrico, esquinas em choques, paralelepípedos. (47) (the nervous city, midday approaching . . .some car horns, a gasoline sky, ozone, smell of alcohol, . . .the electric bus, street corners in collision, cobblestones). In this chaos, the body of the young girl is "eaten" up by the urban predator. The story reproduces the helplessness of the poor segments of the population; both Socorrinho and her family, vis-à-vis the social structure that does not provide answers to and/or defense against the irrational violence of everyday metropolitan life. Socorrinho, unlike J.C.J. is not an abandoned minor, but she does belong to the many children who beg at the urban intersections in order to supplement their family's income. The young girl thus circulates within the unprotected spaces of the metropolis and her body is subject not only to the economic violence confronting the poor members of society, but also to the abuse of the anonymous criminal. In the context of the story, sexual deviance, in this case pedophilia, become the crass symbols of the dehumanized urban spaces

since “[s]exual dysfunction and ‘perversion’ are prevalent signs for the sterility of modern life and the breakdown of meaningful relationships in the urban setting” (Lowe 138). That the cityscape no longer functions as a site of communitarian relationships and, furthermore, is a territory where social control is absent becomes evident in the impunity of Socorrinho’s attacker. He is able to hide behind the anonymity of the *urbe* as well as the inefficiency of the institutions meant to protect the citizens of the metropolis.

As suggested by “Socorrinho,” the police, standing as proxy for the state, are ineffective and reveal the socioeconomic bias that permeates Brazilian society and that associates crime with economic paucity. The search for the body of the disappeared girl takes place only in the marginal territories of the city’s “[f]avelas, rodoviárias, botecos, matagais” (48) (*favelas*, bus terminals, dive bars, overgrown lots). All these spaces have in common either their (officially) unregulated nature, as is the case with the shantytowns and the *matagais*; or their transient and socially hubristic character, for which the bus station and the low-income bars are paradigmatic. Moreover, these are also the spaces where the economic depressed populace dwells. Therefore, as Teresa P. R. Caldeira remarks, in Brazil the general assumption is that:

(a)lthough all human beings are vulnerable to evil, poor people are considered to be closer to nature and necessity and farther from reason and rational behavior than other people. In addition, they are physically closer to the spaces of crime. Consequently they are considered to be at greater risk for being infected with evil. (92)

According to this logic, criminal behavior is contagious, affecting especially the bodies of the lower classes. The authorities interpret Socorrinho’s rape as yet another manifestation of the general lawlessness of the marginal sectors of the population and, in a perpetration of the violence against her body she once again disappears in the police archive, condemned once again to silence. “Socorrinho” signals that it is precisely the disenfranchised sectors that are most affected by criminal acts of which they are often accused. Posited outside the hegemonic social network, the urban poor do not have access to the infrastructure that protects them from violence (“A mãe de Socorrinho ouvia boatos, silenciava à base de comprimidos, o marido já enlouquecido e internado, que miséria, agonia de cidade, moço, não, gente ruim, sem sentimento, pra que deixar sofrendo a mãe humilde” [48]) (Socorrinho’s mother heard rumors, which she silenced with pills, the husband already insane and locked up, what misery, the anguish of the city, Sir, no, evil people, without any feelings, why let a poor mother suffer like this). Nonetheless, Freire does not allocate guilt to any specific figure, as the attacker remains unspecified. Accordingly, the narrative voice indirectly

insinuates that the system that generates social exclusion is responsible for the crime against the little girl.<sup>14</sup> Instead of focusing on race, social class or regional provenance, the axis around which the discourse of crime in Brazil is often constructed, “Socorrinho” only indicates clearly the attacker’s gender, as the victim exclaims “moço” (“Sir”) The classless and ethnically anonymous assailant hence embodies the aggressive male subject that exerts power upon the defenseless body of the female subaltern subject. Indeed, Socorrinho’s marginality is made overt by her unheard cries. She symbolizes the voiceless individuals that disappear in the interstices of the urban landscape.

Speaking of the spread of socio-economic inequity within and due to processes of globalization, specifically global labor flexibility and its impact upon urban sites, Ronaldo Munck affirms that:

(w)hat global labor flexibility actually means is a virtual decomposition of the labor force as it becomes fragmented and opened up for exploitation. It is within the global cities<sup>15</sup>—in their streets and back streets over which the high-rise buildings of the financial centers tower—that this phenomena is most pronounced and most decisively affects the immigrant population attracted by these development nodes of contemporary capitalism. (62)

Marcelino Freire’s collection of short stories *Angu de sangue* depicts the interactions of the citizens of such global cities. These interactions are marked by the absence of meaningful social contacts and occur within a vacuum of community. Additionally, the relations that Freire portrays reflect the social and spatial context in which they occur, territories devoid of historical and communitarian meaning. Their de-characterized and sprawling spaces promote isolation since:

los habitantes se alien[a]n al ser incapaces de representarse (mentalmente) su propia posición dentro de la totalidad en que viven. Carentes de las señales, como monumentos y límites naturales, se sienten desconcertados cuando deben abarcar zonas muy heterogéneas o demasiado parecidas, tréboles de viaductos y autopistas. (García Cancilini, *Consumidores* 108)

(the city dwellers become alienated as they are unable to represent (mentally) their own position within the totality that they occupy. Lacking the signposts, such as monuments and natural boundaries, they feel disconcerted when they have to deal with either very heterogeneous zones or spaces that are too similar, overpass junctions and highways.)



The cityscape of the global metropolis is characterized by not only its geographical and symbolic fragmentation but also by the erasure of the notion of the city as a “public space.” On the one hand the polis disappears in the proliferation of consumer goods and, on the other hand, the lack of minimal material security for large segments of the urban populace. What remains are the dire streets of the city in the age of transnational capitalism.

