



All photographs by Ierê Ferreira

## Youth and the Police

Report on the final stage of the Project – November 2004<sup>1</sup>

Week of November 22-26 – 34<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion and 22<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Battalion, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais State, Brazil

### Hearts and Minds... and Bodies

On November 22-26, 2004, Afro Reggae and CESeC held the fourth and final stage of the project “Youth and the Police”. The project was a partnership with the Minas Gerais State Military Police, through the Secretariat for Social Defense, and aimed to establish a dialogue between police culture and youth culture, decreasing barriers between these two groups through music and art: percussion workshops, theater, graffiti, circus, dance, and shows.

The experience consisted of a four-stage pilot project. The surprising results of the four weeks of activities confirm the success of an innovative, creative, and radical proposal for integration between the police and society, unprecedented in Brazil. In addition, the project proved that it is possible to valorize and highlight the human, playful, and artistic side of the police while decreasing prejudice towards young residents of slums and housing projects.

Among the distinctive aspects of the experience as compared to traditional ways of working with police forces (courses, meetings, and lectures on human rights), the following key elements are worth emphasizing:

1. ***Two-way street.*** the essence of the intervention is not merely to “change the police”, intellectually teaching them something which they appear not to want to understand, or that they resist assimilating, but rather to propose new and unique experiences both for the police and the young people who are entering a Military Police barracks for the first time. The young instructors dress, speak, and have the “*attitude*” of slum kids living a new and exciting experience, changing their stereotypes about the police and challenging the police with their senses of rhythm and music and the plasticity of theater, dance, and graffiti. What is essential is the exchange, and it takes place primarily in the sphere of aesthetics, the body, and the experience of creating a new “*image & attitude*” in the police. The police and the youth are thus both protagonists in a new moment.
2. ***To give rather than to demand:*** Afro Reggae coordinator ***José Júnior***, made it immediately clear to the Military Police Commanders in Minas Gerais that the entire project

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<sup>1</sup> Report prepared by Silvia Ramos.

would focus on the police: the shows, the T-shirts, the CDs, the media people we managed to attract, the instruments and equipment, the time spent in the workshops, the snacks, the photography exhibits, the closing workshops, the production work - everything would focus exclusively on members of the police force and their families. This element appears to have been essential in the dynamic that was established, because during the closing week the members of the Military Police unexpectedly offered a barbecue for the project team, held inside the barracks but during their off-duty time and paid for by members of the police themselves, who passed a hat to cover the expenses. On the last day, the members of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Battalion gave their instructors a new T-shirt they had had made with the logotypes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> MPB and Afro Reggae side by side and the inscription: *Together, in Life and in Art.* And on the back of the T-shirt, the inscription: *Thank you, Afro Reggae.*

3. *When I saw myself being seen:* Image is central to this project. The idea is to challenge the image that society and youth have of the police and the image that the police and society have of youth, especially young black slum-dwellers. Stereotypes are archaic, frozen images, even if they are not true. In particular, as observed by *Estevão Ciavatta*, the police “*are all about image*”: the uniforms, the weapons, the military aesthetic, and the patrol cars. Afro Reggae, in turn, “*is image*”: the performers, the shows, a new image of the slum and youth. All the stages in the project were filmed, photographed, and tape-recorded. During the project, two experiences proved important: the video workshops and the photo sessions. During the video workshops, with *Marcelo Guru*, the police discussed images of the force and went out on the streets to film interviews with people from the slums; during the photo sessions (third week at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and fourth week at the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion), *Ierê Ferreira* used a data show to show the police a selection of images taken in the previous weeks. It was amazing to see the police looking at the beautiful pictures they themselves had taken during the workshops, shows, and closing meetings. On these occasions the police saw themselves just as they had been seen through the photographer’s lens and discussed the “*effects*” that the images will produce in the photo exhibit to be held in 2005. Equally essential was the media coverage. The numerous stories in newspapers and radio and TV programs invariably led to debate, laughter, and emotion the next day. Some policeman’s family and friends would call to say that they had “seen him on TV”, dancing and singing. Several times the instructors would sit with the police in a circle after the activities to discuss one of these media stories. All this helped create a new “we”/“they” watershed: we, the participants in the project Youth and Police, and they, society and the media seeing the police out-of-the-ordinary scenes. All of this quickly replaced the old we/they: we, the police; they, the young kids from Afro Reggae. It was also moving to watch the journalists themselves get worked up with the scenes of uniformed police playing tambourines, snare drums, and bass drums, dancing, and painting graffiti. A new image is liberating – when it’s publicly recognized. As a corporal from the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion said in an interview, “*The time must come for the curse to be broken*”, referring to the gulf between the police and society.