## Notes

1. Caldeira points out that even though São Paulo is paradigmatic of the progressive industrialization/urbanization of Brazil, it is not a unique case. Rather, as she indicates, “Brazil’s urban population, which in 1950 represented 36 percent of the total population, represented more than 50 percent (around eighty million people) by 1980. Half of this urban population lived in thirty urban centers with more than 250,000 million inhabitants. By 1980, Brazil had nine metropolitan regions with populations over one million, which had grown by an average of 4.5 percent a year between 1940 and 1970. In these metropolitan regions is concentrated around 30 percent of the Brazilian population, which in 1996 had reached 157 million, 78 percent of which was urban” (42).
2. Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums* (2006) comments on the concomitant pauperization and growth of the urban peripheries asserting that “Rather than the classical stereotype of the labor-intensive industrial metropolis, the Third World now contains many examples of capital-intensive countrysides and labor-intensive deindustrialized cities. ‘Overurbanization,’ in other words, is driven by the reproduction of poverty, not by the supply of jobs. This is one of the unexpected tracks down which a neoliberal world order is shunting the future” (16). The limited job opportunities faced by many residents of the economic fringes of the metropolitan centers leads often to social disintegration expressed in the increase of criminality, drug consumption, etc.
3. García Canclini speaks specifically of the contemporary metropolis. Nonetheless, the fragmented nature of the urban center, particularly of São Paulo, was already observed by Richard Morse in his study of the *paulista* capital. In *From Community to Metropolis* (1958), Morse affirms that in the late nineteenth-century São Paulo (1890), one can “detect linear progression toward what the sociologist loosely calls ‘disintegration.’ Moreover, a glance at the twentieth century city suggests that the trend has not reversed or abated, that the climate of life is permeated more than ever before by amoral secularism and opportunism; by transitory, partial, individualized relationships; by the neurotic urge for power, prestige, and possession.” (201).
4. Freire, a native of the Northeastern state of Pernambuco has published four collections of short stories. Besides *Era o dito* (*Was the Said [One]*, 2002), Freire published the trilogy composed by *Angu de sangue*, *Balé ralé* (*Abject Ballet*, 2003) and *Contos negreiros* (*Slave Ship Stories*, 2005). For this last collection, Freire received the prestigious *Jabuti* Award. In *Angu de sangue*, the texts are interspersed with photographs of Jobalo, a plastic artist also from the state of Pernambuco. The images that appear in *Angu de sangue* complement Freire’s text, producing a parallel discourse to it. Nonetheless, due to the scope of this analysis, I will not be discussing Jobalo’s images. For a brief analysis of the dialogue between text and artwork, see Bruno Zeni’s article “E a gente vai sangrando,” where he discusses the subtext of the photographs in relation to Freire’s literary discourse.
5. In Brazil, Euclides da Cunha’s study of the Rebellion of Canudos, *Os sertões* (*Revolution in the Backlands*, 1902), is an example of the ideology that utilizes conflict as a means of

- generating a (modern, specifically positivist) national identity.
6. *Angu* is a Brazilian dish from the Southeast region (especially Minas Gerais). It is made with cornmeal and water, and can have either a consistency similar to porridge or, when cooked longer, to polenta. The title of the collection suggests the unwholesome mingling of nourishment, metaphorical of daily existence, and the sacrifice (symbolized by the blood) imposed by the destructive environment of the big city in which Freire's stories take place.
  7. Jean Franco and Idelber Avelar argue that the neoliberalism measures implemented in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s had their antecedents in the economic policies of the military dictatorships in countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. It is significant that it was precisely in these countries that the transition to democracy was also marked by the election of presidents that favored neoliberal policies such as Carlos Ménem in Argentina (1989–99), Patricio Aylwin in Chile (1990–94), and Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil (1990–92). Peru was another country that moved from a repressive political system to the neo-liberal government of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000).
  8. Teresa P.R. Caldeira, citing a 1996 study by the PNUD (United Nations Program for Development) affirms that in a study of fifty-five countries, "measured by the ratio of the average per capita income of the richest 10 percent and the poorest 40 percent of the population, Brazil had the greatest inequality. While for the majority of these countries (including all developed countries and all other major Latin American countries) the income of the richest 10 percent is on average ten times higher than that of the poorest 40 percent, in Brazil it is almost thirty times higher." (48).
  9. See Nestor García Canclini, *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (1995).
  10. Both Michel Maffesoli and Beatriz Sarlo point to the tendency of civic segmentation in contemporary society. Maffesoli, in *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (1996) denominates this trend towards the creation specific group identities "tribalization." Sarlo applies this idea of societal fragmentation to her analysis of Argentine society.
  11. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).
  12. Jean Franco coincides with this opinion. She also calls attention to the close proximity of elite enclaves and slums, of wealth and misery in many Latin American cities. Franco comments that "The *favelas* of Rio and the crowded hillsides of Caracas and Lima, where people do not even have water but must buy it or walk down the hillside to a spigot and then labor up again – such slums nestle by the freeways, the high-rise hotels and the shopping malls as visible threats that have sent the upper classes to refuges in gated communities" (189).
  13. Approximately over twenty million bulletproof vehicles circulate in Brazil (Sources: Viva Rio, O Globo, ISP, Iets, Abralim and DAC).
  14. Madanipour and Allen define social exclusion as "a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources and integration into common cultural processes" (22). Ronaldo Munck observes that this concept of social exclusion is linked to a system of "power differentials" (23). These are particularly present within the contemporary urban context. Munck maintains that social exclusion take "their most acute spatial manifestations in the inner-city ghettos and poor neighborhoods" (22).
  15. Sassia Sasken defines "global cities" as "strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets" (154).

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