Percussion teachers Paulo Neguéba and Altair Martins: masters in the “pedagogy of the drums”

## The November workshops

Percussion workshops were held in both Battalions. In addition, theater and graffiti workshops were held in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and circus and graffiti workshops in the 34<sup>th</sup>. As in previous months, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion we decided to continue working with the same group of police who had begun the project in August. This on-going group formed the project's "core group". In the 34<sup>th</sup> there was unplanned participation in the workshops, with new police members mixing in with the previous participants. In this Battalion, in addition to the traditional presence of Commander Lieutenant-Colonel Luciene in the percussion workshops, the new development was participation by **Barbara Soares**, coordinator of CESeC. According to **Neguêba** and **Altair**, "No kidding, Barbara has to come back, cause she's got rhythm and she's a natural" (on the snare drums). The percussion workshops in the two Battalions were backed up this time by **Ando** and **LG**, both from the Afro Reggae band.

The 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion featured a circus workshop, coordinated this time by **Carlos Cavalcanti**, **Edson Silva**, and **Maxwel Divino Barbosa**. Carlos led the Brazilian National Circus School for 10 years. When he was a kid, Silva worked as a shoeshine boy in the streets of Rio, was attracted to the circus, became an instructor at the National Circus School, and now works six months out of the year on a circus tour in Europe. Maxwel is the star of **Afro Circo** and has been participating in the project since September. The police realized that the instructors meant business, and on the first day they were already on top of the pyramid: the results were seen in the acrobatics and trapeze performance at the closing session. Lieutenant-Colonel Luciene took advantage of the instructors' presence and asked Silva to make the police sweat it out in a no-mercy "phys ed class". With his inseparable digital camera, Edson Silva produced a beautiful DVD with pictures of the closing workshop.



**Soldiers from the Center for Instruction and Training with the core group from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Military Police Battalion: an afternoon of workshops**

At the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion the highlight was a visit – more like an "invasion" – during an afternoon of rehearsals, by 28 soldiers from the Center for Instruction and Training (CET), who joined the 22 policeman from the 22<sup>nd</sup> and formed a full-fledged **Police Force Big Band**. The afternoon ended in partying and photographs.

The graffiti workshops in the two Battalions were coordinated by **Chico Sergio** and **Airá Ilú-Aiê**, both experienced **graffiteiros** from **Grupo Nação** who were hired by Afro Reggae for





the project. In October they had already produced a graffiti show and a veritable stage setting for the *Military Police Cultural Center*, at the barracks of the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The closing workshops were thus held in the 34<sup>th</sup>. In addition to continuing the work with the police from the 34<sup>th</sup>, the instructors joined with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion to paint a gigantic wave on the 30-foot-high barracks wall, with the inscription *Security and Solidarity* below the logotype of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. To illustrate the atmosphere at the graffiti workshops, Chico, Airá, and their students surprised everyone at the end. During the closing workshop the instructors called their pupils up on stage. All together, in front of the Commander of the General Staff and other authorities, they sang a “war cry” they had rehearsed in secret: “*We will paint our graffiti, paint our graffiti we will... no one can stop us, no one... not even the Military Police!*”

### Closing workshop

The week came to a close with the final celebration, as originally planned in May in four stages. The celebration began with *José Júnior, Colonel Renato* (Commander of the General Staff of the Minas Gerais State Military Police), *Silvia Ramos* (coordinator of CESeC), *Lieutenant-Colonel Luciene* (Commander of the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion), *Lieutenant-Colonel Josué* (Commander of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion), and finally *Luiz Flávio Saporì* (Deputy Secretary for Social Defense), an ardent supporter of the project and a key figure in bringing the experience to Minas Gerais. The circus presentation at the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion featured floor exercises and trapeze acrobatics. The theater presentation at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was moving, with the police in uniform and camouflage paint, holding bamboo staffs and singing the Hymn to the Brazilian Flag, with the flags of the two Battalions as the backdrop. Everyone went wild over the percussion from the two combined Battalion groups.



Closing workshop: theater number

The audience, in addition to more than 50 children from *Fica Vivo* and *Proerd* (the Program for Education on Drug Risk) included leaders and dancers from the world-renowned *O Corpo* dance company. *João Madeira*, coordinator of institutional partnerships at Afro Reggae and who had spent the week accompanying the workshop, took advantage of his stay in Belo Horizonte to work on details for future partnerships between Afro Reggae and O Corpo. Other featured visitors during the week included *Viva Rio* researchers *Carlos Costa, Def Yuri*, and *Haydée Caruso* as well as *Paul Heritage*, Professor at the London School of Theatre, who was visiting Brazil from London and could not resist stopping in Belo Horizonte. Paul is going to be taking Afro Reggae on tour to England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in 2006 and announced that the group’s activities will be including workshops with the police at Scotland Yard. Haydée, Yuri, and Carlinhos, in addition to visiting the Police Detachment for High-Risk Areas (known as GPAR) in the Pedreira Pedro Lopes slum (considered one of the most violent areas in Belo

Horizonte), coordinated the participation in a live program on Radio Viva Rio, broadcast from inside the 34<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

The most moving remarks were by *Silvana Moreira*, coordinator of the workshops in the 34<sup>th</sup> and who had everyone in tears, and *Johayne Ildefonso*, theater director, arts coordinator for the closing session, and master of ceremonies.

### And now...

*Luiz Flávio Saporì* stated categorically that it was not the end of the project, “*It’s only the beginning...*” and that he will be doing everything in his power for the project to continue in 2005 and expand to all six Military Police Battalions in Belo Horizonte. In a meeting at the Secretariat for Social Defense, together with the Secretary, *Renata Canabrava*, project producer, *Soraya Bones*, advisor to the Secretariat, and *Hugo Teixeira*, press advisor, we decided that we would hold the following activities in 2005: 1) a photography exhibit; 2) publication of a book of photos, interviews, and an evaluation; and 3) conclusion and launching of a TV documentary. Renata’s team will be preparing a proposal for these activities, as well as for the six new stages in 2005. The Secretariat, Afro Reggae, and CESeC will raise funds through Brazil’s Rouanet Act, which provides tax write-offs to companies for contributions to selected cultural projects.

Another new and important development was announced during the closing ceremony: *Afro Reggae will bring a group of 30 to 40 police members from Belo Horizonte to perform at Canecão, the famous concert hall in Rio de Janeiro, in March 2005*. The police percussion group will be opening the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Afro Reggae Awards Ceremony. Travel and lodging expenses will be covered entirely by Afro Reggae sponsors (*SESC* and others), and the police will stay at a hotel in Copacabana, one block from the beach. During their stay they will visit Afro Reggae projects around Rio.

### Youth and the Police in numbers

- **Workshops:** The 4 weeks of activities included 132 workshops on percussion, video, circus, theater, graffiti, and dance. Each workshop lasted 2 hours and included 20 to 30 members of the police force. In each Battalion approximately 70 non-ranking and ranking police members participated directly in the activities, representing some 10% of the force in each Battalion.
- **Permanent Team:** 19 persons: Coordinators: 4 (3 from Afro Reggae and 1 from CESeC); Workshop Instructors: 10; Documentary: 3; Photography: 1; Production: team led by 1 person.
- **Non-Permanent Team:** Banda Afro Reggae: 18; Afro Circo: 15.
- **Guest performers and groups:** 2 groups (Tambolê and NUC) and 2 performers with their crews (Rogério Flauzino and Toni Garrido).
- **Shows:** 2 shows were held inside the Battalions, with an attendance of approximately 800 each, including members of the police and their families and guests.
- **T-shirts and CDs:** A total of 1800 T-shirts from the project, 80 T-shirts from Afro Reggae, and 105 CDs by Afro Reggae were distributed.
- **Videotaping:** 60 hours.
- **Audio tape-recording:** 40 interviews, approximately 30 minutes each.
- **Photos:** More than 800 photographs were taken, or an average of 200 per week.
- **Print media:** 15 stories were published by newspapers in Minas Gerais, 2 feature stories in the *O Globo* newspaper, and 1 in *Isto É* magazine. The Ford Foundation magazine, which circulates in dozens of countries, will be publishing a story in its next issue.
- **Radios:** Ten programs on the project were broadcast by radio stations in Belo Horizonte. One program was broadcast live on Radio Viva Rio.
- **TV:** In August and September, the electronic clipping service identified 7 stories on the project, in addition to 4 more in November. MTV-Minas broadcast vignettes on the project and produced a program.
- **Costs:** The Ford Foundation provided the project with US\$85,000 and the Minas Gerais Secretariat for Social Defense raised R\$280,000 (just over US\$100,000), including expenses with the 2 shows, airline tickets, lodging, ground transportation, and meals for the teams.

**This project was sponsored with funds from the Ford Foundation  
and the Secretariat for Social Defense – Government of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil**