



***Cultura negra* and the search for
Egalibertarian alternatives to the organisation of space,
Subjectivities and daily life in the margins of Recife, Brazil**



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The pictures on the cover page are of participants of the *cultura negra* scene, who gave me their permission to use their photo. They are not all the same people as those who are represented in the research.

The construction of the margins

Cultura negra and the search for egalibertarian alternatives to the organisation of space, subjectivities and daily life in the margins of Recife, Brazil

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Abstract:

Based on an ethnographic study of a group of participants of the *cultura negra* scene, this study aims to describe how people who 'live the *cultura negra*' engage in the construction of alternative spaces, subjectivities, and lifestyles in the margins of Recife. Using a theoretical lens inspired by the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, it describes how *cultura negra* participants use and give meaning to cultural events, religious activities, artistic expression forms, history, and their negritude in ways that represent how they see themselves in society. It discusses how the *cultura negra*, more than just consisting of music and other arts, is constructed as a shared subjectivity and lifestyle of people who choose to take on this negro subjectivity. Interpreting this from the theoretical perspective of Rancière, I will argue that this choice reflects a rejection of the categorisation of people into more and less sensible, valuable, beautiful, capable, etc. and that people who live the *cultura negra* do not try to be accepted within these categorisations. I interpret the *cultura negra*, in the case of my research participants, as based in the perception that the way Recife society is organised is fundamentally exclusive and unjust. The thesis demonstrates moreover how the construction of the *cultura negra* lifestyle is an ongoing process, grounded in continuous tensions and interactions between different segments of society; interactions that are characterised by contradicting movements of demonstrating disagreement and conflict, versus searching for common grounds and attempts to engulf the margins into dominant expressions that contribute to the image of a unified Pernambucan society. Lastly, attempts of *cultura negra* group subjectivities to stimulate changes in governance practices in Recife are discussed, and the *cultura negra* scene is studied for its potential to offer alternative forms of social organisation based in egalibertarian principles (Balibar, 1993).

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Terminology

1. *A vida negra* – the negro life
2. *Afoxé* – music and dance genre related to rituals of the religions of the African matrix, often takes on militant stance
3. *Axé* – divine energy, life spirit
4. *Babalorixá* – priest in the religions of the African matrix
5. *Brega* – genre in pop music that is popular particularly among poorer Brazilians
6. *Caboclinho* – a dance genre associated with indigenous practices
7. *Candomblé* – religion of the African matrix, see chapter 6.1
8. *Candomblista* – adherent of the religion *Candomblé*
9. *Capoeira* – martial arts dance genre, originated from the Afro-Brazilian population
10. *Capoeirista* – practitioner of the *capoeira*
11. *Ciranda* – a dance genre of Pernambucan popular culture
12. *Coco (de roda)* – a dance genre of Pernambucan popular culture, related to the *Jurema* religion
13. *Comunidade* – community, often used to refer to poorer communities
14. *Conhecimento*—knowledge, understanding (of oppressive structures and the Afro-Brazilian history)
15. *Consciência negra* – negro consciousness
16. *Convivência* – way of living together
17. *Cultura negra* – negro culture
18. *Favela* – slum
19. *Favelado* – slum resident
20. *Frevo* – a dance and music genre of Pernambucan popular culture, mixing European fanfare music with acrobatic moves originating from *capoeira*
21. FUNДАРPE – Pernambucan state Secretary of Culture
22. *Jurema* – religion with indigenous origins, mixed with some African and Catholic influences
23. *Luta* – fight, struggle
24. *Macumba* – term used for various practices related to the religions of the African matrix, derogatory connotation
25. *Maconha* – marijuana
26. *Mãe de Santos* – female priest of the religions of the African matrix
27. *Mangue-beat* – music genre that was created in Recife in the 90's, mixes the drums of *maracatu de nação* with rock and rap music
28. *Maracatu de nação, maracatu baque virado* – music and dance genre within Pernambucan popular culture, related to rituals of the religions of the African matrix, originating from African influences
29. *Maracatu rural, maracatu baque solto* – music and dance genre within Pernambucan popular culture, originating from a mixture of African and indigenous influences
30. *Mestiçagem* – miscegenation, the mixture of people from different descents, see chapter 4
31. *Mestiço* – person of mixed descent
32. MNU – Movimento Negro Unificado, Brazil's Unified Black Movement

33. *Morro* – slum situated against a hill
34. *Movimento Negro* – negro movement
35. *Nação* – nation, referring to the African nations that Afro-Brazilian individuals and practices originated from
36. *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira* – Recife’s city council department of Afro-Brazilian culture
37. OP – *Orçamento Participativo*, participatory government programme introduced by the PT
38. *Orixá* – deity of the religions of the African matrix
39. *Pagode* – popular variation of the samba
40. *Pai de Santos* – male priest within the religions of the African matrix
41. *Prefeitura* – city council
42. PT – *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, Brazil’s labour party
43. *Roda de breakdance* – circle in which people challenge each other to dance breakdance
44. *Roda de capoeira* – circle in which people challenge each other to dance *capoeira*
45. *Quilombo* – maroon community
46. Samba– music and dance genre originating from Afro-Brazilian slave communities, now spreaded into various popular subgenres
47. *Samba de Raíz* – traditional version of the samba
48. *Terça Negra* – Negro Tuesday, weekly event of *cultura negra* at the Pátio de São Pedro, Recife
49. *Terreiro* – Initial meaning: ‘terrain’; initially referred to the terrain where rich landowners kept their slaves. Nowadays it is used to refer both to a *Candomblé* house and to a group of people of the same current within Afro-Brazilian religion.
50. *Toque* – religious service
51. *Umbanda* – variation within the religions of the African matrix, mixes African with Catholic and indigenous influences, see chapter 6.2
52. *Xangô* – variation within the religions of the African matrix, name more commonly attributed to the religions in Pernambuco, see chapter 6.2

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

This thesis studies the northeast Brazilian city of Recife: its population, its history, its culture, and the daily lives of its citizens. It studies the city through the eyes of a small scene however, a group of participants that have particular and rather radical views on the city's plural identities. A group, moreover, that prefers to look at the city from its peripheries: from the point of view you get when standing on the Morro da Conceição, in Santo Amaro or Os Coelhos, when passing your time on the streets and in the Praça de Jaqueira; from the point of view that is represented in the reggae, the *capoeira*, the *afoxé*, and in the houses of Recife's *Xangô* religions. In fact, it is a viewpoint that might not be considered representative of Recife's character at all by the majority of Recifenses, as its beholders are often seen as a little odd, unrepresentative, or even backwards. It is a viewpoint that is uncomfortable and threatening moreover to those who are advantaged by the current way in which Recife society is organised, as from the viewpoint of the peripheries, it is clearest how Recife is divided into those who are and those who are not accepted as who they are, and in those who do and those who do not have access to comfortable housing, the labour market, a safe environment, higher education, etc.

The views of Recifenses living in the margins of Recife, and the frictions that exist between these views and those of other segments of Recife society, are the topic of this thesis. Using the theoretical lens of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, I conceptualise 'margins' and 'periphery' as the 'part of no part' (1999); those people that tend to have limited access to resources that exist in a society as they are seen as less important, not to be taken too seriously, of less value to society because of their different views and behaviour. Rancière has introduced the concept of 'the sensible' to describe how in every society people are interpreted as people that are and those that are not abiding to the society's norms regarding what language, external features, motivations to act, or what behaviour is sensible. The 'sensible' divides a population into social groups, positions and functions of visible and invisible, and of able and less or unable. This process creates the grounds on which it is legitimised to label those members of a society that are seen as refusing to behave 'sensibly' as less important, people that do not have to be accounted for. Within this frame of thinking, it is acceptable for instance that some do and some do not have access to health and education facilities of quality; that for some it is easy to obtain steady, well-paid jobs, which is impossible for others; that people who sit behind a desk eight hours a day receive twenty times the salary and respect of that of a person who separates and carries around heavy bags of waste all day long; that some enjoy protection by the police whereas others are targeted as potential threats and banned from shopping malls, cinemas and clubs. In other words, in my conceptualisation the margins consist of the people that are seen by society as less important, as not 'sensible', who therefore are not seen to deserve the care that others do, and because of that have less access to health, education, housing, security services, etc. When referring to the margins I moreover refer to those spaces and scenes in which these people move that are seen as not 'sensible': places and scenes perceived as dangerous and of low moral by the majority of a society, where people behave in unpredictable, 'insensible' ways.

Based on an ethnographic study of a group of participants of the *cultura negra* scene, this study aims to describe how people who 'live the *cultura negra*' engage in the construction of alternative spaces,

subjectivities, and lifestyles in the margins of Recife. Using a theoretical lens inspired by the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, it describes how *cultura negra* participants use and give meaning to cultural events, religious activities, artistic expression forms, history, and their negritude in ways that represent how they see themselves in society. It discusses how the *cultura negra*, more than just consisting of music and other arts, is constructed as a shared subjectivity and lifestyle of people who choose to take on this negro subjectivity. Interpreting this from the theoretical perspective of Rancière, I will argue that this choice reflects a rejection of the categorisation of people into more and less sensible, valuable, beautiful, capable, etc. and that people who live the *cultura negra* do not try to be accepted within these categorisations. I interpret the *cultura negra*, in the case of my research participants, as based in the perception that the way Recife society is organised is fundamentally exclusive and unjust. The thesis demonstrates moreover how the construction of the *cultura negra* lifestyle is an ongoing process, grounded in continuous tensions and interactions between different segments of society; interactions that are characterised by contradicting movements of demonstrating disagreement and conflict, versus searching for common grounds and attempts to engulf the margins into dominant expressions that contribute to the image of a unified Pernambucan society. Lastly, attempts of *cultura negra* group subjectivities to stimulate changes in governance practices in Recife are discussed, and the *cultura negra* scene is studied for its potential to offer alternative forms of social organisation based in egalitarian principles (Balibar, 1993).

Introduction to Recife's *cultura negra* scene

Cultura negra is the name commonly given to expression forms of Afro-Brazilian origins. What exactly is and what is not characteristic for *cultura negra* is contested, and individuals' constructions of the exact meaning of *cultura negra* often say a lot about their perceptions of various identities that exist in society. Among the *cultura negra* participants who participated in my study, a general agreement exists in what is and what is not *cultura negra*, but the government or non-negro Recifenses might look on this very differently. Thus, the cultural objects I studied as *cultura negra* vary from Afro-Pernambucan music such as *maracatu de nação*; religions with African influences such as *Candomblé* and *umbanda*; transatlantic black expression forms such as hip hop and reggae; the use of hair styles and fashion inspired by (West) African influences; stories of African and Afro-Brazilian history; Pernambucan popular culture genres such as *frevo*; and objects that mix African, European and Indian influences such as the *Jurema* religion or the music genre *coco*. Various detailed explanations of the meaning of *cultura negra* in the views of different actors will be given throughout the thesis. Even though the way they are attributed meaning by different Recifenses is diverse, a set of public activities does exist that are commonly labelled as *cultura negra* by most Recifenses. These activities make the *cultura negra* scene rather visible in Recife. For instance, the city hosts Brazil's biggest weekly event dedicated to *cultura negra*, named *Terça Negra* (Negro Tuesday); it dedicates the full month of November to celebrate and spread the *consciência negra* (negro consciousness); is situated in the state that gave birth to the locally popular Afro-Pernambucan music genre *maracatu de nação*; and almost daily hosts shows and rehearsals of groups of *afoxé*, *maracatu*, *reggae*, various genres within samba, and *frevo*.

The biggest actors in the organisation behind *cultura negra* are the government, which throughout the country and throughout time has always made strong use of cultural objects to construct variations of the Brazilian identity, and the various actors within the *movimento negro*. The *movimento negro* has

developed itself throughout the 20th Century in various manifestations with the aim to regain visibility and acknowledgment of the existence of blacks in Brazil. Since slavery, and arguably up until the late 20th Century, Brazilian elites have made all-encompassing attempts to erase the African and Afro-Brazilian part of Brazilian history from the country's memory, as will be discussed in detail in chapter 4. This is generally seen to have inhibited Brazilian blacks' identification as negroes, and thereby the development of a strong black movement against racist structures based on the perception of a shared black identity and a shared situation of oppression (Marx A. , pp. 250-263). In response to this, several black activist initiatives have arisen in Brazil over the past decades that have aimed to enhance this negro consciousness, the *consciência negra*: the awareness of the black population that it is and always has been oppressed by society based on the shared feature of African descent, and that it has shared afro features distinguishing it from the white population, features of which it should take pride.

The most visible party within the *movimento negro* in Recife is the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Negro Movement, from here on referred to as MNU). The MNU is the biggest alliance of black activists in organised form, which has become strongly interwoven within the government through its cooperation with the PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, the Workers' Party). Through that structure, many of its activities are now organised in cooperation with government bodies in the fields of Afro-Brazilian culture and human rights, while the actual organisation as independent body has become weaker in the past ten years. The Pernambucan delegation of the MNU for instance does not have policy documents, a journal, recent websites or other online activities, and to my knowledge has not independently organised seminars and other activities to raise critical debate during my stay in Recife. According to several of my research participants, the organisation used to be more active in the late 20th Century in for instance invading academic and political meetings and conferences, distributing pamphlets at public activities, and creating and distributing critical literature on racial inequality. Many people moreover criticise the MNU for its neglect of *Terça Negra* (Negro Tuesday) in its function as part of the *luta* (the fight); they are convinced that whereas initially *Terça Negra* was a space that united people who wanted to discuss '*a resistência*' (the resistance against oppression of blacks), it has now become a place of mere entertainment, that is moreover abused by people who want to smoke marijuana or engage in other shady activities. Next to other reasons that will be discussed throughout the thesis, the weakening of the Pernambucan MNU as independent body can be partially attributed to the fact that many of its previously most active members have received positions in the government and are not allowed to be engaged in the organisation of the MNU itself anymore. As MNU representatives told me, this measure attempts to warrant the MNU's capability to form a critical and independent representative of the interests of the negroes in Recife society. Different nuances can be found among opinions on politics and negritude of the delegation of the MNU that is embedded in the government versus the MNU representatives that function more independently.

Another group of actors in the *movimento negro* in Recife, which is aligned to and partially overlaps with the MNU, consists of active members of *afoxé* music groups and of *terreiros* (houses, families) within the *Xangô* religions. In fact, according to De França Lima (2009), the rise of popularity of *afoxé* since the 80's was brought about by MNU activists. Many of these activists created *afoxés* without being religious themselves, with the aim of emphasising the existence of African culture in Brazil. *Afoxé*, generally called 'the *Candomblé* of the street' because of its religious function within the *Xangô* religions, is the music genre that is most directly used as instrument in enhancing the *consciência negra*. Through *afoxé* lyrics and events, education in the *terreiros*, online discussion forums and through other paths, the *afoxé* and *terreiro*

activists aim to promote similar meaning-giving processes to negritude as the MNU (as will be discussed in detail in chapter 6). Activities within the *Xangô* religions are strongly associated with *cultura negra* by many Recifenses.

Many *cultura negra* activities that aim for the empowerment of the negro population in Recife are organised in cooperation between government bodies, the MNU, and representatives of *Xangô terreiros*. Examples are the first public Pernambucan *Xangô* festivity (held on the first of February 2012); the *noite dos tambores silenciosos* ('the night of the silent drums', maracatu night at carnival); the *Caminhada dos terreiros* (march against discrimination based on religion), and other activities organised in light of the month of the *consciência negra*.

Many other actors exist within Recife's *movimento negro*, organised on smaller scales. While their adherents often also participate in activities organised by the afore-mentioned parties, many distance themselves from several of the ideas and practices of the MNU. Some find the MNU's attempts to differentiate the afro population too radical and racialised, while others actually want to simulate changes in society that are more radical, such as those adhering to the *Esquerda Marxista* (Marxist Left). Yet other participants of the *movimento negro* find the link that the MNU makes between *cultura negra* and the *Xangô* religions too limiting as they also want to reach out to black Christians and Catholics. All these movements share the use of cultural expression forms as one of the, if not the, main instrument in the *luta*, the struggle for the empowerment of the black population.

Some examples of cultural activities that are organised by negro activists who are not of the MNU and who are not representing a *terreiro* are the following. The NGO *Cena Brasil*, based in Ouro Preto, Olinda, yearly organises shows of diverse popular culture genres, a protest march, and seminars on topics such as the health of the negro population during the month of the *Consciência Negra*. During my stay in Recife, *Cena Brasil* was more active in the organisation of activities aiming to critically debate negritude and inequality in society than the MNU. It is interesting to note moreover that *Cena Brasil* is independent and maintains its activities as NGO through incomes it generates through music production activities. *Darue Malungo* is another anchor in the Pernambucan *movimento negro*. The community education centre, based in Chão de Estrelas, teaches Afro Brazilian dance, music, tailoring and plastic arts to children of the neighbourhood. The aim is to complement history lessons taught in public schools and the mass media's cultural representations of Brazilian culture with a more profound understanding of the African heritage of Recife society, as well as to make children enjoy and feel proud of that heritage. Having started off in the eighties with *capoeira* classes by *mestre* Meia Noite, when his sisters Ana Paula, Jandira, Ubiracy and Meia Noite's partner Vilma joined him, the curriculum was broadened up to include diverse Afro Brazilian genres such as *afoxé*, *maracatu de nação*, *frevo de bloco*, *coco*, and *samba de roda*.

It is rather common for residents of Recife's *comunidades* (poorer neighbourhoods) to set up socio-cultural initiatives themselves. In for instance Chão de Estrelas, *mestre* (master) Borracha, his pupil Cabral and others organise *capoeira* classes in the streets for children of the community, in order to entertain them and enhance their self esteem. My research participant Shirley, a 30-year old *capoeirista*, does something similar in her neighbourhood Santo Amaro. She particularly stimulates young girls to present themselves in *rodas de capoeira*, in order to enhance their awareness of being equal to men. The *maracatu* Rosa Vermelha from Os Coelhos, maintained by the triplet Sady, Samuel and Rosangela and by my research participant Wilson, next to *maracatu* workshops for children of the neighbourhood also organises festivals of popular culture and *maracatu* exchange projects between different *comunidades*. While all engaged in

the empowerment of *cultura negra* and the neighbourhoods' residents, these initiatives vary in the degree of engagement in public debate on the meaning of negritude, and in their attempts to change government policies.

Throughout the thesis, I will refer to the *cultura negra* scene as including all cultural activities of these different actors that are active within the *movimento negro*, as well as the activities and expression forms that are seen as *cultura negra* by those participating in the *movimento's* activities.

Demarcation of the research participant group

The audience that participates in the activities of the *movimento negro* is diverse, and consists of people with very different political views, different interpretations of the meaning of negritude, and with different levels of identification with *cultura negra* and negro identities. Some activities, such as rehearsals of *maracatus* and *frevo* and samba events in the old city centre Recife Antigo, are attended by a broad representation of Recife's population, many of whom do not identify as negro and who do not even perceive of the events as being related to *cultura negra*. They represent a version of *cultura negra* that is not so different from other Pernambucan cultural objects, that is not seen as marginal (the expression forms are seen as 'sensible'). In many of these expressions some of the elements that could be seen as threatening to the 'sensible' are for instance left out, or their importance is downplayed, such as lyrics about inequality or the *Xangô* religious practices that are associated with the *maracatu de nação* and the *afoxé*. Because of that erasure, others refuse to call this *cultura negra* and instead see it as neo-colonial attempts to incorporate *cultura negra* in other expressions of Pernambucan culture so as to downplay the existence of the negro population.

The part of the audience that I got most interested in during my field work consists of people who in various ways are alternative to the common Recife, people who through the lens of Rancière could be seen as rejecting the notion of the sensible. I got interested with this segment during my first visits to *Terça Negra* (Negro Tuesday), a weekly event at the Pátio de São Pedro where live music and sometimes dance is performed of *afoxé*, *maracatu de nação*, reggae, hip hop and other genres considered negro by the organisers. It seemed to me as if conventions of the daily life I had experienced in Recife so far (as well as how I know them from the Netherlands) were placed upside down at the Pátio de São Pedro on Tuesday nights: I could not with certainty establish the gender of all people around me; several people were dressed in traditional African robes, while many others had decorated their bodies with the most colourful clothing, jewellery, and with tattoos; I saw more different hairstyles than I have seen in any other place (dread locks, kinky, curly, braided, straightened with dreadlocks at the bottom, covered in bandanas or with hats, decorated with flowers, etc.); some people were sitting or even lying on the ground, which generally isn't very clean as many people are accustomed to throw their trash on it; the *afoxé* and *maracatu* music that was performed was of a kind of rhythm and melody different from any music I'd heard before; most people did not seem to pay special attention to the fact that a foreign-looking girl was present (which in my experience is uncommon in Recife); my throat was raw because of the marijuana that was smoked by people around me, while several people were visibly under the influence of drugs and alcohol. There seemed to be one thing that the majority of the diverse audience present at *Terça Negra* had in common: either because of their skin colours, class, or their sexual, music and fashion preferences, or because of the location where they live and sleep, they belong to the periphery of Recife society—though to different extents.

What interested me about this collection of diverse people is that they did not seem to be that bothered about the negative stigmas connected to *Terça Negra* and to people who walk through the streets late at night. I noticed on several occasions that this is different for many other Recifenses, including also many blacks, even some of the poorest blacks and blacks engaged in Afro-Brazilian culture. They see *Terça Negra* as representing a different version of *cultura negra* than the one they identify with. For them, the event represents certain negative stigmas that they do not want to be associated with, mainly related to drugs, violence, and other forms of 'low morals'. By the *Terça Negra* participants, however, these negative stigmas are not seen as a reason to not attend the event so as to prevent these associations. In chapter 5 I will give more examples that illustrate that the participants do not see it as a negative thing that they are seen as different, belonging to the margins, or in Rancière's words: not 'sensible'. Thus, in my interpretation, *Terça Negra* unites some of the Recifenses that are most seen as different, unrepresentative, and that do not try that much to behave in ways that are seen as 'sensible' by society at large.

The people who participated in my research also generally perceive of themselves as being 'different', as belonging to the periphery in certain ways. What being 'different' means differs per person; some feel that they are different because of their sexual preferences, others because of their religion, their physical features, or the neighbourhood where they grew up, and yet others feel different because they do not like capitalism or because they feel they are not capable of participating in a capitalist society. What the participants have in common is the feeling that whatever it is that makes them feel different is not accepted by a big part of Recife society. They share the perception that they are not appreciated by others as they think they should be because they are gay, like to display their African roots in performing themselves, because they live in a *favela*, because they do not have a job, etc. I found it to be rather common for *Terça Negra* participants to refer to themselves and other people who 'live the *cultura negra*' in terms that indicate their being different, poor, from the periphery. Referring to themselves or to the social group they belong to, they for instance used terms such as '*da periferia*' (of the periphery); '*o povo das comunidades/favelas/morros*' (the people of the poorer communities/*favelas/morros*); '*o povo oprimido*' (the oppressed people); '*o favelado*' (person who lives in a *favela*); '*alternativo*' (alternative); or, occasionally, '*os marginais*' (the marginals). Many participants also often refer to oppression, being at the bottom of the ladder, being abused but not appreciated, and to the slave identity when talking about themselves and their ancestors in society ("*éramos escravos*", we were slaves; "*somos escravos ainda*", we are still slaves). There is not one particular terminology that participants use to refer to their situation in the margins of Recife, and not all participants make use of all these terms. Sometimes the ways in which they perceive of themselves in society also becomes clear from the ways in which they compare themselves to others, such as 'the elite', '*a classe alta*' (the high class), '*povoal da sociedade*' (people of the society, of the higher class) 'bourgeois', 'capitalists', '*o povo que mora em Boa Viagem*' (the people who live in Boa Viagem, a richer neighbourhood of Recife), etc. Again, not everybody uses all these terms.

As there is not one particular term that the participants themselves use, throughout the thesis I will often make use of the umbrella terms people of the 'margins' or 'peripheries' and of the word 'negro'. In chapter 5 I will explain that among my research participants, much more than a race, negritude is seen as a choice regarding how to situate themselves in Recife society. In that interpretation, 'negro' might be a better term for referring to the participants than 'marginal' as it is a term that all of them use when referring to themselves. However, as the term 'negro' has different meanings for different Recifenses (as well as for the reader, potentially), I also often opt for the terms 'margins' and 'peripheries'. I will use the

term 'marginals' rather than 'marginalised people' because the latter implies a state that is forced upon people by external pressures, whereas I will illustrate throughout this thesis that many people choose and are proud to be of the margins. It should be noted however that the term '*marginalizado*' in Brasil has a more negative connotation than 'marginalised' has in English, and that when using the term 'margin' or 'marginal' in referring to people I do not intend this to carry any judgment or value statement. Though occasionally participants used the term "*marginais*" (marginals) or "*marginalizados*" (marginalised) when speaking of themselves and the people they identify with, this was not the most common term they used.

At the same time, several of the *Terça Negra* participants do make it their business to refer to themselves and each other by using terms that commonly have derogatory connotations. '*Favelado*' for instance generally has the connotation of criminal or scum. Other examples of terms that have derogatory origins (or are still derogatory today) are '*o negão*' (the big negro), '*negão da favela*' (the big negro from the *favela*); "*viciados*" (addicted/vicious people), "*bagunceiros*" (people who are not serious, who make a mess). It is common for several of the participants to use such curse names as a kind of nickname for each other, or when they talk in sarcastic ways about how they think other people in society see them. Again, this illustrates the point that rather than trying to be considered 'sensible', the research participants emphasise their being seen as not 'sensible', and in many cases, reconstruct curse names into names that show pride to be different (in particular *negro, negão, favelado*).

Another feature is characteristic for many of the *Terça Negra* participants. Their participation in the *cultura negra* is more radical than that of most Recifeans in the sense that they do not just attend a reggae or *maracatu* party or play in an *afoxé* band once a week, but spend as much time as they can engaging in *cultura negra* activities and with among other *cultura negra* participants. Many look upon the world around them through an ideological frame embedded in *cultura negra*, as will be elaborated on in chapter 6. Some of my research participants referred to this by relating about themselves and others who are very active in the scene as the people who 'live the *cultura negra*', or who 'live the resistance' ('o povo que vive a *cultura negra*', 'o povo que vive a resistência').

In short, in line with the theoretical framework of Rancière, in this thesis I interpret a group of *Terça Negra* participants as people who are not only not seen as sensible by society, but who are also satisfied or even proud not to be 'sensible'. My research participants choose to behave and perform themselves in ways that are different from and not fully accepted in Recife society, and do not see this as a negative thing, but rather, enjoy belonging to the margins of Recife. In chapter 5 and 6 I will go into these findings in much more detail.

Within the *Terça Negra* audience I have talked to people of diverse backgrounds, who have diverse reasons to feel that they belong to Recife's peripheries and to participate in the movement. Within the audience, I chose to focus my research on the ones who attend regularly, and who identify as participants of the *movimento negro*. This means that people who come to the event as tourists or people who do not identify with the negro identity are not included in my descriptions of *cultura negra* participants. I want to stress, however, that unlike prejudices common among the Recife population, the vast majority of audience members whom I talked to identifies as negro and with the *cultura negra* movement. Though the perception is common that the *Terça Negra* audience mainly consists of people who attend only because they can use drugs, get drunk or meet gays to flirt with, in my experience many of the people who indeed also like to socialise, flirt or smoke marijuana at *cultura negra* events principally go because they identify with the movement. It is likely however, that several of the people who were most interested to participate

in my research are the ones who are most passionate about *cultura negra*, and that my descriptions are therefore somewhat biased to a group of Recifenses that is most actively involved in the *cultura negra* scene.

Thus, the representation of Recife's *cultura negra* scene that is presented in this thesis should not be seen as representative of the overall *cultura negra* audience, but as a particular and radical segment that self-identifies as negro and as being situated within the margins of Recife, and that strongly identifies with *cultura negra* as lifestyle and as political movement.

Aims and contributions of the research

In order to generate critical understanding of how ways in which societies are organised work to include and exclude people, and what is at stake for the various parties involved, I argue that it is of importance to study the ones least advantaged by the ways in which social spaces in a society are distributed. The thesis aims to shed light on how these distributions affect the daily life experiences of those who are more often excluded than included, and how they reflect on that; to what extent they perceive this situation as negative; and how they would like social structures to be changed.

Various books and articles have already been written on the samba, *capoeira*, the *maracatu*, the *afoxé* (black music genres), and on mixtures of global pop influences with Brazilian genres such as funk and *mangue-beat*. Literature is extensive moreover on religions of the African matrix, phenomena related to race and inequality, black activist movements, and the use of cultural objects by the government to contribute to Brazil's national identity. Surprisingly enough, however, hardly any ethnographic studies have been conducted about how in Recife, or even in Brazil in general, negro populations engage in *cultura negra*. Hecht, 1998; Koster, 2009; Koster & De Vries, 2012; Koster & Nuijten, 2012; Scheper-Hughes, 1993; and Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman, 1999 have carried out studies that are useful in enhancing our understanding of the lives of people living in the margins of Recife. But despite these and other exceptions, it generally seems rather uncommon for researchers in Brazil to actually perform ethnographic studies through living among marginal Brazilians themselves. Thus, most of what is known about *cultura negra* and on interpretations of negritude in Brazil is based on studies of black middle class Brazilians (Gledhill, 2006; Sansone, 2003) and on studies of leading figures in the black movement, cultural objects, etc. (e.g. De França Lima, 2009; LaFevers, 2010). Reis, in *O Dia de Negro* (2006), is the only author I have come across who has talked to a diverse representation of Recife's *cultura negra* scene, though with different, journalistic aims, thus not offering in-depth insights in the daily lives of this audience.

My study aims to contribute by broadening up the study of *cultura negra's* uses to a more diverse representation of its participants. I will study political and governmental processes from the perspective of the margins, and not principally through that of governance actors such as the official government, NGOs, influential leaders of social movements, religious institutions, the education system, etc. Rather, by analysing the scene through the theoretical framework of Jacques Rancière, I will describe how activities of these governance bodies are de-politicising rather than political, and that the most political movement that I have discerned in Recife, though humble, takes place in the most peripheral scenes.

I see this study of the reception, interpretation, transformation and use of *cultura negra* by a group of its participants as contributing to a deeper understanding of the importance of *cultura negra* in Brazil. Firstly, by enhancing the understanding of the Pernambucan case, for the link between *cultura negra* and social processes in society has been most elaborately discussed for Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. Often the

findings of studies in Bahia are ambitiously generalised for the Brazilian case, whereas the case of Pernambuco can be expected to differ, given its different history and the more racially (as in: genetically) mixed character of the population. Indeed, my study will present findings that greatly differ from for instance Sansone's perceptions on how black youths in Bahia engage in *cultura negra*, though this might also be explained by his focus on middle class black youths while mine is more on blacks living in the margins of Recife.

Secondly, the study aims to contribute by exploring differences that exist between interpretations of the meaning of *cultura negra* by various governance actors, leading figures and the participants of the cultural movement. I will describe how to the particular group of participants whom I researched, the *cultura negra* is much more decisive in the construction of subjectivities, in guiding daily life activities, and in participation in political debates than is argued by authors such as Marx, (1998); Gledhill; De França Lima; Van de Port (2005) and Sansone. These authors argue that several of the cultural objects seen as *cultura negra* mostly serve a strategic role for the MNU in denouncing Brazil's *mestiçagem* (racial mixture) identity, but do not so much represent the desires, identifications, philosophies and practices of poor black Brazilians. According to them, many of the participants engage in the scene not because they identify with the version of *cultura negra* that the MNU or Afro-Brazilian religious actors present, but instead follow the movement for reasons not related to the cultural expression forms themselves. They are said for instance to participate in order to be in a safe space where they can escape racism for a few hours; to use symbols of *cultura negra* only as a fashion statement; or to see *cultura negra* activities as spaces that are '*cheio de bichas*', good places to meet gays (Van de Port, Candomblé in pink, green and black. Re-scripting the Afro-Brazilian religious heritage in the public sphere of Salvador, Bahia., p. 16).

Through studying the topic from the perspective of *cultura negra* participants themselves, I intend to attribute more agency to the participants in the debate. My research aims to offer an in-depth study of how people who consider themselves negro, through participation in the *cultura negra* scene, construct subjectivities that combine elements of various historical and cultural influences with origins varying from Europe, Africa, the US, Jamaica, and of course, from within Brazil and the particular context of Recife. I will present detailed accounts of how the participants perceive of themselves in Pernambucan society, and how this situation is used as basis to construct their subjectivity as negro rather than as *moreno*, *pardo*, *mulatta*, white or indigenous. On the one hand, negro is still partially seen as a skin colour that some have and some do not, but as I will explain, the colour is differentiated from the negro *subjectivity*, which is not seen as a race or predestined feature of their bodies or characters. Though strongly linked to notions of African origins, the negro subjectivity is perceived as a choice for a certain mindset and lifestyle, one that any Pernambucan can take on.

Theoretical framework

The phenomena that I encountered in my field study will be analysed through a theoretical lens that is offered by authors who advocate the re-centring of the political in the post-political society, principally Rancière, but also Swyngedouw, Badiou, Žižek, Dikeç and other authors.

An essential principle on which the work of all these authors is based, is that of 'the political' as situated in disagreement. Above anything else, politics is the expression or surfacing of the existence of

conflicting perceptions on the state of the situation, on the way a society is organised and structured, and on who gets to participate in creating this distribution. The only changes that by these authors are considered as political are fundamental changes in the state of the situation, in the distribution of who has access to which social spaces. This kind of change is actually very rare. Indeed, one of the few examples of real political change that are given by the authors is that of the communist revolution, that turned labourers who were previously excluded from participation in the distribution of social spaces into the shared owners of the system.

All other changes, though in practice often called ‘political’, in the view of these authors are actually a-political: rather than treating the cause of problems, namely the distribution system, these a-political changes distract attention from the cause through the moving around of problems within the same system (Rancière, *Introducing disagreement*, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2009). The reason why the actual system is hardly ever transformed is because the system is always to the interest of some people; those who are advantaged by the current distribution of social spaces, and based in that profit often have most power. These are the people that are referred to as the elite. The elite of a society thus consists of the people advantaged by the social distribution system, who try to uphold the fundamentals of that system. All sorts of government techniques are used by the elite to prevent the ones who are not advantaged by the system, the supplementary population, from changing the structure. This can be done through violence and oppression, but, as the Rancièrian movement stresses, nowadays it is much more often through governance systems that mask the existence of fragmentation, of the structures that include some while excluding others. This masking is done through the normalisation of the distribution of spaces, resources and actors (Dikeç, 2007, p. 5), in which the concept of what Rancière calls the ‘sensible’ is essential. Let me further elaborate on the meaning of this last sentence in the following paragraphs.

Based on Rancière’s perception that there is no thought or way of reasoning that some persons are and some persons are not capable of, Rancière refutes any form of categorisation of people based on characteristics that would make them inherently different from each other. Instead, he interprets all categorisations of humans as social constructions which are used to maintain or reconstruct certain ways of social organisation. Equality is thus a presupposition from which we can study subjects, something that every individual disposes over—and not a goal, reward or condition that can be achieved. In fact, while everybody is fundamentally equal in their equal capability of reasoning, their situations in social distributions hardly ever, probably never are equal. There is probably not one society in this world in which this basic principal of equality is respected; for instead, the previously mentioned concept of the ‘sensible’ is generally used to categorise societies in different groups of people.

the ‘sensible’ consists of the perceptions that decide the meaning attributed to sounds, views, senses; they decide which sounds are voices and which are noise—and thus, who are and who are not visible or listened to, and what is and what is not visible and audible (Rancière, 2006, p. 3). The perceptions decide which behaviour and ideas are sensible and what is and what is not doable or sayable, and thereby which actors should and which should not be taken serious. These notions on what is and what is not ‘sensible’ divide the population into social groups, positions and functions of visible and invisible, and of able and less or unable—thereby assigning them different spaces in society. In this thesis I will often refer to the ‘sensible’ as the combination of perceptions that are supported by the elite of a given society about what is valuable, doable, sayable, relevant, and who is capable, responsible, to be taken serious. Thus, my use of the word ‘sensible’ is not supposed to be interpreted as a normative term, but as a term representing prevailing

perceptions of who is and who is not capable, beautiful, modern, valuable, intelligent, etc. For instance, in colonial times elites constructed the perception that blacks are non-human, less intelligent, less sensitive, and of a cruel nature. Based on this perception, the exploitative character of the distribution system was covered up by the construction of ideas that made it sensible to not include blacks in the system (Rancièrè, 2006, p. 3).

The Rancièrian thinkers see the categorisation of people into more and less 'sensible' as a means to legitimise what they call the ways in which social spaces are distributed in a society. In the context of Recife, when talking of 'the distribution of social spaces' I refer to the structures that decide for instance that some do and some do not have access to health and education facilities of quality, the labour market, to money and comfortable housing, to representation in the media and protection by the police, etc. Let me give a short background sketch of the uses of space in Recife in order to further elaborate on what I refer to when speaking of 'the distribution of social spaces' and how this relates to the perception of the 'sensible'.

Brazilian cities have always reflected social segregation, both in the way people are grouped together in different neighbourhoods and communities, and in the ways in which they (can) make use of space. Many poorer Recifenses—many of them black—, people considered to be 'of low moral' and others who make no part of the elite are often grouped together in *favelas* and *comunidades* (Costa Vargas 2006; Freyre 1986; Gledhill and Hita 2009: p.9). As I will explain in more detail in chapter 5, living in these areas generally means living with limited access to facilities, resources and security. Theije describes how also the houses of marginal religious groups, *terreiros*, are settled more in the peripheries of Recife and have little visibility, in contrary to variants of Christian and Catholic religious places (2006). In the case of Recife, though the biggest of these poorer neighbourhoods are situated in the outskirts of the city, it is not necessarily the case that *favelas* and *comunidades* are always in the geographical peripheries. The actual central area of Recife (the old city centre) for instance is hardly inhabited by middle class Recifenses, and has gained a peripheral reputation throughout the 20th Century through its association with prostitution, drugs and criminality (Campos 2000). Meanwhile, the neighbourhood Boa Viagem, where many richer Recifenses live, also accommodates and is surrounded by several *favelas*.

When I speak of the distribution of social space, however, this does not just refer to the neighbourhoods in which people can live, practice their religion, receive protection, etc. It also refers to the ways in which they make use of space. Freyre describes how already throughout the 19th Century, the street was associated with immorality and delinquency, and as a place for negroes and prostitutes (pp.107-109). Poor and middle class residents of Recife perceive of and use the streets and urban space in quite radically different ways: whereas to the former the street is the place where they live their lives, interact with others, and develop their personalities, for the latter it is only something to be used in order to get from A to B, and which preferably should be used only from the inside of a car or bus (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998; Gough and Franch 2006). Middle class youth interviewed by Gough and Franch for instance said they feel unsafe and have already been mugged several times on the streets of Recife, and therefore prefer to spend their time in 'safe' areas such as their homes or areas with police surveillance such as the beach or the shopping mall—which for poor youth is rather inaccessible as they are often banned by surveillance based on exterior features.

In short, in every society social spaces are distributed in a way that reflects the prevailing perceptions of the 'sensible'. The 'sensible' legitimises the fact that some are and some are not allowed

into shopping malls, cinemas, nightclubs, fancy hospitals, etc. and that some live in neighbourhoods and communities with comfort and security and others do not. The way society is structured and the perception of the 'sensible' keep each other in tact, for the social spaces to which people have access affect society's perception of them and partially decide whether they can qualify as 'sensible', whereas this qualification in turn decides to which social spaces they may have access. Rancière calls the people whose needs and desires are not taken into account and who cannot participate in the distribution of social spaces the 'supplementary'.

Elite engage in the upholding of distribution systems in society through creating, maintaining, and where necessary adapting the sensible. Whereas changes in the 'sensible' are often mistaken to be political of nature, in the perception of the Rancièrian movement they are nothing but the elite's governance techniques to maintain the state of the distribution (Rancière, 1998, 2004). Rather than politics, these authors call these balancing acts to maintain the status quo the *police*. Thus, looking again at the example of the exclusion of slaves, the abolition of slavery can be seen not as radical politics, but as an act of policing the performance of the 'sensible'. International pressures and other influences created a situation in which the exploitation of blacks in the form of slavery could no longer be uphold, as the idea that blacks are no humans was no longer accepted as sensible. This aesthetical change in the perception of which bodies and which are not human could have risked the unravelling of the overall unequal character of the distribution of social spaces. Therefore, the perception of who is human was adapted and it was no longer accepted to use blacks as slaves, which cooled down revolts against the elite among both blacks and international parties. However, ancestors of slaves remained the ones who were exploited for cheap labour and who for many more years never received any profit of the distribution system. In this example, in order to avoid disagreement, to avoid the denunciation of capitalism as fundamentally exploitative of some to the advantage of others, the 'sensible' was adapted. Rather than through the use of violence, this was done through searching for a common ground, an advancement of the situation of blacks which blacks themselves would not disagree with. This is where Rancièrian thinkers see the threat of consensus politics: political change that solves the problem at its root is prevented, as exposure of the real problem through conflict and disagreement is replaced with the distracting question of how to change a system that is fundamentally erroneous. In the example of the abolishment of slavery, consensus on how the supplementary population would be represented, as 'free' humans, distracted from the fact that their continuous situation of being exploited within the capitalist system would not end depending on whether the elite would start calling them human or not.

In a similar vein, the Rancièrian thinkers point out the anti-political character of western democracies (Rancière, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2009). Accepting as a given the endless heterogeneity of any population, these authors state that no government body or set of governing bodies has yet managed to cover the full population, to include the diverse interests, opinions, desires, knowledge, norms etc. of every member of a society into one organisational form. Any form of existing representational governments is always exclusive of a part of the population. The existence of 'democratic states' that supposedly represent every individual member of a society is therefore a myth, one that presents a government form as including all in order to disguise the exclusion of part of the population in the distribution of social spaces. This is what Rancière calls 'the scandal of democracy', which "while promising equality, [...] produces an oligarchically instituted form of governing in which political power seamlessly fuses with economic might and a governance arrangement that consensually shapes the city according to the dreams, tastes and needs of the

transnational economic, political and cultural elites” (quoted in Swyngedouw, 2010, p.3). Through populist managements, people are made to believe that they are democratically represented and can engage in political action through elections and participatory activities within the capitalist system (Swyngedouw, 2009, pp. 611-613). Meanwhile, according to the authors, the post-political democracy is in fact nothing more than the incorrect use of the term democracy to mask what governance activities are actually concerned with: the ‘management of capitalism’ (Swyngedouw, Where is the political?, 2008, p. 9; Swyngedouw, 2009, pp. 611-613).

This post-political democracy is actually contrary to true democracy (Rancière, Hatred of Democracy. Translated by Steve Corcoran in 2004., 2006; Swyngedouw, 2008, p. 10). True democracy, Rancière argues, takes place when subjects act upon the fact that they are equal, by denouncing the structures that divide society in groups that are supposedly more and less valuable. Thus, true democracy is revolutionary and opposite to consensus.

The notion of equality leads Rancière to see all individuals as potential political actors, although political action can only take place among those people who fundamentally disagree with the way society is organised (Rancière, 2006). Whereas the aim of the elite is to maintain its space in society through policing the performance of the sensible, the marginals continuously put this performance under stress by demonstrating the existence of fragmented perceptions on what is sensible. It is this *mésentente*, a term that means both disagreement and misunderstanding in French, where potential for political action is situated. Therefore, politics should not be studied in the sphere of governance bodies and other actors that are part of the police system, but among those who are supplementary to the distribution of social spaces, the part whose expressions are judged as noise rather than as legitimate voices, the part that is excluded from the creation of governmental systems that organise society, the ‘part of no part’. In order to study democracy, we should study the activities of the ones who are not counted, who “have no common title to exercise power, except that of not being entitled to its exercise”, and who, through the exercising of this power, disrupt all logics that strengthen the domination of the elite (Rancière, 2004, p. 5).

The work of the Rancièrian thinkers comes out as anti-capitalist. Capitalism is strongly interconnected to the ‘sensible’: it divides society into people who are productive in terms of making economic profit and those who do not, and thereby into people who are and who are not valuable. Badiou, Swyngedouw and Dikeç urge their readers not to accept capitalism just because it is less bad than its alternatives, and to instead search for radical alternative ways of organising society (Swyngedouw, 2010; Badiou A. , 2005; Swyngedouw, 2008; Dikeç, 2001). They argue for a continuous search for alternatives to the post-democratic system, constructions of “great new fictions that create real possibilities for constructing different socio-environmental futures” (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 614). These new fictions should be based in unconditional recognition of what Balibar has defined *égaliberté*: the recognition of equality, the absence of discrimination, and liberty, the absence of repression (see also Dikeç 2001). Recognising the fundamental equality of every individual means recognizing the truth. Therefore, Badiou argues, distributions that include some at the expense of others hide the truth out of selfish interests of the elites. He states that to search for egalibertarian alternatives is to fight for the truth; meaning that essential to any struggle to develop egalibertarian alternatives is the uncovering of discriminative structures, in other words, pursuing the exposure of the truth (Badiou, 2001).

From the accounts of these authors, we can conclude that in order to find the most creative egalibertarian alternatives to police orders that wrong the condition of equality and liberty, we should

study the activity that takes on in the margins of societies: among the people who least identify with the sensible, who are least advantaged by it moreover, and who have most reason to fight for truth and search for universal ways of living together. In that sense, the alternative should be looked for in utopias, ideas that are seen as unrealistic and not 'sensible' because of their radical denunciation of the state of the situation. These utopias reclaim space for the ones who are unaccounted for in the current system. In this context, Žižek reconstructs the meaning of utopia as follows: "The true utopia is when the situation is so without issue, without a way to resolve it within the coordinates of the possible that out of the pure urge of survival you have to invent a new space. Utopia is not a kind of a free imagination; utopia is a matter of innermost urgency. You are forced to imagine it as the only way out, and this is what [is needed] today" (in the documentary *Žižek!* 2005).

Having explained the theoretical framework, let me prevent disappointment on behalf of the reader by stating straight away that I have hardly seen radical political activity in the *cultura negra* scene, though I will present findings that point to a quest for egalibertarian alternatives in the margins of Recife. Brazil's tradition of 'cordial politics', of searching for common ground and avoiding direct disagreement, seem to be so strongly embedded in the population that even the people who are most aware of being disadvantaged by the current governance system and who are most pessimistic about the establishment can hardly bare speaking in un-cordial ways of any particular segment of society, including the establishment. As will be discussed in chapter 7, most of my research participants prefer instead to let the establishment be as it is and to create alternative spaces in the margins where new egalibertarian forms of living together can be experimented with. Others search for common ground with the elite, in attempts to broaden up the system so that more of their interests might get represented.

Despite the fact that little radical politics are actually occurring in the margins of Recife, there are various reasons why I see the Rancièrian framework as insightful in the case of the *cultura negra* scene. Firstly, it supports enhanced understanding of structures of discrimination and repression and of tensions and interactions between the elite and the margins in the Brazilian case, by framing society into people who create, uphold, abide to, transform or radically denounce the sensible, and into those who are and those who are not advantaged by the construction. Of course, in reality these structures are complex and people cannot simply be categorised as adhering to the 'sensible', living in the margins, belonging to the elites, etc. or not. Throughout the thesis I will give many examples of people who regularly cross between the margins and the rest of the city, who for instance like to work as government officials during the day while spending their time at night in the *favela*, or who can easily behave in ways perceived as 'sensible' while the next moment completely breaking with this behaviour. Thus, for analytical purposes I use categorisations such as 'people who adhere to the 'sensible'', 'elite', 'middle class' versus 'people who refute the sensible', 'margins', 'periphery', but in reality no such categorisations are made that strictly. In fact, many of the research participants often avoid categorisations of people, as shall be explained throughout the thesis.

Looking at distributions in society through the Rancièrian lens offers understandings that go beyond race, which has proven to be a problematic and limiting concept for understanding the social structures in Brazil, which do not follow practices found in Europe and the US (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999; Fry, 2000; Owensby, 2005). Instead, The Rancièrian framework interprets individuals as choosing how they want to relate themselves to the 'sensible' and to social distributions, rather than as people who act based

on interpretations of an identity that is partially fixed in their looks and the situation in which they are raised. Seeing the police as engaged in the continuous reconfiguration of the performance of a unified identity that hides the actual fragmentation of society, moreover enables us to frame the balancing acts of the Pernambucan government to transform, de-politicise, and incorporate *cultura negra* in the policing of the sensible. It enables a critical reading of the struggle of the *movimento negro* moreover, and of the extent to which its activities aim to uncover the truth of the existence of excluding structures, as well as search for truthful egalibertarian alternatives. Lastly, I will use the theoretical framework to point out the political potential of the *cultura negra* scene for the construction of future utopian alternatives: ways of living together based in the principle of *égalité*.

At the same time, I expect that the detailed analysis of the *cultura negra* case study presented in this thesis will contribute to the elaboration of the theoretical and philosophical work of the Rancièrian thinkers, which so far is characterised by a high level of abstraction. Giving it a more practical application, I intend to enhance comprehension of the use of the theoretical work in the study of real life processes. The discussion of several of the underlying assumptions can moreover be given more body through relating them to the perceptions of my research participants on what is best for their personal situations and for the future of Recife society.

Structure of the thesis

After having explained the theoretical lens through which I will look at the *cultura negra* as communal lifestyle and identity, in chapter 3 I will take the reader on a night out at *Terça Negra*, in order to create a lively image of the versatile character of public activities and participants of *cultura negra*. Chapter 4 will offer a historical context description of how Brazilian government bodies have used cultural objects for the purposes of creating and upholding a shared national and Pernambucan identity, and of how *cultura negra* has been embedded in this identity over time. Chapter 5 introduces the reader to a segment of the population that is structurally ignored in this representation of the Pernambucan identity, and that refuses to abide to several perceptions incorporated in the Pernambucan identity, concerning which behaviour is sensible, acceptable, beautiful, modern, valuable. It narrates how this segment denounces these perceptions and prefers life in the margins over trying to become part of the Pernambucan. Chapter 6 gives a detailed account of how participants of this marginal segment engage in the construction of a collective subjectivity that denounces the exclusive character of the Pernambucan identity. It describes moreover how this alternative is constructed through the engagement with and (re-) construction of cultural objects in the *cultura negra* scene, which are largely embedded in constructions of Africa and of other symbols that counter Euro-centrism, Christianity, oppression and capitalism. Chapter 7 discusses to what extent political potential can be identified in the *cultura negra* scene, but also discusses the de-politicising practices that are pursued.

Chapter 2 – Field work and methodology

The findings presented in this thesis are acquired through literature reviews and a seven month ethnographic field study in Recife, during the period of early August 2011 till late February 2012. The main sites where the research was conducted are in the central neighbourhoods Recife Antigo and São José, and in the *comunidades* (poorer neighbourhoods or slums) Chão de Estrelas; Comunidade do Canal in Aruda; Os Coelhos; Santo Amaro; Casa Amarella; and Dois Unidos. This chapter elaborates in detail on how the field study was conducted. Within the methodology many sensitive and ethical issues are at stake, mainly due to the situation of the researcher as white-skinned outsider within a setting in which people tend to be particularly conscious of skin colour, class, and discriminative practices. Many approaches had to be flexible and were based partially on interpretations of visible codes, safety, or on intuition. Therefore, I devote substantial attention to describing the decisions I have made and approaches I have used.

2.1 Identification of the research topic and setting

The initial aim of my research was to study artistic activities in the *comunidade* Chão de Estrelas, in order to contribute to previous studies conducted by students and staff of Wageningen University on social, political and economic topics in the community. Soon after arrival in the *comunidade*, I found however that due to the retirement of some residents previously active in arts and culture, and due to less external funding for activities such as those of the Afro-Brazilian community arts school *Darue Malungo*, there was little activity in the neighbourhood on which I could base a study of relationships between arts and social change.

In search for an alternative research topic, I shifted my focus broadly to Recife and culture in general in the first two months of my stay. I used artistic expressions as starting points to search for issues that engage people in their daily lives. Thus, I attended and analysed a broad variety of cultural activities in Recife and Olinda. Recurrent issues I came across in different artistic expressions and events related to Pernambucan identity and the role of Africa in Brazil, in which I experienced 'Africa' to hardly refer to the physical continent of Africa itself. Of all cultural events, as explained in the introduction, it was *Terça Negra* that most captivated my interest. From the first time I attended it, it raised questions regarding what it is about *cultura negra*, or the setting in which it is presented at *Terça Negra*, that unites such a diverse group of people. With these questions in mind, regarding the place of *cultura negra* in Recife society and the ways in which its participants see themselves in society and identify with Afro-Brazilian culture, I set off my research with the broad question of how people who self-identify as 'negro' or 'negra' give meaning to and make use of *cultura negra*. My initial literature review on black culture and identity politics in Brazil led me to conclude that while some literature has been written on the daily lives of marginal citizens of Recife, studies of the role of *cultura negra* in these daily lives is virtually non-existent, as discussed in the introduction. I therefore chose to adopt a rather open-ended and exploratory approach, in which through observations and conversations I tried to understand ways in which people in their daily lives relate to *cultura negra* and their personal relation to it. Within the data that I obtained through this broad inquiry, I

continuously searched for patterns which I would then explore in future interviews and observations. Based on the data I gathered through my field study I later searched for literature and theories, of which, based on my findings, I tested the relevance and usefulness to explain my research questions. Thus, it was through interaction with the phenomena I encountered in my study that I further specified my research aims and themes, and that I generated the theories as explored in this thesis.

From *Terça Negra* as starting point, I broadened up the research setting to include the different settings in which I ended up by following threads from the event. I kept track of other public events that attract similar audiences through announcements made at *Terça Negra* and through recommendations of audience members. Next to these public events, the setting also came to include the activities in which some of *Terça's* audience members engage with *cultura negra* in their private lives. Having met these people at *Terça Negra*, they now provided me with access into spaces such as their communities and *terreiros*, in many cases places to which I would not have had (safe) access without their company.

2.2 Research tools

The field work consisted mainly of participant observation studies, for which I participated in public and private activities of *cultura negra* in Recife, spent time with and joined research participants in some of their daily activities, and had both 18 overt in-depth interviews and many more informal, spontaneous conversations about people's perceptions on *cultura negra*, *Terça Negra*, blackness and other relevant topics. In total I had short conversations on these issues with about 40 attendants of *Terça Negra*, of whom eleven participated in observation studies on a regular basis. Next to the data collection with individuals of the *cultura negra* scene, I also collected data on institutions such as the government, the MNU and other activists in the field of race and culture. This was done through observation studies of how these institutions and activists perform and present themselves, and how they present issues of race and identity in cultural activities. In some cases, these people were also attendants of *Terça Negra* and therefore can be classified both as representatives of institutions and as individual participants of the *cultura negra* scene. I moreover observed and analysed how institutions and their representatives acted and presented themselves at public events and spaces.

The interviews with *cultura negra* participants, where possible, I conducted after having met a person on several occasions, or I did several interviews at different stages, in order for them to feel comfortable around me. I generally let the participants choose the location for the interview; most of them were conducted at participants' houses or jobs and on terraces in the centre. I often started with explanatory questions, in which I asked participants for instance to explain to me what *cultura negra* is, what 'negro' means, what the role of the African continent within Pernambuco is. It helped that I am not Brazilian, so that I could get away with asking rather simple questions such as 'you just used the word *periferia*, what does that mean?' or 'why do these people wear African hats?'. Through these questions I could get a view of how participants themselves interpret these issues in different ways. Though subtopics were prepared in advance, I then generally let the interviews flow with the topics raised by the interviewees, as I saw this fit best with the broad and open-ended character of my research inquiry. However, with some people open-ended interviews proved problematic, as they did not know how to answer them or seemed to feel uncomfortable in formal interview settings. With these participants I relied

most on observation studies and informal conversations. Some participants were stoned during interviews, but as they seemed comfortable, philosophical and talkative this way I did not experience this as a problem. With one of the participants I conducted several interviews over skype, as the attendant had just left Recife when I got hold of her, but was very motivated to discuss the issues of interest with me. As she had outspoken views and did not need much encouragement to talk, I felt that my not being physically present did not negatively impact the interview outcomes.

As for the observation studies with participants, I asked participants if I could join them to activities related to *cultura negra*. Thus, which activities I attended as representing *cultura negra* was decided by my research participants, and by how they want to present *cultura negra* to outsiders. I visited some participants at their jobs (most of them in the cultural scene), joined some of them to religious services, attended the rehearsals of their music or dance groups, and went to cultural events with them. At these activities, I would observe and analyse both the activities, the setting in which they take place and the people participating in it, as well as how my research participants behaved: how they performed themselves in communication with others, what clothing they wore, whether and how they sang and danced along, what language they used, etc. Some of the participants I saw only three times outside of *Terça Negra*, while eight of them I saw on a regular basis throughout the last three months of my stay.

Important for the participant observation studies is also that I lived six months with a black family in the *comunidade* Chão de Estrelas. I was engaged in the *comunidade* as English teacher at the community centre where I taught a small group of adults, and at the Afro-Brazilian community arts school *Darue Malungo*, where I also participated in arts classes and activities. Members of the family whom I lived with regularly took me to activities related to arts and culture, and sometimes to meetings with community leaders and meetings of the OP programme (*Orçamento Participativo*, the participatory programme of the *prefeitura* aiming to include citizens in decision-making processes). During the first two months of my stay I moreover studied Portuguese and got a general introduction into Pernambucan life and culture at the language course for foreigners at the Pernambucan University, *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco*. Through my activities in Chão de Estrelas and participation in the events of *cultura negra* which I attended, I spent most of my time with people who are living at the margins of Recife society. Through the connections I made at university and through *couch surfing*¹ I also visited places and participated in activities that are more common to the daily lives of high and middle class Recife society, and got an understanding of ways in which many members of this part of society regard *cultura negra* and its participants.

The last component of my field work consisted of analysing documents and other artefacts, both real and virtual, that give indications of people's views on themselves, society, culture, aesthetics, blackness, religion, etc. These include the books, booklets, flyers, stickers and other information given to me by representatives of the government, the MNU, and attendants of *Terça Negra*, as well as websites and blogs about or written by relevant actors and topics. Clothing, accessories and tattoos, as well as objects in people's houses were also observed and analysed within the data collection. Particularly after my departure from Recife I have moreover kept analysing participants' posts and activities on facebook, to which many are connected. Through their profile descriptions, posts, the activities they indicate they will

¹*Couch surf* is a global network of people interested to host and visit people from all over the world. I met several university students in Recife through this network.

attend and the discussions they participate in, the medium gives an indication of their aesthetic preferences, views on politics and identity, participation in the *luta*, and of how they want to present these in public.

The observation studies were documented in different ways, depending on the situation. Overt interviews and several spontaneous conversations with people who knew I was researching *cultura negra* were recorded, and later transcribed into English translations, as literal and as detailed as possible. I moreover always carried around a notebook in which I kept field notes; though generally I would start writing only when people would not pay attention to it, for instance on the bus back home. If I wanted to remember some remark or lyric literally without standing out as researcher I would pretend to be writing a text message and save the note in my phone. Once I think many people at *Terça Negra* knew I was conducting research on the event (as the presenter Demir had welcomed his '*amiga holandesa*' who is studying *Terça Negra* through the microphone) I also regularly wrote down notes about outfits, remarks, music lyrics, etc. directly. Every night I made notes in a fieldwork journal on my laptop of what I had experienced that day, particularly relating to living in the margins and *cultura negra*. I also took pictures regularly of different events and activities, or lent my camera to research participants for them to take pictures. Within the research, the pictures functioned mainly to write detailed descriptions of people, clothing and artefacts in the field notes.

2.3 Access, contact and field relations

2.3.1 Situation of the researcher in the field

Of two main challenges I have been very aware regarding my role within the research setting and in relation to the research participants. Firstly, part of the target group could be expected to have a somewhat lower self-esteem and might be more sensitive to perceived differences in class, phenotype, education, etc. than other members of society. People who have hardly ever been able to participate in economic society or to follow much education, and who feel they are often seen as inferior because of their skin colour, housing, sexual preference, etc. might at some point start perceiving of themselves as inferior. I perceived this to be the case with several of the research participants, who for instance needed quite some time and encouragement before they felt comfortable to have interviews, and who kept saying that I should better talk to their priest, *afoxé* director or other people whom they felt would be more qualified to speak on the topic. With some, during our first interview they talked little, after which I would tell them on different occasions how interesting the talk had been to me. I noticed that during later interviews, they were more talkative.

Secondly, my body in different ways can be associated with exactly those people who are seen as oppressors by people who feel marginal. Being white, blond and not looking like a poor person (even when wearing old frayed pants and untidy hair, I would still be considered as looking rich to poor Recifenses), I could be associated with exactly those Recifenses who are perceived by many marginal people as being afraid of poor blacks, never setting foot in *comunidades*, and thinking only in stereotypes about gays, blacks, marijuana-smokers, etc. The fact that my body was very present in people's perceptions of me was clear from the fact that they often referred to me as '*brancinha*' (little white girl) or '*gringa*' (foreigner). I was clearly confronted with these stereotypes during my first interactions with Wilson. He told me he

usually does not hang out with whites, as he said they are often racists. But as I was interested in *maracatu*, he would show me to his *favela*, as he wanted more rich people to know what *favelas* are like. After having talked to me only for three minutes, he assumed that I had never been to a *favela* before and that I was afraid of slum dwellers. At some point I heard some men on the street in his *favela* asking about me, some of them engaged in Wilson's *maracatu*, so I told them where I was from and sat down with them. Wilson was so surprised by the fact that I felt at ease around slum residents that for the rest of the night he kept talking about this incident, and when presenting me to people referred to this anecdote: "this *brancinha*, what did she do? Tell them what you did! She just went to sit down with the *favelados* who were smoking *maconha* and chatted with them like any other people!"

On the other hand, being Dutch, I could also be interpreted as someone external to the whole socio-political structure of Recife society, more neutral through a kind of insensitivity to social norms. This is what I aimed for in the way I presented myself, I somewhat exacerbated my being different to show I do not fit categories of Brazilian identities. I did not have to pretend this, as my clothing, accent, attitude and lack of knowledge on many things gave this away quite easily. I did sometimes purposely emphasise these differences however, by for instance talking about homosexuality or marijuana as a very common thing in the Netherlands. I am small-built and am in my early twenties, and I asked a lot of questions, including many simple questions. These factors I think might have led people to see me not as a threatening person, but as a curious person who does not know a lot, so that also people with low self-esteem knew that they could teach me many things. In fact, it is by breaking with social rules because I did not know them that I learned to understand them best. For instance, it was through my friends responding shocked when I talked out loud at *Terça Negra* about their using marijuana that I understood that using it is accepted among the friends, but that outside the group it is treated with discretion as the participants consider it harmful for their reputation if they are associated with marijuana. Most of the research participants did not have much experience with foreign people or researchers on which they could base their interpretation of me. Once they found I did not fit any of the existing categories of people they knew, I therefore had the advantage that I could construct the image of myself anew.

I particularly felt the need to invest a lot of time to build trust with gay participants. Based on what I heard around me from non-gay people, I had come to understand that indeed gays are often stigmatised, and intuitively I felt that many gay people whom I approached needed more time to trust me and were more careful in showing their feelings and personalities. I took the time for them to trust me by meeting up regularly, in settings where the participants felt safe (their homes or neighbourhoods, *afoxé* shows, *Terça Negra*), before asking them to participate in in-depth interviews. While I was indeed very interested in the link between homosexuality and *cultura negra*, I only directly asked about this to those people whom had already started talking about their sexuality out of their own initiative. These careful approaches made it difficult to go in-depth with a big group of participants, as with some I was just starting to get a better relation when I had to leave.

There were also ways in which I presented myself as similar to the research participants—though never aiming to present myself as something I am not; poor or negra. The fact that I showed commitment to the *luta* against discrimination and that I lived in Chão de Estrelas, hung out with black and gay friends and enjoyed *cultura negra* led many of the participants to say that I behaved like a negra. The fact that I often attended the event with my black neighbour Toni, and that I could tell people that I lived with the family of Meia Noite, a famous *capoeirista* and activist in the *cultura negra* scene, might in that sense have

contributed to my access to and acceptance by participants of the event. Lastly, the fact that I learned Portuguese while living in the margins of Recife made me talk like a foreigner, while at the same time using vocabulary and sentence structures used by *favelados*.

Being in my early twenties made it quite accepted for me to walk up to and create friendships with participants, as many of them are also between age 20 and 35. I think that my being a foreigner moreover might have made me interesting for some people who had not yet had a lot of contact with foreigners. Many of the participants asked me lots of questions about the Netherlands; about welfare, minimum salaries, football, the cuteness of Dutch men and about the soft drugs policy. When in their neighbourhood, they also liked to introduce me to every neighbour, family member and acquaintance as their Dutch friend. On the other hand, my being a foreigner might also have been received with some cynicism by some of the representatives of institutions, whom indicated they already had done several interviews with (foreign) students. With their busy agendas, conducting an interview with me might not be considered very interesting: there is little in it for them to talk to a Dutch person who does not have half the contextual knowledge on the topic that most locals do, is not negra herself, and will write a research in English that will probably never serve their purposes. I noticed for instance that the *Terça Negra* organisers of MNU often touched upon the same issues and made similar arguments (also similar to arguments discussed in for instance Reis 2006 and LaFever 2009), as if they were repeating a standard tune. Thus, the challenge for me was to prepare challenging questions and stimulating topics for discussion.

2.3.2 Selecting and accessing research participants

As discussed in the introduction, in order to study the experiences of exactly those people whose voices are least heard in the discourse on *cultura negra* and in society in general, *Terça Negra* was crucial to my research; it offered a space where I could meet people of the target group and informally start conversations with them, without being dependent on gatekeepers' or other people's judgments on which people might be most interesting to talk to. For indeed, when I did get in touch with potential research participants through others, they would often lead me to priests, academics, heads of some musical associations and organisers of *Terça Negra*. An aspect of the research activities that is likely to have influenced my findings is the step of selecting participants within the *Terça Negra* crowd. Whom I approached or happened to get in touch with, but also whom showed interest in and was able to get in touch with me, has influenced which people and which views were included in the research. This was moreover dependent on who I was capable of having somewhat deeper conversations with, as it might be more difficult and potentially unsafe to have interviews with for instance people under the influence of glue or alcohol, but also because some people talk more easily about their views and experiences.

Let me start by saying that this research does not aim to create an image that is representative for participants of *cultura negra* in Recife in general. Rather, it aims to provide in-depth understanding of a particular group of participants, a first exploration which I hope will be broadened up, complemented and if necessary corrected in future research.

Having said this, I will continue to explain how I went about in creating a rough sample of the *Terça Negra* audience. The *Terça Negra* audience stands out in particular for its diversity of people of different backgrounds, religions, sexual preferences, class, fashion styles, etc. It is exactly this diversity of people, and what unites them at this event, that is one of the main issues at stake within the research. I have therefore

purposely searched to represent this diversity in the sample, while aiming to avoid boxing or labelling people based on one characteristic (such as religion, sexual preference, use of marijuana, etc.). I have searched also for contact with people who differ in the extends to which they are active in the *luta*, as well as the extends to which they diverge of the 'sensible'.

In the first phase of searching research participants the approaching of potential participants was partially based on my interpretations of visible features such as skin colour, where and with whom they stand, fashion and other visible references to Africa, religion, or musical genres. These visible features can give rough estimations of people's social class in Recife society, their religion, sexual preferences and their musical preferences. In order not to let my choices for whom to approach be guided only by generalisations of visible features, I also regularly started talking to the first the best person standing to my side, making sure I did this at different points of the square in order to avoid for instance just talking to *candomblistas*, who gather mostly nearby the stage.

About half of the participants were approached by me in this way, while the other half are people I happened to get in touch with in one way or another. Some of them I got to know through friends, others in Chão de Estrelas or at cultural activities, while one participant I met in his function as taxi driver. In a later phase of the research I also used more of a snowball technique, in which I got in touch with people through others whom I already knew at the event. The fact that I knew some people also enabled me for instance to ask people if they could introduce me to people of *Xangô*, or people with other particular characteristics which I was interested in. Through these different approaches I tried to prevent my selection of participants to be based only on visible characteristics, or only on characteristics that I myself thought might be interesting on forehand.

Once I had gotten in touch with people, the next factor deciding whether or not and to what extent they would be included in the research, of course, was whether or not they were willing to participate, and whether it was possible to meet them on a regular basis. I expected the way in which I approached people and the first impressions I gave as decisive, and went about it carefully. Though no one ever told me so in words, I interpreted the responses of a few audience members as them not feeling comfortable with being approached by a (white) stranger or not being interested to get in touch with me. In these cases I tried to make them feel more comfortable so as not to leave them with a negative impression, but did not ask for further contact. While many people moreover readily gave me their contact details, with which people I did in the end work together for the study was also decided by practical factors such as their flexibility to meet me despite full agendas, whether their phone numbers stayed the same, but mostly whether they were enthusiastic about letting me participate in their daily live activities. As the research methods are highly dependent on which people are open to establishing friendships with a white stranger, it is possible that views of people who are more hostile or distrustful towards outsiders are less represented. Among the audience members some have very outspoken political and social views, whereas others just go to enjoy the music. I noticed for instance that people who feel strongly engaged in the *luta* or who do studies related to social topics are often more talkative and make it more easy to have in-depth interviews than others. While I have tried to interview people not just because they have outspoken opinions, I can give more in-depth descriptions of the meaning-giving processes of those who do, as they have told me more about their views on society and other issues.

2.3.3 Presenting and communicating the research

When starting to talk to people I was generally open about my intentions and explained them that I was doing a research about *Terça Negra* or *cultura negra*. I presented it in a light form, as an interest of mine to learn more about *maracatu*, *afoxé*, *Xangô* for my study, in order to stimulate people's sense of being able to teach me something by talking about the topics. Only in conversations with people who do not participate in the *cultura negra* I often first asked them for instance about whether they knew and liked *Terça Negra*, and told them that I was studying it only afterwards, as I had experienced many university students for instance to hold negative views on the issue, and to share these most openly if they did not know my interest for it. When doing observations during *Terça Negra* I generally avoided being visibly present as observer, aiming instead to be interpreted as tourist or exchange student, several of whom attend the event on a regular basis. Firstly, because people might behave different when they know they are observed, and secondly, because I did not want people to feel uncomfortable. One objective of attending *Terça Negra* for nearly all participants is to escape daily life, in which they feel people (particularly non-blacks, non-gays, non-poor people) are always looking at how they dress and behave. I felt that for people to know that I was observing how they dress and behave might therefore negatively intrude upon the research setting. With the participants whom I did participant observation studies with over a longer period of time I did however explain that next to cultural objects themselves, I was also interested in how people use *cultura negra* in their daily lives, and generally in what their lives are like as they are so different from my life in the Netherlands. I did not specify that this included observing the way they chat, dance, participate, talk, etc. in order not to make them feel over-conscious about themselves. I did regularly talk about observations afterwards, to check my interpretations. For instance, I would ask people why they did not sing along with their groups, whether there was a particular reason for wearing the colour they were wearing, etc.

A main ethical question in my observation study, particularly for the research participants I spent most time with, is about creating friendships with people with the aim of studying their behaviour and activities. I was always aware that I was partially using friendships with research participants for the purpose of gathering data. In practice, though, I did not see the participant observation studies as much different from other forms of meeting up with friends, except for the fact that I was more consciously asking goal-oriented questions and afterwards wrote down detailed notes. As both the participants and I enjoyed our friendships and I was open about my research activities, I therefore did not interpret my research as harmful or misleading. In return for their interviews and being my guide, where possible I did my research participants small favours such as translating someone's CV into English, taking pictures during performances of their groups, or paying for drinks or food during an interview (though I made it clear that I paid it from university funding for the research, as I did not want any money issues to influence our relationships).

I was careful with how I referred to the participants as I did not want to victimise them as discriminated or marginal people, and only adopted terms such as '*marginal*', '*favelados*', etc. only after they had introduced the terms themselves. Generally, when describing the participants in relation to non-participants of *cultura negra*, I would for instance call them 'negroes', 'the people who live the *cultura negra*' (*o povo que vive a cultura negra*), or 'a diverse group of people' (*um povo diversificado*).

2.4 Impact of the research on the researcher

I see my time in Recife as a continuous experiment with expectations relating to class, phenotype, gender and space. I continuously moved in spaces that I felt I was not expected to as a young white-skinned woman by most Recifenses, and I played with characteristics of whites and coloured people and with aesthetic views. I think I sometimes also confused people with this. For instance when I wore an afro wig during carnival, and many people, including a bus conductor and a waiter who both recognised me as the *gringa* (foreign girl), wondered why someone with such 'beautiful blond hair' would want to have black hair. It also happened several times that gay people were looking me up and down and after a while asked me if I was gay, something that never occurred to me in the Netherlands. The fact that I felt that for seven months I was always seen as outsider has also very much influenced my view, it created a lens through which I saw the world. I think this made me sharp but perhaps also over-sensitive to many of the smallest examples of discrimination and stereotypes.

My becoming close friends with many of the participants was necessary for me to participate in their daily life activities and talk about their sexuality, dreams, life views, but also has impacted my perceptions on the topic. Already being rather left-winged in my life views, the passion of the participants for environmental and anti-discriminatory causes made me very impressed with *cultura negra*. When I had cynical thoughts about some of the points made by participants, I often felt the urge to try to explain them in positive ways. I have tried to ascribe most of my findings directly to my research participants, so that rather than giving my account of how things are, I give that of the research participants. I believe that had I been more distanced of the principals and activities of *cultura negra*, I would not have been able to build such rapport with the participants, and to get the information I got from them.

Safety issues

Important activities for my field research were the attending of *Terça Negra* and other events that end around midnight and take place an hour travelling from where I lived, and to meet up with people whom I got to know through *Terça Negra*. Particularly as *gringa*, I had to be careful in how to travel, with whom, whom to trust, etc. I was always on my guard, though more because people told me to than because I actually felt uncomfortable or unsafe, in fact I have never felt unsafe during my stay. I always asked people familiar in the locations I visited for recommendations as to what I could and could not safely do as *gringa*. Moreover, during the first two months of my data collection at *Terça Negra* my neighbour and friend Toni Silva was under the contract of Wageningen University under a VIDJ grant as my research assistant, to enable me to attend late night events, at times join me in approaching or visiting attendants, advise me what was and what was not safe for me to do, help me translate where my Portuguese understanding was insufficient, etc. After two months I had made enough contacts to travel back home and visit places with other friends.

Another challenge in my research relates to expectations of relationships between Brazilian men and European girls. For a girl, particularly a blond European one, to start chatting with men and ask if they want to meet up some time to talk about *cultura negra* is likely to be interpreted as a flirt by many Brazilian men. The fact that some men in their function as representative of the *prefeitura* (not the ones interviewed for this research), even in their offices, tried to kiss me or asked me out on a date while I thought I was

having a formal meeting, illustrates the potential miscommunication that can arise. I dealt with this by introducing Toni as my boyfriend to potential research participants, or by approaching men through introductions by friends.

2.5 Processing the data

Recordings of interviews were transcribed to the word into English, and for formulations typical for the *cultura negra* scene or for words difficult to translate they were transcribed both in English and Portuguese. Only after the first analyses of the data I came across the authors used for the theoretical framework, and realised that the processes they describe are about similar structures and processes that I had studied in my field work. Based on the theoretical framework, I created a coding system based on which I went through the interview transcriptions, field notes, reviews of the literature and other documents again to re-analyse my findings through the lens of the work of Rancière and other authors who want to re-centre the focus on the political. In that process, a translation was made from the data I gathered from talking and observing participants to theories within the theoretical frame. Terms such as 'egalibertarian', 'fragmentation', 'sensible', are not used by the participants themselves. Throughout the thesis I intend to make clear how I made the translation from the field data to my theoretical interpretations of them. Firstly, by describing what language participants use themselves and how I relate this to Rancière's concepts. In many cases, participants use such diverse terms to relate to particular actors or structures in society that I have recaptured these into one term, as is the case for the concept of 'marginal', as explained in the introduction. Secondly, I intend to make clear how I made this translation by separating paragraphs that describe my observations and remarks of participants from those in which I provide my theoretical analyses.

Privacy issues

In references to research participants, only those whom have given me permission after having been explained in detail how the information they had provided me with would be used are referred to by their real name in the research product. I am careful in presenting data that could harm any of the participants and am aware of the vulnerable position of for instance street children and youths in presenting my findings. There are moreover a set of facts and phenomena that I have described in vague or anonymous ways in order to protect any of the research participants to be associated with them. Sometimes this is on their request, for instance, some people engaged in activities of Afro-Brazilian religions do not want the outside world to know they are. On other issues I myself have judged it to be in the interest of participants to leave out information or make it anonymous, such as drug habits or stories about the sex lives of younger participants.

Chapter 3 – A night out at *Terça Negra*

This chapter takes the reader on a night out at *Terça Negra*, as seen through my eyes as an outsider to Recife and the *cultura negra* scene. Rather than describing one particular night, I will combine some of the people I met and experiences I had over 6 months of *Terça Negra*, trying to describe those experiences most illustrative for the versatile character of public activities and participants of *cultura negra*, while aiming to do justice to the experiences of the event's *publico fiel* (the 'loyal' audience members who regularly attend the event).

It is Tuesday night, I arrived at the Pátio de São Pedro two hours before *Terça Negra* starts so that I can have a quick bite and observe the audience members arriving. The Pátio is situated in the neighbourhood São José, in the centre of Recife. With its cobblestones, the São Pedro church and two-store houses painted in pastel blue, yellow and pink, the square generates an atmospheric scene that mixes the architectural styles inherited through Portuguese and Dutch colonial influences with the sounds, images and smells of the *cultura negra* scene and its participants. Music considered 'negro' by the organisers of the event is already playing: some reggae, some *samba*, some *mangue-beat*, an *afoxé* song every now and then. One song that is hardly ever skipped is '*Não chore mais*', Gilberto Gil's cover of Bob Marley's 'no woman no cry'. One of the first to arrive, as always, is Amauri; the face of public *cultura negra* events in Recife: a black man with a grey beard, in his fifties, always dressed in white and with religious *Xangô* beads around his neck and a flat cap on his head. In his roles of *pai de santos* (priest of the *Xangô* religion) and activist in social movements in the fields of race, religion and sexuality, he organises and presents *Terça Negra* as well as several other events of *cultura negra*. Hours before the first show starts, Amauri is busy trying to get all artists to arrive on time, a stressful task as the buses that pick them up regularly get lost in the *favelas* where the artists come from, or sometimes do not show up at all.

Near the entrance to the square, on the side of Avenida Dantas Barreto, I see Luiz talking to every by-passer about something related to the sewage opening in the street. His head is misshapen; he looks as if his skull was broken and grew back into a strange shape. Luiz is from the interior of Pernambuco, where his sister and mother are still living. Now he lives by himself in the streets in the centre of Recife. He attends *Terça Negra* every week because his hobby is to listen to music, reggae in particular. As is the case for many others, the event also offers him a source of money and food, for begging is how he comes around. He walks from the sewage opening to the stage and, though no show has began yet, seems to be captivated by the music played by the DJ for about fifteen minutes—until he gets into a fight with some other street children and has to escape the pátio. Like Luiz, several Recifenses are yet to arrive who use the event to make some money: through collecting empty cans, or through selling snacks, alcoholic beverages, or marijuana. Neilson, who loves *Terça Negra* as he is a big fan of all types of music, generally enjoys the event until around 22.00h, when he starts driving visitors home in his taxi. The fact that the event is associated with *Xangô* does not bother him, even though he himself is Catholic, as he likes the people at the event and can combine entertainment with work.

Around us, at the terrace, the people who can afford to spend a few *Reais* on a drink or a bite sit down: some tourists with Paulista accents; some black families, dressed up in their evening clothes; a dreadlocked guy in his twenties, on a date with a girl in a colourful flower dress with curly Afro hair. Gustavo and Leno, living in the neighbourhoods Ibura and Dois Unidos, came straight from their job as construction workers to the *Pátio* to have some beers before the concerts start. Both of them have a black skin, clothing in rather neutral colours, and caps on their heads; Leno a baseball type and Gustavo the same kind of flat cap as Amauri, and many other black men in Recife. The two men, around 30 years old, have been attending the event nearly every week for years, to enjoy music—reggae and *afoxé* in particular—and to be in a place where they can escape the racism which they experience in many other Recifen locations on a daily basis.

Several teenage boys pass by to sell merchandise varying from carnivalesque Cordel hats to luminous tiaras, silver watches and chocolate candies. Some white men, all of them dreadlocked, sell their handmade bracelets and earrings at the terraces and at the entrance to the square. Another black vendor with a strong Jamaican accent tells me every time I pass by: “hello my friend, do you like-y joint-y?” Looking up from a teenager who has just tried to sell me chewing gums, I notice a lady who must be about 70 years old, dancing at the centre of the square. Though bended forward and with un-smooth muscles because of her age, she dances with a lot of spirit and is laughing out loud while doing so. She encourages some teenage girls, dressed in short skirts with tight tops and seated at the ground by the side walk, to join her and dance—without success. After ten minutes a man in his forties, whom I assume to be her son, enters the square and drags her away by the arm. She tries to resist him and shouts for the police to rescue her, again, in vain.

Next to the teenage girls, many other people have entered the *pátio* around 19.30h and are sitting on the sidewalks in front of the São Pedro church, or at the door steps of the tourist information centre, the office of the *Núcleo da Cultura Afro-Brasileira*, the *Casa do Carnaval*, and the other buildings that have closed their shutters and doors an hour ago. Meanwhile the centre of the square, which in total measures about 40 by 30 meters, is still in active use by the street vendors and shop employers who are heading home, or those who are just arriving with their carts to sell crisps, *feijão*, *caldinho*, skewers and beverage. *Rastafari* colours are well-represented in the bags, t-shirts and hats of some of the reggae fans already waiting for the event to start. Marcelo, a 25-year old committed to the struggle for social equality who is present at many *cultura negra* events, even has his hair braided with beads in the colours red, yellow and green.

I sit down at the sidewalk next to the São Pedro church for a while with Junior, who just arrived. Last week at *Terça Negra* we got to chat when his boyfriend complimented a friend of mine on his dancing moves. This week Junior wears a tight t-shirt, spiked bracelets and coloured contact lenses. He tells me that he has been attending *Terça Negra*, ‘a tribute to the negroes’, for ten years now, and, though he lives in Olinda, that he attends nearly every edition. He generally goes with his brother, and sometimes even with his whole family. What he enjoys most at the event is the *afoxé* music, because, being *Xangô* himself, he likes to listen to the stories that the songs tell about the *orixás* (deities of the Afro-Brazilian religions). Also, just as for Leno and Gustavo, *Terça Negra* offers him a space to feel at ease, welcome—though in my perception his skin colour is not even that dark, he considers himself negro and sees *Terça Negra* as a place where people are not racist. At *Terça* Junior feels that everybody accepts him as he is. We look at a guy who is making his way towards the stage to have a chat with Amauri and Junior Afro, Recife’s Secretary of

culture. I have seen the first guy at every *cultura negra* event I attended in the past months. He stands out of the crowd, because though not having any physical features of an Indian, nor of a negro, he always wears a hat with feathers in it, reminding of an Indian headdress. I ask Junior why he thinks a white-skinned person might wear an Indian hat to a negro event, to which Junior replies, “because he likes it, because here everybody from these different groups come. Here it’s a mixture. Here everybody is accepted. You’re with a *povo* [people] that’s open, cool, it’s a type of people you can laugh and make friends with”. Demir, Amauri’s co-host of the event, has just arrived and joins the group. It is 20.00h and the first group to perform is almost ready, time for Amauri and Demir to mount the stage. Junior kisses me goodbye and walks to a group of men, friends whom he met through the event.

With a low voice Demir and Amauri shout through the microphone: “Teeer-çaaaaa Neeeee-graaaa! *Axé, Terça Negra!*” Both of them have a little piece of paper in their hands from which they read the events that will take place in the upcoming weeks: a reggae show in Rua Moeda on Friday, a *coco* festival in Campina do Barreto, and of course November is coming up, the month of the *consciência negra* (negro consciousness), with on 4 November the *Caminhada dos Terreiros* (march against discrimination of religions). They present the programme for today and introduce the first group of tonight’s edition: “from the *comunidade Os Coelhos*, give it up for Rosa Vermelha!”

Everybody turns towards the entrance of the square, as from the Avenida Dantas Barreto the beat of the *alfaias* appear; big drums with a low sound, used for the genre *maracatu de nação*. Dancers enter the square in colourful dresses with hoops at the bottom so that they take up two square meters per dancer, and the audience has to make space. Some of the dresses have silver and gold decorations and look like royal dresses of European court styles from colonial times, while others remind more of African dresses because of the flowered patterns, in combination with beaded necklaces and clothes wrapped around the hair of the women. Some of the dressers are somewhat simpler, without hoops and without many decorations. Two dancers seem to be men, they also wear big dresses and makeup. With clenched fists and bended elbows, the dancers move their arms up and down, or they turn around in circles, following one hand which they hold up in the air. Two of them dance with on their hand a doll dressed in royal clothing, wearing a crown. Behind them, two royal couples appear: a prince and a princess, and the king and queen. They look like a Portuguese royal court party, wearing fancy dresses with lace, feathers, pearls, shiny decorations, white gloves, long veils and crowns on their heads. Behind the king and queen, boys with white barrister wigs hold up an umbrella and carry the veils.

Wilson, the guy with the Indian headdress, walks in front of the dancers and urges the audience to make a space for the dancers. He gestures the percussion group to come forward also. The percussion group consists of about 15 *alfaias* and other instruments such as the *caixa* (snare), some *agbés* (gourds with beads tied around them) and a *gonguê* (a cowbell that is hit with a drumstick). They are played by mostly boys age eight to sixteen, and by Sady and Samuel, who together with the dancer Rosângela form the triplet that has created the maracatu. It is a rather short performance, about fifteen minutes only, in which the group performs four different songs, including the song that was written by Sady and Samuel:

Quando encontro a minha nação minha rainha já chegou
Quando eu toco no baque virado, Rosa Vermelha é nação nagô
Nagô nagô, nagô se coroou
Quando eu toco no baque virada, Rosa Vermelha é nação nago

When I meet at the road to my nação² my queen already arrived
When I drum the baque virado, Rosa Vermelha is of the 'nagô' nation
Nagô nagô, nagô³ she was crowned
When I drum the baque virado, Rosa Vermelha is of the 'nagô' nation

Some people shoot pictures or videos of the maracatu with their phones. A Swiss student, who always attends the event together with a guy with blond dreadlocks and tattoos on his arms, writes down some notes; he does a musicological study on a type of rhythmic tones only used in *maracatu*. By the time that Rosa Vermelha has disappeared back into the Avenida Dantas Barreto, the audience has increased a lot, though more people are still arriving. Many people told me that in the past the event used to attract thousands of people, but today I would estimate the audience to consist of about 500 people. One of them is Ana Paula. I have just noticed her at the terrace at one of the restaurants, with her one year old daughter. In her busy job as councillor of the *governador* in the area of *cultura negra*, the few times a year that she has an evening off on Tuesday she likes to spend it at the patio. Dancing to the music of *cultura negra* is the way in which she can really entertain herself and relax. Her one year old girl does not even cry when they stand next to the *alfaias*, she just watches the musicians, and later dances between Ana Paula's legs.

Fashion-wise, what immediately catches the eye at the patio is the big crowd of youths who in their fashion emphasise their black bodies and their African roots. The many women with afro hair, braids, with dresses and accessories in bright colours and with flowered patterns make a clear identity statement within a society in which many black women straighten their hair or dye it blond, and in which the beauty of women is still largely decided by European aesthetics. Many young black men at *Terça Negra* also participate in this fashion movement, for instance by wearing their hair in dreadlocks, braided or afro, by wearing spiralled earrings that many people of *Xangô* wear, and some through wearing West African ropes, or through referring to certain music genres of the *cultura negra* scene on their t-shirts. Many people are also present however who do not seem to invest particular effort in or want to make a statement through their fashion. Many boys wear baseball caps and Bermudas, some with t-shirts of Santa Cruz or competing football teams, a fashion common among *favelados*.

Amauri and Demir are on stage again. As the next group is delayed, they fill the time by repeating once more all the events of *cultura negra* to take place this month. Also, Demir who has re-baptised himself the 'Wikipedia man', gives us some facts about the *orixás*. Being in his forties, Demir has been engaged in *cultura negra* for a long time, and is an active figure in the reggae scene of Recife and Olinda. Nearly white-skinned, he does consider himself negro, as his family has African origin and as he is touched inside when he hears a beautiful *afoxé*. He has even written some *afoxé* songs himself, as well as many reggae tracks. Though he is not of the religion himself, Demir got more interested in *Xangô* recently. He refers to himself as someone who is still in the process of learning about his African roots, for instance by reading about the

² *Nação* means nation and originates from the different African nations from which people were brought to Brazil. Nowadays, though the ancestors and cultural practices of the different nations have been mixed, the word *nação* is used to indicate the different streams within the *Xangô* religion.

³ *Nagô* is the name of the most common nation in Pernambuco (as well as of the population of the former Ketu Kingdom in west Africa)

stories of the *orixás* on the internet, and he wants to take the audience with him on this journey. So every week he surfs on Wikipedia and writes down some facts about an *orixá*, which he then reads to the audience. Today he tells of Oxossi, deity of the forests.

As the second band still hasn't arrived, the DJ takes over and starts playing hip hop music mixed with a touch of funk. Quickly, a circle is created at the centre of the audience, and a group of young men enters the circle to, one by one, show their break-dance moves. Their moves are diverse and impressive enough to keep the audience entertained for nearly an hour. The group of dancers, who have tones of skin colour varying from white to black and most colours in between, combine rhythmic with acrobatic movements. On the one hand, the *roda de* (circle of) *break-dance* appears a competition in which all show how skilled they are, while on the other hand the guys seem to be a team: some dance combinations together, others use each other's hands to step on before making a backward flip into the air, and everybody is patted on the shoulder or hugged when having presented his moves. One of them, Gabilo, I only recognise when he waves at me, as he has recently cut off his dreadlocks to enhance his chances of finding a job.

When a drunk 50-year old man starts dancing in the middle of the circle, people initially laugh. After a minute, one of the break-dancers puts his arm around the drunk's shoulder and guides him away to make space for his colleague. The man quickly returns however, and one of the boys who has been standing aside me with a bottle of glue under his nose runs up to the older man and kicks him in the crouch. The man initially gets angry, but is too drunk to follow the boy and leaves the *roda*. The boy walks back to a group of boys and girls, all around the age of 8 to 14, and all of them appearing to be high. They laugh loudly about the boy's kick. Another boy runs up to the group and shows everybody that he got himself a bottle of soda, which he and a girl finish together.

Every now and then the circle is used for *capoeira*, a Brazilian martial arts dance, in which the break-dancers also participate. Shirley is always one of the first to enter the circle to challenge somebody to dance *capoeira* with her. After many years of struggling to get accepted as *capoeirista* as a woman, and to make her living out of the art, she sees it as her duty to show the audience that women can also participate in *rodas de capoeira*. Moreover, next to being professor at the *Movimento pró crianças* in Os Coelhos, at night she teaches *capoeira* voluntarily to both boys and girls in her community. When she has a Tuesday off and when she can bring her seven-year-old daughter to her mother, she takes the girls of her classes to *Terça Negra* to stimulate them to participate in the *rodas*. Just as for Ana Paula, *Terça Negra* is the one moment of the week she has to herself, in which she can just dance without worrying about anything.

Somewhat before 20.00h, a remarkable amount of gays and transgenders started to enter the pátio de São Pedro. The ones who stand out most are the divas among the transgenders: women with male features in their faces and bodies, dressed in short skirts, on high heels, with long hair, epilated eye brows and make up, using exuberant and feminine body language and dancing with a lot of energy. Some immediately leave when they hear the hip hop music playing, many others form a separate circle where they dance in ways that do not remind of hip hop movements, more of ballet and other genres. Other transgendered audience members catch less attention. Michelle for instance is visiting the event for the first time today, and she stands with her arms crossed and her shoulders bended at the back of the square, just observing the event. She used to be a man but is now a woman. Or perhaps she is only trying out the looks of a woman just for today; I don't ask her as I don't want her to think my interest is with her sexuality rather than with her as a member of the *cultura negra* scene. She is very shy, hardly looks into my eyes

when I talk to her, and waits for her friend to reply. She wanted to see what the event is like as she had heard from friends that *Terça Negra* attracts a nice audience among whom you can feel at ease, and as she feels connected to the *cultura negra* as she has recently joined a *Xangô* religion.

The main attractions for her and many others are about to start: the *afoxé* performances. The performances are often called the '*Candomblé* or *Xangô* of the street', because the music is inspired by the music that accompanies religious rituals in the *terreiros* (*Xangô* houses) and because the songs praise and call upon the *Xangô* deities. The first *afoxé* to perform is Omô Nilê Ogunjá. The *afoxé* groups are generally big, and consist of so many musicians that they only leave space on the stage for one or two people to dance at the same time. Most of the musicians drum *atabaques*, tall drums typically used in the genre. The others shake the beaded gourds, *agbés*, or hit the *agogô*, a double bell which has two different pitch heights when beaten with a wooden stick. The rhythm is different from rhythms audible in western music, and it took me some time to get used to and recognize the rhythm—just as with the *maracatu*. The melodic part of the music is provided only by the voices of the singers: a male and a female lead singer and a background choir of five men and women, who mostly by echoing the lead singers' lyrics. All performers wear white robes with blue patterns drawn on them, and necklaces in the same colours, because blue and white are the colours of the deity of war and hunting, Ogum, to which the group is dedicated. The women wear their hair tied back by big white and blue cloths, and the men wear Nigerian hats in the same pattern of the robes. Only the dancers are dressed differently. The female ones wear dresses that are wide at the bottom so that they spread out as the women dance in circles. The male dancers also wear dresses, in combination with remarkable, high headgear that makes the dancers half a meter taller and that covers all but the face. The headgear of one is filled with peacocks' feathers, and that of the other with a bunch of rope that covers his face.

After every song, the singers address the audience: "Axé!" The lead singer announces that the *afoxé* will tell about '*nossa historia*', our history. She reminds the audience that we live in a country of racism and discrimination, where the majority of the unemployed and the people doing low-paid jobs are negro. It is because of this situation that having the *consciência negra* is so important, the singers state before starting the next song, which goes '*Consciência negra, em toda sua dimensão*' (Negro conscious, in all its dimensions). Other songs narrate about Ogum, nature and mama Africa.

Most people who attend *Terça Negra* do so partially because they love the genre *afoxé*, and those who are of the *Xangô* religion feel the presence of the *orixás* (deities) when the music is played. The ways of enjoying the music are diverse however. A boy with a big frizzy hair cut is dancing by himself with a rug sack on his back. Another guy with his hair in a big bunch of braids, whom I see dancing at nearly all public events of *cultura negra*, always seems completely absorbed in the moment when dancing. The same goes for a girl who is part of the same group of university friends, who also wears her hair frizzy and who has a bright red dress and the African continent tattooed on her shoulder. On her wrist she has the symbols of two *orixás* tattooed: the patron *orixá* of her boyfriend and that of herself. I am at the moment standing with my friends Josuel and Gloria, both of whom live for *Xangô* and for *afoxé*, but who despite that hardly dance. Josuel is standing with his arms crossed and his eyes fixed on the stage. Every now and then he says something about the rituals that are being performed on stage, but mostly he enjoys the music by himself. Gloria moves to the rhythm, the small bottle of spiced liquor (*axé*) that Josuel bought in one hand, a cigarette in the other, and does not lose the tough attitude she has taught herself. Like Josuel, she regularly points out facts about the *afoxé* music to me, and explains that the group that she and her brother are

starting up in Morro da Conceição is not yet as advanced as this one, because they only picked up the initiative a few weeks ago. When the current performance is almost ending, Josuel points out that his *pai de santos* (priest) just passed by, and suggests we have a chat with him. The *pai* is dressed in clothing reminding of West African robes, and sits hand in hand with his boyfriend at the side of the pátio. He tells me about his *terreiro* in Casa Amarela, the *Xangô* religion, and explains me about the unjust misinterpretation of the *orixá* Exú as demonic by Christians. This interpretation is seen as ridiculous by many participants of the scene, as the devil and pure evil were introduced by other religions: African religions only tell stories of people who have both good and bad sides, like humans. A Catholic priest, friend with Josuel's *pai*, passes by and joins the conversation. He and the *pai* are in a Pernambucan group in which several Catholic and *Xangô* priests come together regularly to discuss diverse social issues.

Meanwhile, the final group has started to perform: the *afoxé* Oyá Alaxé from Dois Unidos. Like the previous group, their aim is not artistic only; it also lies in the desire to tell people about the force of *axé* (the life force of all living things) and the religious traditions of the people who were brought to Pernambuco from Africa. That is why in 2008 they released their album '*Ação Afirmativa do Povo do Axé*', Affirmative action of the people of *axé*, and why they now sing lyrics such as:

*Essa beleza negra Olorum quem criou
Vem pro quilombo axé dançar o Nagô
Todos unidos num só pensamento
levando a origem desse carnaval, desse toque colossal
Pra denunciar o racismo*

*This negra beauty that was created by Olorum⁴
Come from your maroon to dance Nagô
All united in just one thought
To take the origin of this carnival, this massive play
To denounce racism*

At 23.30h the shows are over. By then some of the audience members have long gone home as they need to work tomorrow, but the majority does not leave before the last song has finished. As the square is starting to empty, several people are still collecting cans and other objects which they can trade for a little bit of money. A tiny, bent woman with a glittering pink tiara has been making her way throughout the audience all night long to do so already, and is now pulling around a heavy garbage bag with cans. She looks about 70 years old, and is at the event nearly every week. Luiz has also not yet given up his income-generating activities; he strolls through the Avenida Dantas Barreto, where he begs for some coins from the visitors who can afford to go home by taxi. One corner of the patio is not yet empty however; the corner that some call 'New Amsterdam', as it is where some of the older audience members, among whom many activists and musicians, 'smoke joints in peace'. In this corner, a rastafari man, an alternative-looking white-skinned man with a cowboy hat, and some others are playing the tambourine and singing *capoeira* songs for many more hours; they are not yet willing to call it a night.

⁴ The supreme God of the *Xangô* religion

Chapter 4 – From denial of the negro race to ‘everything is negro’: policing the performance of Pernambucan identity

Relations between race, culture and governance in Brazil have been a widely discussed topic for decades. Much has been written on how Brazilian governments have always used culture as instrument to hide the reality of everyday reality of racial inequality, and thereby to shut down critical debate about and contestation of racial politics (Alberto 2008; Caldwell 2007; Da Costa 2010; Fry 1982; Hanchard 1999; Nascimento 1999; Sansone 2003; many more). On the use of culture by the government in the context of Pernambuco, particularly in recent years, existing literature has shed less light. This chapter therefore aims to review recent cultural ideologies adhered to by the Brazilian government in relation to negritude, with a focus on Recife: the views on the meaning of race, blackness, Brazilian identity and *cultura negra* that are behind the government’s actions.

The framework of the Rancièrian thinkers that will be applied to the topic enables a more profound understanding of the sometimes contradicting moves of the government, by exposing the recurrent trends and underlying struggles behind the diverse approaches to racial policies that have existed throughout years. Substantial adaptations have been made to who is being represented at the receiving end of government activities, and to the ‘sensible’ and the Pernambucan identity. In other words, what Rancièrè calls ‘the police’ has undergone many changes to keep up with some of the demands for equality of local, national and international pressures. However, as I will argue in this chapter, one of the main purposes of Recife’s government bodies throughout time appears to have been to prevent the exposure of fragmentation, of the existence of conflicting interests that are more and less represented in the way social spaces are divided over society—in other words, to prevent radical change. I will argue that in a continuous attempt to maintain peace, or a common perception of consensus among Recife’s population, the government engages in a continuous balancing act to de-politicise radical denunciations of the ‘sensible’ and turn them into cultural objects that can be used in the performance of a shared Pernambucan identity.

Before presenting my findings, let me point out the fact that Brazilian government bodies are not the only actors engaged in the policing of the performance of the sensible. The ideologies regarding race and identity which will be discussed cannot be attributed to any group in particular. Rather, the formation of the *mestiçagem* ideology can be expected to be a complex process to which many actors with different interests and intentions have contributed. Responsibility for the creation of the *mestiçagem* ideologies in most literature is attributed to the vague group of actors constituting the Brazilian ‘elite’, particularly the white elite, and authors who have introduced and supported the ideology of racial democracy, in particular the Pernambucan sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987). General agreement exists however that the Brazilian state has played a significant, active and conscious role in upholding the policing activities, as will be discussed in this chapter. While within the scope of this research I am not able to present a full picture

of all elites engaged in the police, the discussion of the government as main police actor aims to give an idea of common perceptions on what Pernambucan society should look like.

At the same time, it should also be noted that the government in Recife is in fact constituted of a complex scheme consisting of diverse actors with different views and interests, meaning diverse views and approaches exist within the government. Hardly any policy documents exist that describe how individual bodies and actors relate to each other and what their different aims, views and levels of influence are. I will describe general ideology trends that I have observed in Recife, while where necessary and possible attributing them to particular actors or bodies rather than the government as a whole. The government representatives interviewed for the study are:

- Lindivaldo Oliveira Leite Junior, the Recife Secretary of Culture of Recife's;
- Edson Axé, director of the *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira*, department of Recife's *prefeitura* (city council) that works with Afro-Brazilian culture;
- Carmen Lelis, government official specialised in history and patrimony at the *Fundação da Cultura*, the cultural foundation of Recife's *prefeitura*;
- Inaldo Pontes, government official specialised in Pernambucan celebrations at the *Fundação da Cultura* of the Recife *prefeitura*;
- Ana Paula Carneiro de Santana, advisor specialised in *cultura negra* at the Pernambuco state Secretary of Culture.

4.1 The *mestiçagem* ideology as basis for the 'sensible' in Brazil

Having acquired its independence from European powers only relatively recently in the early 19th Century, to Brazil the search for a national identity that both demonstrates its modern character yet also its independence and difference of Western Europe has been an urgent matter throughout the 20th Century (De Sousa & Nascimento, 2008; Alberto, 2008, p. 20; Callaway, 1999; Dunn, 1999, p. 342; Burns, 1968; Caldwell, 2007; Fry, 2000). The well-known publication of the *Cannibalist Manifesto* by Andrade in 1928 is one of the oldest pleas for the use of culture in the performance of a 'radical' and 'anti-colonialist' Brazilian identity towards the rest of the world (in Dunn, p.243 and in McCann 1999, p.478). This anti-colonialist character has manifested itself in a national identity that is grounded in the perceived tolerance towards and the inclusion and mixture of races in Brazil, commonly referred to as the *mestiçagem* (miscegenation) or the melting pot ideology. Within this ideology Brazilians are not perceived of in terms of race, but rather, as a mixture of different origins. 'Race' is a concept that is seen as nonexistent, not relevant, and even potentially dangerous for the Brazilian case (De Sousa & Nascimento; Fry).

On a national level, the mixture character is emphasised through the country's self-appraisal for never having had legal racial differentiation, and its celebration of the beauty of '*mestiços*' (people with mixed genetic backgrounds) and of cultural products such as the samba and *feijoada* (a dish that used to be prepared by slaves) as representations of the inclusion of African, next to Indian and European influences (Alberto, p. 19; Sheriff, p. 15). On a more regional level in Pernambuco, this mixed character is manifested mainly in the identity of the *nordestino* or the *pernambucano*, which from the early 20th Century onwards have generally been portrayed as races on their own (Blake, 2011; LaFevers, 2010, p. 33; McCann, p. 117). For a big part of the 20th Century, next to being "devoid of African racial characteristics", Afro-Brazilian

religious practices were eradicated from the Pernambucan identity by ruling elites (Blake, p. 19). Despite the fact that since independence Afro descendents have constituted the majority of the Pernambucan population⁵, Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Brazilian culture are generally depicted as minority and as something from the past, a social group that does not exist anymore as it has been mixed with indigenous and Europeans, into the *nordestino* or *Pernambucano*. The folkloric stereotype of this identity is a mixture of indigenous and European phenotypes, thereby again downplaying the existence of Afro-Brazilians in Pernambuco.

While the *mestiçagem* ideology rejects many European and North American racial views and practices by presenting itself as the tolerant alternative, many western values and aesthetics regarding what is modern were however upheld throughout the 20th Century. Within this mixture of races and cultures it was the white as opposed to the black body that was generally seen as more modern and beautiful (Sansone, 2003; De Sousa & Nascimento, p. 131; Mountian & Calvo-Gonzalez, 2011; Skidmore, 1974; Guimarães, 1999). Moreover, initially the use of the melting pot ideology by the state and other elites in Brazil was still based on the expectation and hope that over time the mixed-raced population would 'whiten', which was expected to enhance the country's chances for development (Fry, 2000; De Sousa & Nascimento, 2008, p. 131; Skidmore, 1974). This was actively pursued by the state for instance through policies that stimulated immigration from European countries.

Since the 60's, a debate has emerged that questions the racial democracy in Brazil, and which by now has influenced academic and public discourse, as well as the Brazilian state, to recognise the existence of strong disparities between parts of society and the relation between these disparities and skin colour (Alberto; Sansone; Hanchard, 1999; Mitchell, 1999; Nascimento, 1999; Simões, 2006; Telles, 2004; Fry, 2000; many others). Racial discrimination in Brazil is generally perceived as a rather complex process however; because of its disguised character, which I will discuss further on, and because of the fact that its contestation is often based on prejudices regarding skin colour in combination with other factors such as class, age, occupation and fashion. Sansone describes how a persistent stereotyping that depicts black bodies as inherently different from white bodies can be seen as the core of this ongoing racism. Whereas whites are generally depicted as being intellectual and technical, blacks tend to be characterised as musical, sensual, physically strong (p.162), and as 'antithetical to modernity' and in 'opposition to "the mainstream"' (p.174).

Critical analyses of this myth of racial democracy have led many authors to conclude that the *mestiçagem* ideology does not only serve the construction of a national Brazilian identity, but also to hide the reality of everyday racism that the majority of the black population suffers from till this day, and thereby to shut down critical debate about and contestation of racial politics (Alberto; Caldwell, 2007, pp. 41-43; Da Costa, 2010; Fry, *Feijoada e soul food: notas sobre a manipulação de símbolos étnicos e nacionais*, 1982; Hanchard; Nascimento; Sansone, 2003). The refusal to acknowledge race forces an identity of *mestiçagem* upon the overall Brazilian population, to which not all can relate. This limits the control of blacks over the construction of their own identities (Alberto; Da Costa), and is generally seen to have been successful in eliminating distinctive Afro Brazilian identities throughout time (Fry, 2000; Marx, 1998). The oppressive character of this shared identity, at least in origin, becomes clear from Blake's description of

⁵ Depending on who you ask and how you define Afro descendent, for as will be discussed, features of race, colour, and descent are flexibly attributed to persons. According to government representatives and other Recifenses I talked to, currently 60% of the Pernambucan population self-identifies as negro.

how white ruling elites in the early 20th Century constructed the *nordestino* identity partially with the aim of repressing rebellions by indigenous and Afro Brazilians, by constructing the identity of the *nordestino* as “a docile, hardworking agriculturalist, not a runaway slave, rebel, bandit, or unionized worker who challenged the social and political status quo” (p.9).

To rephrase the previous within the theoretical framework of Rancière’s thinking, the *mestiçagem* ideology has constituted the ‘sensible’, or the common perception of what Brazilian society should be like, as a society in which racial differences do not exist anymore and are not important in deciding people’s place within society, as people of diverse backgrounds have mixed their races and cultures into one happy mixture. In this ‘sensible’, blacks therefore do not really exist, and those who have a black skin are presented as *mestiços* who next to being black will probably also have phenotype characteristics, ancestors and practices of European and indigenous origin embodied in them. In terms of values and aesthetics, nonblack bodies and western behaviour and religion are still favoured within this mixture. The Brazilian ‘sensible’ therefore takes on a misleading guise: presenting the ‘sensible’ to be inclusive of every individual living in Brazil, while in practice used to disguise and redirect attention from the unequal distribution of social spaces in Brazil. Rancièrian thinkers would call this a typical feature of post-political consensus governance, in which governing elites forestall “the articulation of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories [...] and assemblages” (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 10) by policing the ‘sensible’ in a way that instead it promotes a sense of unity among the population.

The state’s struggle for stability and the policing of cultural expressions

Cultural objects are probably the most important, or at least the most visible policing instrument in upholding the *mestiçagem* ideology, in the reconfirmation of the ‘sensible’ and the strengthening of people’s sense of being included in it. Music, dance, graphic arts and other media, public activities and celebrations, football and other national symbols present Brazil as a happy mixture of people who despite their diverse looks and class are celebrating, dancing and making music together, and who enjoy the cultural products of the diverse groups united among them. Presentation through these cultural objects disperses this image to all segments of the Brazilian population, in an entertaining and participatory form. At the same time, cultural politics can also be seen as counter weight to forestall the political potential of cultural objects of the population, particularly the population most diverging from the ‘sensible’. Cultural objects are what Negri & Hardt call ‘common property’; since everybody has access to them and can participate in their construction, the objects have the revolutionary potential to sketch alternative aesthetic orders, in which what and who is beautiful, modern, capable, or sensible is being denounced. Thus, cultural expression forms, particularly of marginal populations, provide risks to the stability of the performance of the ‘sensible’. As the following paragraphs illustrate, Brazilian police orders have tried to co-opt radical aesthetic alternatives into de-politicised artefacts that confirm the Pernambucan identity.

Sources as recent as 2010 describe how the government has always had a tight grip on cultural expressions and the ways in which these represent Brazilian identity, which Alberto calls the “policing [of] the image of Brazilian racial democracy” (2008, p.30, see also Da Costa, 2010 and LaFevers, 2009). In Recife, the following are only some examples of the government bodies that engage in cultural politics, next to the city and state levels of the Secretary of Culture: *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira*, the FUNDARPE (Foundation of Historical and Artistic Patrimony of Pernambuco), the *casa de carnaval* (carnival house), the *casa da cultura* (house of culture), the *Fundação da Cultura* (cultural foundation), the *espaço multicultural*

(the multicultural space) and directories of the preservation of cultural patrimony and of the cultural space of the Pátio de São Pedro. Expressions that are critical of society or that display the ways in which the 'sensible' in fact does not include everybody on an equal basis, are repressed or subtly incorporated into the state apparatus, so that they can be converted into cultural objects that strengthen the *mestiçagem* identity instead. Da Costa's study of an *afoxé* and black activist group in Riberão Preto, in the state of São Paulo, demonstrates for instance how state officials continuously favour black artists who do not politicise blackness in their art and who do not challenge "commonsense understandings of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices and knowledge" (2010, p.385). The growing institutionalisation of culture by the state and its use of resources to influence who gets to perform what version of culture makes it difficult for black Brazilians to create alternatives to the versions that confirm the Pernambucan identity, according to the author.

Discussions about the reality of racial inequality, racism and the existence of groups who are not included in the distribution of social spaces are thus avoided by the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian elements in mainstream Brazilian culture, through leaving out their political and normative dimensions and their representations of African and Afro-Brazilian history (Da Costa). What is left of the African influences, Da Costa states, are mere "folkloric symbols, reified 'traditions,' or survivals of the past, rather than complex, changing, and 'modern' forms of knowledge and sociality" (p.376, emphasis original). In a similar vein, Lopes argues that "it is racism that de-Africanises popular music in Brazil" in order to prevent rebellion against the status quo, by stripping black Brazilians of their African identity (2005, translated from Portuguese). The most commonly discussed example of this is that of the samba (Béhague, 2006; Sheriff; Pravaz, 2008; Owensby, 2005). Originating from the Afro-Brazilian population and narrating topics inspired by lives of blacks in the margins, throughout the 20th Century the genre has moved from a practice of the margins towards being a symbol of the Brazilian identity. Since its growing popularity among broad segments of the population in the 1930's, the government has tried to influence the genre in order to make it more suitable for Brazilian identity and the performance of the sensible. For instance, as Owensby describes, "[w]here independent *sambistas* emphasized the character of the *malandro*, a kind of urban black or mulatto trickster who lived by his wits and charm at the margin of legality, the government [tried to push] lyrics praising hard work, discipline, and sacrifice" (p.332, see also (Matos, 1982)). Though not fully successful in this attempt, in this shift towards inclusion in the mainstream Brazilian culture the samba has become more about glitter and glamour and people of different skin colours dancing together than about daily lives of blacks in the margins of society.

In Pernambuco, a cultural expression that could potentially threaten the 'sensible' perception of the *nordestino* identity is the *maracatu de nação*. In its representation of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions and its direct relation to practices of slavery, *maracatu* illustrates the existence of an Afro-Brazilian population that is not compatible with the identity of the *pernambucano*, and reminds society of the racist nature of historical interaction between whites and blacks. This tension is illustrated in De França Lima and Guillen's statement that "*maracatu* today is in a symbolic dispute between *pernambucanidade* and *africanidade*" (Callaway, 1999, p. 37). Again, we can discern how the Brazilian state has attempted to adapt the *maracatu* in order to incorporate it into a version of common heritage that strengthens the sensible. Institutions such as the *Federação Carnavalesca* (created already in 1935), the *Casa do Carnaval*, and the more recent *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileiro*, have for instance always had a strong influence on cultural expression in Pernambuco through establishing standards. Thereby, in the words of LaFever, they have been "greatly impacting otherwise naturally occurring adaptations and changes within the cultural

manifestations, effectually homogenizing certain groups and characteristics as well as fomenting distinctions between what are today referred to as *maracatus de baque solto* and *baque virado*” (LaFever p.48; see also De França Lima, 2008). LaFever and De França Lima describe how, based on the depiction of Pernambucan identity and culture as something based in authenticity and tradition, the standards for *maracatu* that were set by the *Federação Carnavalesca* in the 40’s established what was considered authentic amongst Recife’s *maracatus*. In this process, *maracatu* came to represent Afro-Brazilian customs and religion as folklore, as patrimony of the past, rather than as expression form of people who currently do not identify with cultural objects that represent the ‘sensible’. At the same time however, the Pernambucan identity has also adapted itself to recognise and thereby represent part of the marginal population, by broadening up to include references to its Afro-Brazilian heritage.

These interactions between the creation of subversive cultural objects that undermine the ‘sensible’ on the one hand, and the struggle of the government to exert control over these objects in order to safeguard the stability and credibility of the ‘sensible’ on the other, are illustrative for the threatening potential of cultural expressions to enforce political change. Any Brazilian who does not feel included in the Brazilian *mestiçagem* identity has the possibility to create new cultural objects that express the unrealistic supposedly inclusive character of the identity. The Brazilian government continuously responds to this threat by trying to incorporate as much as possible elements of the subversive cultural objects that can contribute to upholding the myth of a *mestiçagem* identity, while forestalling the subversive elements of the cultural objects. This way, it attempts to continuously mask the gap that exists between the ‘sensible’ and the ‘part of no part’, the margins.

4.2 The turning point: from *mestiçagem* to multi-racial to multicultural neo-*mestiçagem*

Fry (2000), De Sousa & Nascimento (2008), Owensby (2005) and others have pointed to the struggle that Brazil seems to undergo in admitting the existence of racial inequality without giving in to policies that further dichotomise and re-introduce a racialised interpretation of individuals. Though racial inequality has long been admitted to exist, these authors describe how the image of *mestiçagem* and racial democracy have remained characteristic for the imagination of Brazilian identity, even though these lines of thinking seem incompatible at first glance. Many questions are still left open regarding how these opposing tendencies have been incorporated into policies in practice, and regarding how this has changed the way that the national and regional identity are now perceived and presented. Specifically on the case of Recife and Pernambuco hardly any literature exists yet on racial politics since the late 90’s. In this subchapter I present my perceptions on how government entities in Recife have developed the ideology on race and Pernambucan identity in the 21st Century, and I will discuss to what extent this has led to political change.

4.2.1 Affirmative action in Recife

As described in most literature on the Brazilian government and race, the existence of a racial democracy is hardly still believed to be true by Brazilian officials, who have commonly acknowledged the fact that racial inequality is a substantial and serious problem to Brazilian society. The first presidential mandate to

acknowledge this was that of president Cardoso (1995-1999), who installed an Inter-ministerial Working Group to Valorise the Black Population. In 1996 for the first time the existence of racial groups as targets of public policies was officially recognised (Htun, 2004, p. 67; Reichmann, 1999, p. 21). This would introduce the short period in which the government turned towards affirmative politics to emphasise the existence of 'racial' and other subgroups through using terms such as 'negro', 'black', 'Afro', but also '*indígena*' (indigenous). In the case of Recife, many activities are even devoted specifically to these subgroups, such as '*Terça Negra*', or '*pólo Afro*' (the stage where Afro music is performed during carnival). The following statement from 2004 on the website of the Recife *prefeitura* by Claudilene Silva (former director of the *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira*, who is also an MNU militant) shows the anti-*mestiçagem* character of some government representatives in the early 21st Century:

Who never heard the phrase: "racism does not exist in Brazil"? Evaluating the existing racial inequalities, Brazil is a racist country of prejudices and discrimination, which has taught a big part of its children, negros and negras, to be a caricature of the white population, while being treated as inferior beings. To disclose the day of the consciência negra [negro consciousness], to know our heroes, to identify ourselves with our ancestors; these are essential elements for us to be able to turn ourselves in subjects of our own history. (my translation)

Since abandoning the racial democracy view, many affirmative government policies have been implemented on national and regional levels in Brazil in order to materialise the perception that racial inequality and thus racial differences exist and that this needs to be combated. For instance, the government has come to include many black representatives, among whom several black activists. Recife's current Secretary of Culture for instance, Lindivaldo Junior, is an Afro-Brazilian who has been state coordinator of the MNU before working for the *prefeitura*. Quotas for blacks have been implemented in both the public and private sectors and in universities in several Brazilian states, though as will be discussed further on, in Recife this trend is less strong. Government bodies geared towards policies for inclusion of the Afro-Brazilian population have moreover been created; in Recife, next to the afore mentioned *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira*, the departments of education and health also have sub-departments focussing on the needs of the Afro-Brazilian population. Within the national education system, curricula have been included and professors have been trained to teach about the history of the Afro-Brazilian population and racist structures. Moreover, as one of few cities in Brazil, Recife has incorporated the Month of the Negro Consciousness in the official calendar, within which activities are supported and organised, among others by the *Núcleo*, that aim to contribute to society's 'reflection about the incorporation of the negro in Brazilian society' (UNICEF, 2011).

These initiatives, as well as a study performed by Htun, indicate that indeed, the majority of government representatives believe in the cause of tackling racial inequality. Global pressures such as through the World Conference on Racism in Durban 2001, but also the desire to maintain Brazil's image as social and liberal country, and pressure of activists and academics are likely to have contributed to the ideology shift. However, Htun argues that perhaps more important for the shift is the fact that key governmental actors since 1995 have taken initiative based on their personal sympathy with the anti-racist

agenda⁶. Even more, Htun describes how governmental elites developed affirmative action policies before the demand for it grew strong in society at large (pp.79-81).

4.2.2 The celebration of the multicultural

While openly denouncing racial inequality in such clear terms as presented above and at times introducing affirmative policies aimed specifically at the Afro Brazilian population, the new Pernambucan identity as presented by the government is in fact not characterised by a multi-racial population that consists of different groups, with essentially different characteristics and life styles. As said before, a wide-spread and persistent reluctance seems to exist in Brazil to accept the idea that Brazilian society is constituted of races that are essentially different. Da Sousa & Nascimento conclude that Brazil is at a crossroads at which it can go two directions: either it can maintain the national identity of a racial democracy and keep working towards this utopian goal, or it can opt for a racialised view of Brazil as “post-modern multicultural society” (pp.140-142). Note that in Rancière’s view, neither of these approaches can be political or democratic, as in both cases it is still the government that decides how blackness and Pernambucan identity are represented and how this representation is policed. In the late 90’s and first years of the 21st Century the government has moved towards the direction of racial affirmation. However, I found that the government in Recife is now adopting an approach that under the banner of multiculturalism aims to combine the acceptance of the existence of racial inequality with the continued attempt to promote a sense of union, cordiality, tolerance and mixture.

Within this new Pernambucan identity, the multicultural character of the population is not denied but celebrated as the state’s biggest strength. Critics have feared that the multicultural view on Brazilian identity would cause a dichotomous perception of blacks versus nonblacks. They see the racialised ‘multicultural’ view as a concept taken from the United States or international human rights discourses, and do not see how it would serve the Brazilian case to fight racism through the affirmation of the idea of ‘race’ (De Sousa & Nascimento; Htun; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1999; Fry, 2000). In their view, this will only lead to a harmful dichotomy instead of union, which would moreover not do justice to those social groups other than blacks who are also discriminated against in Brazilian society. In the case of Recife, the government however aims to avoid this dichotomous thinking by placing an obvious emphasis on the *multi* of ‘multicultural’. Throughout the year the multicultural character of the city is for instance emphasised through activities within the *Programa Multicultural*, such as the three-day *Festival Multicultural* in October. Carnival in Recife has even been re-named *Carnival Multicultural*, and in between performances, as well as in promotion material, is praised almost nonstop for being ‘the most multicultural carnival of Brazil’ or even the ‘most diverse and democratic celebration of the world’.⁷

In these ‘multicultural’ programmes, next to the representation of *cultura negra*, genres of indigenous descent, of the interior, and many culturally mixed genres are presented. The participation of people from different parts of town and with different income levels is also understood as contributing to

⁶ Already in the late 1950s and early 1960s, former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso for instance explored race relations for the writing of his dissertation and books; in the 1980s he already advocated for improving the situation of Afro-Brazilians.

⁷ See the website of the *Programa Multicultural*: <http://www.recife.pe.gov.br/fccr/multicultural/> and the website of Carnival Multicultural: <http://www.carnavaldorecife.com.br/>, also to get an impression of the colourful visual representations of the meaning of ‘multicultural’ by the *prefeitura*.

the multicultural character, and is enhanced by the government's support of artists from *comunidades*, and through the decentralization of activities. Carnival and the *Programa Multicultural*, next to the big stages in Recife Antigo, take place at smaller stages and within activities throughout the city, many of them in *comunidades*. Next to diversity in terms of race, neighbourhood and wealth, the government moreover supports cultural activities for the inclusion of other marginal groups under the multicultural banner, such as Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders (LGBT) and religious minorities. Lastly, the diversity of artistic disciplines is also understood as contributing to the multicultural character. Thus, the government has developed the aesthetics of the representation of Pernambucan identity and has shifted the accent within 'multicultural' from a racial matter to a matter of groups, genres and disciplines that for diverse reasons need to be included and positively affirmed in society at large.

While the existence of an Afro-Brazilian population is not denied, no clear demarcation is made between where 'black' begins and 'nonblack' ends. When answering my question what 'negro' means, Edson Axé, Lindivaldo Junior and Carmen Lelis all responded that 'negro' is not so much a racial concept and that they think it is not really possible to differentiate between negroes and non-negroes. Rather, to them the term is an instrument, a word that people who feel marginal in Recife society can use to show pride of themselves, to counter the trends of things associated with 'negro' being presented as inferior. Policies that focus on the Afro-Brazilian or negro population, as Axé explained to me, should therefore be seen not so much as focussing on a particular segment of society but as policies to generally change the situation of inequality and prejudices. To talk of and represent '*cultura negra*' for the government representatives is to talk about identity politics: giving visibility to the part of society that is most invisible and underrepresented, and to demand acknowledgement for the hardships that this population has weathered throughout history. In line with this, the *Núcleo* is also against the implementation of racial quotas for universities, as this would assume that access to university is a racial issue, while it is in fact caused by broader social inequalities related to low quality of public education and access to financial resources required to study. While not wanting to define the exact meaning of 'negro', the government representatives I interviewed generally do use the word. Its meaning for them relates to ties with Africa; the people and practices that have roots in the heritage brought to Brazil by African slaves. This way of approaching the concept of negritude without offering a frame within which some people and objects can and some cannot be defined as negro, is seen as typical Brazilian practice that refuses to take on western dichotomous conceptualisations of race, and instead is characterised by "miscibility, flexibility, plasticity and social adaptability" (Owensby 2005, p. 328; see also De Araújo, 1994).

The government representatives continue the celebration of the mixed character of the Pernambucan population, with the alteration that attention for the unequal distribution and treatment within this mixture is demanded, and that rather than being a small and inferior group and culture of the past, the negro population and culture are acknowledged to be an important component—in Junior's view even the main component of Pernambucan identity. Junior and Lelis state that in fact everybody and everything in Recife is negro, and see negro influences as present in everything and as highly essential for the way Recife and its population are. Within the cultural expressions that are most used as representations of Pernambucan identity, the government representatives see Afro-Brazilian influences as hegemonic. Whereas the MNU, as will be discussed in chapter 6.2, aims to differentiate *cultura negra* from mainstream Pernambucan culture, the government to the contrary tries to enhance the population's consciousness of the hegemonic and positive role of *cultura negra* in Pernambucan identity.

Again, we see that a crucial instrumental role is attributed to diverse cultural representations and celebrations in the construction of the new, shared Pernambucan identity. The cultural objects under the multicultural banner serve as the search for a broad common ground, for the construction of consensus on the idea that Recife should be characterised by racial democracy, respect for each other, appreciation for diversity. The idea of multiculturalism is connected to the biggest celebrations of the year, and to all those cultural expressions most popular amongst most everybody in Recife: hardly any Pernambucan will say that they do not like Recife's multicultural carnival with the colourful banners, dance and music of *caboclos*, *capoeiristas*, *sambistas* and *frevo* dancers everywhere throughout town. This is a substantial attempt towards changing society's perception on Pernambucan identity, for it means that every member of the Recife population who enjoys dancing or playing for instance the *frevo*—and every single Recife I met does—is made to participate in this celebration of the diverse influences that have constituted Pernambucan culture. During the activities, democratic representation, tolerance and diversity are continuously praised as beautiful things by people ranging from famous artists, the mayor, and presenters who are also part of the black or gay movement. This consensus on Pernambucan identity is strengthened also by presenting it as natural feature of the Pernambucan population: Pernambucans are presented as being born as cordial, social people, who are proud of their mixed genetic backgrounds. Even their passion for celebration and their creativity are presented as inescapable feature of the *pernambucano*, illustrated for instance by the *prefeitura's* reference to the fact that at the *Festival Multicultural* regional artists demonstrate their 'creative DNA' **Invalid source specified..**

While most people I talked to are positive about this initiative, several activists and politicians also point out that celebrations are only one part of society, and that the situation of inequality in daily life still needs a lot more improvement and government attention. Some activities that are co-organised by the government do in so many words address issues of inequality or the diverse origins of the Pernambucan identity, such as thematic forums within the multicultural programme, the *Caminhada dos Terreiros* (the march against religious discrimination) and recent books published under the Secretary of Culture which amongst others present the black influences in carnival and *frevo*. I have not come across discussions of the causes that can be found in the organisational structures in Recife society today however, which often brings discussions to the conclusion that corruption should be fought and education improved in order to enhance the equal situation of Recifeans. The fact that despite changes in policing approaches the structures that divide Recife into people who are and who are not capable, valuable and thereby able to profit from the ways in which social spaces are distributed, is hardly raised for discussion. Most cultural activities supported by the government do not aim to raise any discussion on the issue of equality at all. Several research participants reverberate what *Terça Negra* attendant and music producer Energia told me, namely that the government in recent years supports mostly cultural activities with aesthetic and entertainment objectives, and shows little interest in socio-cultural programs that use culture to raise debate on political topics. While not so much ignoring and denying the existence of racial inequality, this critique indicates that the government does to an extent still favour cultural expressions that are about entertainment and not so much about criticizing the way in which society is structured. Recent articles also continue describing how a similar avoidance of critical debate on racial inequality continues to exist in the states of Bahia (Baiocchi & Corrado, 2010) and São Paulo (Da Costa, 2010).

Within this identity the colourful celebration of the multicultural has replaced the folkloric image of the 'rustic and authentic' interior (De Albuquerque Junior, 2004; LaFevers, 2010, pp. 28-33). Resistance to

'imported' influences in Pernambuco has always been strong (Teles, 2008, pp. 82-88; LaFevers, p. 59), the Pernambucan identity is therefore represented mainly by those genres that are unique for Pernambuco, or can be argued by Pernambucans to have roots in the state, such as *frevo*, *forro*, *maracatu de nação* and *maracatu rural*, *capoeira*, *mangue-beat*, *caboclinho* and variations of the *samba*. It is these genres that are visible in tourist shops, that are presented at many of the biggest shows in the city, and that are represented at the carnival drawings developed by the *prefeitura* for the use in promotion films, websites and for the decorative banners of the city. Genres such as hip hop, reggae, and *brega* are in fact more popular than these 'Pernambucan' genres among big parts of the population, and are also occasionally supported by the government, but since they are non-local genres they are not seen as corner stones of the Pernambucan identity.

Afoxé, commonly referred to as the '*Candomblé* or *Xangô* of the street', appears to be in the middle of the negotiation process of being embedded in the Pernambucan identity still. It is one of the music genres that are popular in Recife that most openly denounces the state of the situation, the unequal distribution of Recife society, and that often pleas for its listeners to assume the African, rather than the Pernambucan identity. Since its growing popularity in the 80's, it has therefore provided the government with a dilemma, for the subversive character of this genre is so much embedded in this genre that it is difficult to search for common ground with its participants, whereas not trying to embed the genre into the Pernambucan identity implies the acknowledgment that Recife society is fragmented into those who do and those who do not identify with the state of the situation. In my interpretation, government representatives do not pay too much attention to the genre. It is accepted as *cultura negra* and regularly given a stage, in activities such as the 'encounter of the *afoxés*', *Terça Negra* and at occasional Afro-Brazilian religious events in the city. It is moreover one of the official eleven *agremiações carnavalescas*, the eleven categories of Pernambucan carnival genres. Yet, government representatives stress that the genre is one of many *cultura negra* expression forms, and that the MNU's presentation of the genre as the dominant symbol of *cultura negra* creates an exclusive version of *cultura negra* that does not represent those negroes who are not of the *Xangô* religion. By the government it is presented mostly as one of the many colours represented in the multicultural mix, rather than as a genre that aims to raise a critical debate on society. The genre is thus given a place in the Pernambucan identity, but is not commonly used to characterise Pernambucan identity. This may be explained also by the fact that *afoxé* is perceived to be more connected to the overall Afro-Brazilian population in Brazil than to a particular state. That is, in the eyes of most *pernambucanos*, for in the view of Bahians the genre is connected to their state. The fact that much debate exists on the question of whether it is possible that the *afoxé* (also) originated in Pernambuco (De França Lima, 2009) indicates the ongoing struggle to incorporate the genre into the Pernambucan identity. This struggle is illustrative moreover for the flexible approach that is used in constructing identities in Brazil: whether a genre is Pernambucan or not is not determined at its birth, but can be negotiated throughout time depending on its use, adaptations, and the desires of its users.

A genre that in most of my research participants' views strongly represents *cultura negra* as well (though less strongly than *afoxé*) is *maracatu de nação*. This genre is seen as corner stone of the Pernambucan identity, particularly since the increase of the genre's popularity, also globally, after the *mangue* movement. This movement, led by Chico Science, mixed the *maracatu* drums with rock and hip hop influences into the *mangue-beat*. Along with *maracatu rural*, a version that is said to be more mixed with indigenous and European influences, and *caboclinhos*, said to have originated from indigenous tribes,

maracatu de nação has been exlaimed national immaterial patrimony by the FUNDARPE and the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Patrimony in 2007 (FUNDARPE, 2007) and is included in Pernambuco's official *agregiações carnavalescas*. Nowadays, the genre is supported by the government both in its more traditional and religious forms and in the 'post-*mangue*' forms, the non-religious use of *maracatu*'s rhythms and rituals. However, the extent to which the genre is taken as a religious practice that holds meaning in the daily lives of marginal Recifenses today rather than as a folkloric practice of the past, is still questionable. Illustrative for the way in which the *maracatu de nação* (or *baque virado*, another name for the same genre) is perceived and presented by some representatives of the government, is the way in which Carmen Lelis, a nonblack historian working for the Recife *prefeitura*, presented it to me when explaining the *agregiações carnavalescas*. She described how the category *maracatu de baque virado* originates from Afro Brazilian religious traditions, while emphasising that today the majority of the groups are not aligned to a *terreiro* anymore and consist of many nonblacks also. Whether or not this is true, this contrasts the perception of participants of the *cultura negra* scene, who generally describe the *maracatu* as African and as closely related to the Afro-Brazilian religion. To present the expression form as folkloric and as typical for the shared Pernambucan history enables the government to turn it from a symbol of subversion of people who identify as African rather than Pernambucan into a symbol of common ground. The references to unequal distributions, that are much less direct in *maracatu de nação* than those in *afoxé*, can moreover be attributed to complaints about a far historic background of slavery, a topic about which no disagreement exists on whether or not it was horrible.

Discussion

Summarising, I have described how the government in Recife has moved from downplaying the existence of *cultura negra* (early 20th Century) and later the de-politicisation of *cultura negra* and its inclusion in the *mestiçagem* melting pot (±1930s-1990s), to the affirmation of the existence of a black population (±1990s-early 2010s), and finally, towards the celebration of the positive contribution of plural minority groups to the Pernambucan identity (early 2010s-ongoing). Within this current perception of Pernambucan identity, the existence of discrimination of minorities based on (a combination of) factors such as skin colour, religion, sexual preference, place of residence, clothing, etc. is acknowledged and a start is made to revert this. Terms such as 'negro' 'Afro Brasileiro' and 'cultura negra' are not avoided, but generally seen as necessary on the short term as instruments to balance past practices of neglect, by replacing negative associations through enhanced public valorisation and respect for blackness. This is supposed to enable steps in the direction of a more true racial democracy in which nobody and everybody may feel the need to self-identify as negro.

The new Pernambucan ideology still sees the population as a mixture of people who are not essentially different, but demands attention for the unequal distribution and treatment within this mixture without emphasising one particular segment. As can be concluded from an analysis of this approach through the viewpoints of Rancièrè, Swyngedouw, Badiou, Žižek and Dikeç, multiculturalism is per definition a-political. I have described how the celebration of mixture in Recife has been used with the purpose of creating common ground, thereby denying antagonism or the existence of fragmented groups who are more and less benefited by the way society is organised. This consensus, while acknowledging that

the model is still based on a shared utopian longing rather than on reality, represents Recife's population as if every single inhabitant has the opportunity to become equal through an enhanced racial democracy model. At the same time, however, this consensus in the form of celebration and cultural expression is used as a cover up: the issue of how the structuring of society in the current system necessarily creates categories of people who are and those who are not included is left untouched. In Badiou's line of thought, a true attempt to search for universal equality is incompatible with activities that replace the exposure of the truth, of the existence of practices that disrespect universal equality, through the approach of creating consensus.

The aim of using the Rancièrian framework in this matter is not to point out that how the Brazilian governments over recent years have been doing is, to use the words of Rancièr and Badiou, scandalous and wrong. My main aim here has been not to pass a judgment on the government's functioning and intentions and to state that the government does not want the best for Pernambuco's broader population, including blacks and marginal, but to enhance understanding of its governance strategies and views on Pernambucan identity through the analysis of the tensions and balancing acts in which it engages. I have met several government officials whom I believe take the matter of searching for better ways very seriously (as well as officials who do not), who seem to truly believe that the racial and cultural policies they are creating are contributing to a better Brazil. I noticed that many of these politicians are strongly aware of critiques on governance approaches and are very engaged in the reflection on how to implement these critiques to improve the system. These people, and with them I believe the majority of Recife's, might find the link between capitalism and (racial) inequality far-fetched, and rather, search for improvement of the '*convivência*' (way of living together) within the way society is organised and distributed as it is. In their eyes, as opposed to the view of Rancièrian thinkers, the facts that black activists are now part of the government, that black aesthetics are being acknowledged as very important for Pernambucan culture, and that through the *Orçamento Participativo* even those living in the margins can think about the development of their neighbourhood, indicate that radical political changes have occurred, particularly in the past twenty years. Government representatives such as Lindivaldo Junior see the union of the population through an overarching Pernambucan identity as instrumental for pursuing equality, by getting rid of prejudices and discrimination. Government officials I talked to believe that the most potential for the creation of a society in which all members are equal lies in improving the existing system. Rather than searching the conflict between elites and the margins or between whites and blacks, efforts should be invested in strengthening the consensus, on strengthening the population's understanding of the Pernambucan identity as beautiful, exactly because of its diversity.

This is a different perspective from that of Rancièrian thinkers, who state that equality cannot be pursued as an aim through policing practices, but is already inherent in every individual. When equality is being pursued as an aim by government representatives, this indicates that equality is not recognised as basic starting point that every individual already disposes over, but as something that is attainable by individuals only when they can participate in the system created by the elite. Moreover, the authors argue, if capitalist structures are the cause of unequal distribution, which they think is the case (see theoretical framework), then shifting around within this system will not change the fact that some people will always be excluded in order for the capitalist system to work. Thus, they would argue, the 'sensible' has been substantially adapted so that it has enabled many of the previously marginalised members of society, such as black-skinned people or *Xangô* adherents, to now participate in universities, to become rich, or to

participate in the policing of the sensible. At the same time, however, this has created new categories of what is 'sensible', and thereby also new groups of people who are marginal. Thus, some studies have pointed out that those black-skinned people who have managed to become embedded in government bodies are blacks who know how to adapt themselves to white practices, and that for Brazilian blacks to advance in socio-economic life, they need to abide to a set of norms on how to behave that are constructed by the elite (Baiocchi & Corrado, 2010; Sansone, 2003). I however prefer to look at it in terms of 'sensible' and 'marginal' rather than in terms of 'white' versus 'black behaviour', as Brazil has long proven to be subject to social constructions that go beyond racial categorisations. In applying the Rancièrian framework to the Recife case, I interpret the problem to lie not predominantly in *who* participates in the policing of the performance of the sensible, as I currently do not see a particular segment of society being particularly strongly represented neither at the executing nor the receiving ends of governmental policies. Rather, I see the a-political character as situated in the fact that the system in which society is categorised in terms of 'sensible' and not 'sensible' is maintained.

Through the analysis of Pernambucan identity through the Rancièrian framework, this chapter has presented several balancing acts which the Recife *prefeitura* continuously struggles with. The first struggle relates to balancing the absorption of fragmented expressions, some of which affirm identities alternative to the *pernambucano*, while upholding the image of a unified Pernambucan culture. To allow for true democracy, in which there is no oppression of differences, different opinions and different expressions, is antagonistic to what the government perceives to be its duty: to organise, to structure society, to prevent chaos and conflict. The government's main (a-political) strategy to cope with this struggle is the performance of *Pernambucanidade* through music, dance, graphic arts, public activities and celebrations. Through these events the government aims to represent the diversity of people, genres and disciplines that celebrate the existence of differences together, under the multicultural, colourful Pernambucan umbrella. The second balancing act relates to admitting the inequality and problems existing in society without losing face as the governing actor who is in control of the situation.

This chapter has narrated also how throughout history, the interaction between the 'sensible' on the one hand, and marginal populations and cultural expression forms that were unaccounted for in the image of Pernambucan identity on the other, have continuously forced the government to reconfigure the performance of the 'sensible'. Those who identify with the 'sensible' have continuously adapted; by disguising the existence of marginal people and expression forms, by transforming and incorporating them into the sensible, or by changing the 'sensible' perception of what is and what is not Pernambucan, and of who should be included in it. In the words of Lindivaldo Junior: "*Marche mais, e o governo marche atrás*" (which translates into "if you walk more, the government will have to follow"); the more what is accepted in society is challenged, the more the government is forced to adapt what is accepted. Throughout time, cultural objects of different segments of the population have been incorporated into the government body and subtly altered, in a continuous attempt to keep up with the demands of those who fundamentally disagree. At the same time, the adapted versions of the 'sensible' have created new divides among the population, and the distribution of social spaces in Recife is still benefitting the elite much more, and at the cost of, the ones unaccounted for in the new version of the 'sensible'.

Chapter 5 – Reframing the story: experiencing Recife through the lens of the margins

“Before, I didn’t try that much for those roots. I thought: I am negro, because it’s like that. But afterwards I understood that it’s not the colour of my skin that will tell me if I’m of African descent. It’s not the colour of the skin that... There are people who have got the colour negro but who don’t give the minimum, here in Brazil. If they could they would be white, they hide their hair. [...] You close your eyes, and to be negro, you need to have conscience of your history you see? Your history, which was a sad history, a tragic history, a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, but it also had its victories. It wasn’t all lost, it wasn’t just a big loss. That luta [struggle], that conquest, I think that that’s it, we can’t stop, we have potential to keep going in front, it’s not the colour that will decide if you’re good or not, it’s not your face, your posture.”

(Vam, audience member of *Terça Negra*)

In the previous chapter I have discussed how the *police* in Brazil have constructed the identity of the “Pernambucan” in order to disguise the existence of a fragmented population. This identity comes along with a set of other perceptions on what is commonly accepted as ‘sensible’; perceptions about which bodies, which voices, which types of behaviour and ways of thinking are modern, beautiful, capable and trustworthy. These constructions serve in particular to downplay the existence of those groups that profit least from the current distribution of social spaces such as health facilities, (higher) education, comfortable housing, or media. Firstly, they do so by presenting an image of Recife society that is characterised by unity. Secondly, this is pursued through supporting those who are supplementary to the distribution system into participating in upholding the Pernambucan identity and the acceptance of the social distribution, by categorising them as ‘insensible’ if they do not.

In this chapter, I will describe in detail how a group of people who in several ways are some of the most peripheral citizens of Recife interpret the meaning of their marginal negro subjectivity, and what the situation in the margins means in their daily lives. This detailed exploration serves as a basis for chapter 6 and 7, in which I will analyse how the ways in which negroes participate in *cultura negra* represent tensions that exist between elites and the margins, and which egalitarian alternatives the participants of the *cultura negra* scene see to the current organisation of Recife. For that purpose, I have chosen to study one of the groups of Recifenses who diverge from the Pernambucan and the ‘sensible’ most radically, which, as explained previously, I saw represented in the negroes who regularly attend the event *Terça Negra*. Thus, this chapter does not represent experiences of marginal Recifenses in general, but of a particular group of marginal people who self-identify as negro and as marginal, and who rather than trying to abide to, denounce the ‘sensible’ and the Pernambucan identity.

5.1 Negritude: choosing to be different, oppressed, and proud of it

“In Brazil there doesn’t exist a pure race. It’s a dynamic of colonization; the French arrived first, then the Portuguese, then the Dutch. And before that the indigenous already existed [...], and the black slaves, it was all mixed. We are! Look at me for instance. My mother, she has green eyes. My father was a mixture of white with negro. And this is what came out [points at himself]. I am not white, nor negro, so what am I? So you have that option of [choosing] your psychological orientation, of the perspective of which social movements you identify with. They help you to orient yourself, to say “I will become negro”. I am a man with African descent, because of my grandparents. But my family also has people of European origin, whom we respect. But I choose to be negro.”

(Amauri, presenter of *cultura negra* events)

The *Terça Negra* audience members, to different extents, construct their subjectivities in ways that question the existence of one unified Pernambucan identity. The unified Pernambucan identity portrays the population as diverse in looks, origins, and cultural preferences, yet consisting of individuals who essentially all feel part of and identify with one group of Pernambucans. The *Terça Negra* participants, to the contrary, generally emphasise a subjectivity that opposes itself to the Pernambucan identity, by emphasising the existence of fragmentation through self-identifying firstly as ‘negro’ or ‘negra’. Many of the participants distance themselves from the Pernambucan identity still more radically, by connecting their identities firstly to an African identity, before they even consider of themselves as Brazilians. The concept of the ‘Pernambucan *mestiçagem* identity’ is forwarded by myself for theoretical purposes: my research participants do not for instance say things such as “I reject the Pernambucan identity”; or “I present myself in this way because I want to deny the unified *mestiçagem* identity”. However, when presenting themselves to me they do generally say for instance “*Sou Afro*” (“I’m Afro”), “*Sou Africano*” (“I’m African), or “*Sou Afro-Pernambucano*” (I am Afro-Pernambucan). A few participants who are more consciously talking about the issue of race in Recife also discuss the *mestiçagem* theory or racial democracy and discard it. They also self-reference in words that indicate their perception that they are different, that they belong to the margins of Recife society. For instance, through referring to themselves as belonging to ‘*a periferia*’ (the periphery); ‘*o povo das comunidades/ favelas/morros*’ (the people of the poorer communities/*favelas/morros*); ‘*o povo oprimido*’ (the oppressed people); or, occasionally, ‘*os marginais*’ (the marginals); and through calling themselves ‘*favelado*’ (person who lives in a *favela*); or, also occasionally, ‘*alternativo*’ (alternative). As I explained in the introduction, there is not one particular terminology that participants use to refer to their situation in the margins of Recife, and not all participants make use of all these terms. It is based on these different formulations that I refer to the participants as self-identifying as ‘marginal’. Through these identifications as marginal, the existence of inequality in Recife is also emphasised, rather than downplayed.

So, from these alternative viewpoints on Recife society, on the Pernambucan identity, on unity and fragmentation, what is the term ‘negro’ taken to mean? The complex meaning of race in Brazil, in which hundreds of different names exist to describe different phenotypical appearances, has been debated by various authors, such as Sansone (2003) and Owensby (2005). Particularly in a state such as Pernambuco, which is known to have one of the most racially mixed populations of Brazil, nearly every citizen has at least

some European and some African ancestors. As Sansone describes in detail, how people attribute racial identifications to themselves and others can vary per situation: depending on who a person compares herself to or on what kind of impression a person might want to make, in some situations the same person who referred to herself as 'negra' earlier might later refer to herself as '*morena*' (brunette). Race classifications in Brazil depend not just on phenotypical characteristics of bodies, but also on interpretations of age, social class, occupation, and fashion. In *Blackness without Ethnicity*, Sansone paints a picture of the meaning of negritude that is even further distanced from visible features that can be interpreted as 'negro'. He describes that being black in Brazil has almost become a choice for a lifestyle, one in which people present their identity towards the world around them through Pan African symbols, in order to differentiate 'black' culture from 'white' culture.

The following presentation of my ethnographic findings on the meaning of negritude attributed by *Terça Negra* participants will indicate that indeed, negritude by the research participants is not seen so much as a racial denomination, but more as a term to describe a way for people to situate themselves in society. In another sense, my findings differ from those of Sansone. Based on his research in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, he concludes that for most dark-skinned Brazilians, choosing to live the negro life is not motivated by a wish to distance themselves from value systems that structure society. He states moreover that the negro life is manifested mainly in the use of symbolical Pan African cultural references in life style, with the aim of finding alternative ways of being modern, so that blacks can fit into white society. For the majority of my research participants, being negro goes deeper than a symbolical presentation of themselves to the world around them, and, moreover, is often actually used to differentiate themselves from commonly accepted Brazilian values. Next to the difference in locations in which Sansone and I have performed research, the divergences between his and my findings could also be attributable to the fact that Sansone's research population consists mainly of middle class blacks, and mine just of a particular negro population that is more radical than the average population in its denunciation of the sensible.

It took me some time to understand the ambiguous use of the term 'negro' and whether or not in my research participants' view it is related to race or an identity that people are born with. I was given rather contradicting accounts, even by people who self-identify as negroes and who live the '*vida negra*' (negro life) every day. When asking my research participants about the meaning of the term 'negro', many would initially answer that negro is a race or a colour, that negroes are the ones who came from Africa, and the ones who have inherited the African blood from their ancestors. The answers given to one of my next questions in many cases completely discarded the racial dimension of the identification however. This question was: 'Can I, despite being white-skinned, blue-eyed and from a European country, be a negra?' For nearly half of the participants, the answer is 'yes'. To these people, skin colour has been nearly completely replaced by behaviour and attitude in defining negritude. The other half of the participants explain that there are two dimensions of being negro: having a negro body and feeling or acting negro—white persons can be negro in the second dimension. To them, a white person remains a white-bodied person, but can behave negro and have a negro attitude; whereas a black-skinned person can behave white, but remains negro. All of them thus differentiate between race and a sort of behaviour and attitude that they denominate as negro, and for all participants, when they describe the essence of negritude, this latter dimension is more important than phenotypical features.

This does not mean however that racial and ethnic references do not remain important in the ways in which participants speak about negritude. All participants refer regularly to their African heritage, the African blood that flows through their veins, and their ancestors that have been enslaved. In their personal identification they seem to find it important to point out that they are from African descent, particularly those who have less physical negro features, such as Josuel, Demir, and Wilson. In most of the world, Josuel, Demir and Wilson would be interpreted as Europeans rather than Africans. In the interviews they made similar references to the fact that despite these physical features, they do have African ancestors and African blood, in remarks such as that of Josuel: “*Eu sou negro* [I am negro]. *Sou branco* [I’m white], but because I’m a son of a negra I’m *mestiço com sangue do negro* [a *mestiço* with negro blood in me]”. A remark by one of the MNU activists whom I talked to is illustrative for the ways in which negroes flexibly interpret descent in order to explain a shared experience of the world. In discussing my enjoyment of *a vida negra* (the negro life), he remarked: “You might be white, but since you are Dutch, there is a good chance that one of your ancestors had children with an African in colonial times, that’s how it went in those days right? So even through your veins African blood might be flowing!”

The starting point is therefore how you experience the world, which can tend more towards ‘negro’ or more towards European. From there on, nearly anybody can assume a negro subjectivity by making it plausible that they have some African descent. Generally, participants moreover point out that it is up to every individual to decide for themselves whether or not they are negro, and that nobody will stop a white from calling him or herself negro. Thus, Shirley, who initially answered that not just everybody can be negro, after reflecting upon it answered: “But it depends on the road they come from, on what roots they come from. Because I didn’t yet say this, but here in Brazil, there are no whites. Because everybody has some descent of a negro, of the Africans”. This line of thinking is not that different from the *multicultural mestiçagem* view that every Pernambucan is a bit negro. However, in the eyes of *cultura negra* participants, not everybody is negro, only every Pernambucan who feels a stronger connection to his African than to his European descent. Demir, presenter of *Terça Negra* and reggae artist, explains how he chooses to follow his negro, rather than his white roots:

“My colour is *parto* [...] but in a mixed country, a country of Indians that was colonised by the Europeans who brought negroes as slaves, which mixed everything. My brother himself, Almir, he is negro. Because my maternal grandparents were negroes and my paternal grandparents are whites. Somehow he is darker than I am. But you can’t say that he’s more negro than I am, because what is negro for you? It’s not the colour of your skin, it’s what’s inside of me, my feelings, it’s what I feel when I listen to an *afoxé*.”

The essential difference, then, lies in the fact that in the perception of the *cultura negra* scene, the African descent is emphasised as the descent that the participants identify most with, and in the fact that for them, the essence of negritude lies in an alternative place in society, an alternative way of living and of looking upon the world.

These essential characteristics of negritude are often referred to as the *conhecimento*, the knowledge, but also as having the ‘*consciência negra*’ (the negro consciousness), ‘*o sangue negro*’, (the negro blood) or as ‘*viver a cultura negra*’ (living the *cultura negra*). The *conhecimento* can be described as a general attitude, a way of looking at the world and your role in it. It strongly relates to an understanding of or an interest to learn more about the history of the African continent and culture, and of the Afro-Brazilian

population; how they were shipped to Brazil as slaves and how blacks have been oppressed for centuries, and still are today. Gloria for instance describes the meaning of negritude and the *conhecimento* as follows:

“[To be negra and to engage in *cultura negra* means] working on top of our ancestors, the slaves, the *orixás* [deities of the *Xangô* religion]. For me, it is that. To study the religions, and you create a culture on top of that. [...] As if it is a lecture, every day you have more experience, you have to study more. It doesn't stop, you are never finished learning.”

The negro consciousness is also central to Flavio's definition of 'negro':

“Negro is a value of race, of colour, and of your tradition. [But] it is not about the colour of skin, but also of the head. Because when people talk about negro, they only talk about the skin colour right? But it's also about *conscientização* [awareness-raising], the *consciência* [consciousness]. If I have that, that is my true colour. [...] But in Brazil the identification of people is wrong, [...] they never learn the history of our Afro-descendants. [...] [What we have to fight for is] that one day the people will get smart and come to think: *poxa* [damn], this here is *minha cultura verdadeira* [my true culture]. And my parents and my grandparents should have taught me, but I'm learning it with other people who are not from my family now, and I will step up and pass it on right away.”

Having the *conhecimento* moreover implies being proud of who you are, being proud to show the world that you are different, that you are negro. '*Orgulho de ser negro*' [proud to be negro] is a common expression used by people when they explain the meaning of the *conhecimento*, and the following remark by Shirley is characteristic for many participants' ways of referring to their negritude: “I think the colour negro is very beautiful. I myself, when others ask me what I am, white, negro, pardo, I say: 'I am negra'. Always I say I am negra.” The *conhecimento* and *orgulho de ser negro* moreover mean to enjoy living the life of a negro. What '*a vida negra*' means exactly varies per person, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6. Roughly, people agree though that it implies living among other negroes, living in *favelas* and *comunidades*, not being racist, respecting others, preferring immaterial over material values, enjoying *maracatu*, *afoxé* and other expressions of *cultura negra*, not hiding your afro characteristics, and more. Augusto Cesar told me during our interview: “my daughter might have a white skin, but she will grow up as a negra”. He explained that she would grow up understanding the system of oppression in society, respecting people of different colours and backgrounds, and enjoying the *cultura negra*. He proudly showed a picture he had made of her together with the Congolese king and queen from a *maracatu de nação* that performed in Chão de Estrelas. Thus, the participants turn a term that in history has long been of a derogative nature and an identity that is still stigmatised in Recife society today (see subchapter 5.2.1) into a beautiful thing, something to be proud of and to tell everybody about.

Part of the meaning of negritude relates to the awareness of being marginal, of the existence of oppressive structures. This is in fact such an important characteristic of the meaning of negritude, that next to the 'African descent', it is one of the factors that many participants mention first when answering what 'negro' means to them. Shirley for instance answers:

“What does negro mean? Suffering. Negro is not just the body, it's not just colour. [...] I think that it's the class that suffers most. When I talk in relation to 'negro', I see more suffering. [...] If you see who do the heavy jobs, the ones who are doing them most often are negroes. [...] We are still slaves, slaves of the schedule, slaves of work, slaves of your own residence.”

Gabilo also describes the abuse of negroes, without whom Brazil would not be the way it is:

Gabilo: “Osh! It [being negro] means everything. It means that we were slaves. Our ancestors, the negroes, were turned into slaves from Africa. To work as slaves, *a galeira* [the guy, the people]. It is the blacks who suffered most, who work most. The weight of what we did. It means everything. Without the *galeira* we were nothing, *porra* [fuck]! We get used, we weather it all: rain, weight. And meanwhile they [non-negroes] don’t stand a thing, but they think they already have it all.”

Both in the past, and in society of today, the more talkative participants argue that negroes are the persons who were abused as slaves, unappreciated for their contributions to Pernambucan society, and, worst of all, who were robbed of their history, their identity, their culture. From the moment that they kidnapped Africans to use them as slaves, the European colonisers have done all in their power to eradicate African religions, languages, arts, and to exterminate shared memories. This was done for instance by turning the identity of the diverse Africans into the common identity of the ‘slave’, the ‘inferior’, as well as by separating people of the same families and communities so they could not talk in their own languages and practice their culture together (Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil 1978-2002*, 2006, p. 17). The participants see the theft of the black’s identity occurring until today, for instance in the discrimination of the *Xangô* religion and the abuse of *cultura negra*, as will be discussed in the subsequent subchapters. To identify as negro means to raise your voice against this oppression, to “not lower your head just because you are negro”, to regain your identity, to rediscover your history and culture, and to, through your pride of being negro, attribute the well-deserved appreciation for those who have suffered, who have offered their hard labour for Brazil.

What is interesting about the conceptualisation of the negro by my research participants, is that on the one hand it maintains some characteristics of race by drawing on the African legacy for inspiration and identification, while at the same time distancing itself from a view of race as demarcation to classify some people as belonging and others not. Affirmative action policies and the MNU’s attempt to differentiate the negroes from non-negroes have always been strongly criticised for fighting racism through racism. The flexible approach in which nearly anybody who wants to can ‘belong’ to the negro group subjectivity, if we may believe my research participant Flavio, can be seen as a protest against racist identifications of blacks:

“if we fight against compartmentalisation, we may not exclude anybody. If we compartmentalise cultural and social differences, I may not exclude [people of non-black] colour, I may not exclude colour. [...] [Therefore, Lynn] you are negra. Negro is a question of consciousness”.

Translating these findings into the theoretical lens of this thesis, choosing to take on the negro subjectivity can be seen as a display of *mésentente* (disagreement, misunderstanding) with the ways in which social spaces in Recife society are distributed. Negritude by the participants is closely related to the awareness of and will to fight against what some see as the ongoing practices of ‘slavery’, of politicians who only think about their own pockets, of those structures that organise societies in ways that benefit only some at the costs of others. This display of disagreement, however, is not done through creating a new category of people that is exclusive of others. Rather than creating an alternative ‘sensible’, in which for instance only black bodies, people without money, people of the *Xangô* religion can be seen as beautiful, modern, valuable, etc., a group subjectivity is created that everybody can take on and can interpret in their own way. The fact that everybody can choose how to give shape to their lives as negroes makes it difficult to capture the diverse people, from diverse backgrounds, with diverse life views and experiences, in a theory such as this thesis which aims to describe general tendencies, as there are hardly any characteristics that

apply to all participants. For instance, not all research participants live in *favelas* or are poor, not all are black-skinned, not all want to present themselves as very different from the elite, not all are very aware of oppressive structures in society, etc. The reader should take this into account when reading the diverse stories of *cultura negra* participants, and when sometimes reading stories of different participants that seemingly contradict general tendencies described at other points.

5.2 The translation of *mésentente* into daily life experiences in the margins

Gloria lives on the Morro da Conceição, a *favela* as you know them from television; small, colourful and chaotically placed houses situated between hills, in the neighbourhood Casa Amarela. The first time I visited her at her place, a friend who happened to be around dropped me off at the gate, as Gloria did not pick up her phone. Entering the house, some people looked at me for a few seconds, but did not seem to mind that a foreign-looking stranger had entered. My friend shouted Gloria's name and a sleepy head with untidy, frizzy hair appeared from the unfinished balcony. Her house is about 70m², on top of which a second floor is being constructed, which her mother hopes will be finished next year ("*se Deus quiser*", "if it's God's will"). The house has no paint layer over the bricks yet, and is completely stuffed with furniture, decorations, and altars for the *orixás*. There is even one whole room of 12m² that serves as altar, it is furnished with plastic (white-skinned) dolls, crowns, fruits and other food on plates, and more. Gloria and her fiancée Luana mostly spend their time in a stuffed little room upstairs, where they and other family members play computer games on a television that broadcasts only in black, green and white.

Gloria told me that she lives with only 12 people, all women and children, but the times I was at her place I saw at least 20 different faces, including also a few men of different ages. The house is very lively; women are passing by all the time, taking showers, smoking a cigarette, playing with the baby of Gloria's young cousin. Many of the girls are shouting and arguing with each other, and the room is covered in a continuous whelm of smoke. Every now and then, one of the women stops in their activities to offer me one of the three chairs, to ask me how I like Brazil, or to offer me something to eat or to drink. Gloria's mother is *Mãe de Santos* (*Xangô* priestess), she told me that she can communicate with the *orixás* through the shell game *jogo dos buzios*, and that she regularly receives calls from Europeans who want her help in finding answers to life questions. She is a rather big woman, with a loud and shrill voice, and she smokes nonstop. Next to the big family, at least 8 dogs live in the house, most of them with broken paws and ears, or skin diseases, which Gloria's family took from the street as they would have died otherwise. Gloria's house seems a place where everything is allowed, where hardly any rules or norms exist about what to wear, how to talk, how to engage in sex, etc.

At the age of 31, Gloria has always spent her time in marginal spaces. She hardly leaves Casa Amarela, except for when she attends *afoxé* and other *cultura negra* events in Recife Antigo or in Olinda. Her *terreiro* (*Xangô* community) and her *afoxé* group are both situated in Casa Amarela, and as for facilities and entertainment, she says you have

everything you need over there, and that there is no need for you to leave the neighbourhood. As she is jobless, and as she can live with her family, there is nothing that forces Gloria to extend her life world to outside of Casa Amarela. In the spaces where she mostly moves; her house, Casa Amarela, the *terreiro*, her *afoxé* rehearsals, the *cultura negra* activities, Gloria is not that different from the standard: being of the *Xangô* religion is rather common in these spaces, whereas her homosexuality in turn is very common within the *Xangô* religions. Being jobless, having no money for a beer or phone credits, being from the *favela*, having frizzy hair, talking about sex or about being drunk, smoking nonstop: about all of that Gloria does not have to feel uncomfortable when she is in these spaces. Her mother told me that she was born in a rich family and that she has money, but she does not want it. Rich people tend to look down at and worsen the situations of poor people, which is why she does not want to be associated with or around them. Gloria and her mother much prefer living among fellow negroes, in the margins.

As described, the perception of belonging to or feeling more at ease in the margins is the one thing that all participants of the scene have in common. Previous studies illustrate that for many black Brazilians it is uncommon to talk about examples of racism that they encountered, because of the continuous belief that holds strong that inequality and discrimination in Brazil is not so much caused by the skin you are born in, but by your behaviour and class (Sansone, 2003, p. 55; Owensby, 2005, p. 322). However, among the *cultura negra* participants, who are more concerned with the *consciência negra* than the average Recife, the existence of discrimination and prejudices in Recife is very much acknowledged, and all participants could come up with several examples that they personally experienced. The situation of marginalisation, as well as how strong they recognise, denounce, or enjoy it, varies per participant. Many of the participants have always been excluded of job possibilities, health and education facilities of quality, representation in the media, etc., and have always lived life styles that are not accepted by perceptions of what is sensible. Others made the voluntary choice to denounce the 'sensible' and the Pernambucan identity, or to live the life of the margins. Yet others feel part of the Pernambucan, or actually do not feel particularly excluded in Recife society, but feel at their best in marginal spaces such as *Terça Negra*.

While participants describe unequal distribution and discrimination based on colour, sexual preferences, religion or other characteristics as unfair, rather than victimising themselves they generally present their marginal situation as something that is part of who they are and as something they are proud of, because overcoming your oppression with pride is seen as one of the biggest strengths of the negro. Wilson for instance, when talking about himself, told me many times that people tell him he is crazy or '*foda*' (fucked up) for choosing to live in a *favela* and for doing work that does not generate any money, but that he prefers it that way. He is proud to live in the margins and talks a lot about how he likes living in a *favela* with other negroes, smoking marijuana, not having money, doing things that middle class people think is *foda*. Participants use their belonging to the periphery as element in constructing subjectivities that they can appreciate, and in presenting themselves to the world around them. I will elaborate on these processes further on.

For the majority of the participants of the *cultura negra* scene, the marginal situation is a situation they were born in: they were born in *favelas*, in environments where drugs and violence are common, without access to education of quality, and partially because of the stigmas surrounding the uneducated black *favelado* they feel that they cannot advance in finding jobs and getting access to many resources and

social spaces that the elite can access. Wilson for instance describes the contrast between financial resources of the marginal and the elite. He points out that while “the miserables” receive a minimum salary of R\$60, suffer, live in the mud, do not have the basic necessities, and sleep on the street, the deputy receives R\$600.000, and politicians spend “millions and millions and millions, go by plane, or by a cars that are imported”. Gabilo explains how government facilities often do not reach the peripheries, in his example of how safety and protection measures are not accessible there: “In fact, the *galeira* [the people] says that the police is there to protect, but they only protect those who’ve got money and who are white. The poor don’t have that, they don’t have these conditions”.

Likewise, people experience it as nearly impossible for *favelados* to get education of quality, and explain that the level of education in public schools is so drastically low that it is impossible for anybody who has only followed public education to attend university. To illustrate how dramatic the level of education in the poorer neighbourhoods is, one of my neighbours in Chão de Estrelas who teaches at a public school explained that conditions were so tough that he and his colleagues would generally be satisfied if during their class nobody got physically hurt. In neighbourhoods with more violence and unstable family situations, school classes consist of many children with forms of concentration and attention problems, and generally classes are too big for the outnumbered staff. They feel that it is impossible to teach anything, as they spend all their energy into preventing chaos. Moabia is the only person of her extended family and the community in which she lives in Santo Amaro who got accepted at university. She explained to me how difficult it was; for years she studied all day long outside of school, to get accepted at a lower level university, for which she studied so hard again that she could transfer to the *Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco*. Meanwhile, she relied on many of her uncles and aunts to help her get around financially.

What most participants consider as the most hurtful forms of marginalisation does not have to do that much with not being given priority in the ways resources and spaces are distributed over Recife society however. I did not hear many complaints about for instance the fact that negroes often live in shacks, have less access to participation in universities and government bodies, or are less able to participate in the job market and in consumption society. The reality of this unequal distribution is very much known to and considered as unfair by the participants, but their most urgent desires generally do not relate so much to redistributing the social spaces.

In fact, in my experience, many participants prefer living in the margins. Translating it into my own theoretical interpretation, they prefer spending their days in *favelas* and other spaces and activities where fellow negroes live and where the ‘sensible’ is less dominant. The majority of the lives of those participants who were born in the margins have been lived in the margins: they live in poorer neighbourhoods, where they go to school, engage in arts and religion, do their groceries, and establish their social networks. In a similar vein to this subchapter’s introductory story of how Gloria spends her time in the margins, Gabilo lives with his sister and cousin in a tiny shack in the *comunidade* do Canal in Aruda, and spends his time by participating in and teaching break-dance, *capoeira* and other dance and music genres. These activities take place in *comunidades* all throughout Recife, as well as in the Praça da Jaqueira, a park that serves as meeting point for many break dancers and other youths—not many middle class youths though, for whom hanging out in streets or parks is often seen as dangerous. Gabilo goes to the centre of Recife and Olinda too, but only for negro activities such as *Terça Negra* and reggae shows.

The fact that the *cultura negra* participants generally feel at home in the margins, and that many people show pride and happiness of living in *favelas*, does not mean that they judge the life in the margins to be good as it is. They are very aware of some of the horrors in which they are living, of the painful reality that poverty creates in the lives of many slum residents. Numerous slums in Recife, Chão de Estrelas being one of them, have gone through slum upgrading programs in recent years in which shacks have been replaced by brick houses. They are no longer officially referred to as *favelas*, but as *comunidades*. When walking through some of the poorest slums, such as Morro da Conceição, os Coelhos, or Santo Amaro, you often only see an occasional shack made of wood and aluminium boards, while the majority of the *favelados* live in stone houses, colourfully painted and in several cases with a second storey. As I learned from the time I lived in Chão de Estrelas and from the stories I heard of friends who live in other slums, despite the improvements that have been made in housing and basic facilities, life in the *favelas* or *comunidades* remains harsh. While some participants, such as Wilson, romanticize the *favela* as a place of much more beauty and joy than the rest of the city, in practice it remains also a place where drug addiction, depression and extreme violence are at the order of the day.

To grow up in a *comunidade* often means growing up with regular traumatic experiences. In Chão de Estrelas for instance, nearly every family has some members who are engaged in drug trafficking, and deathly retaliations occur regularly⁸. Vilma and Jandira, head of and teacher at the education centre *Darue Malungo*, estimated that as much as one out of three of the youth they have taught over the years have passed away before the age of 30, due to drug addiction or drug-related homicides. Moabia's *comunidade* in Santo Amaro was the scene of a violent conflict between the drug gang of Moabia's and the neighbouring *comunidade* in early 2012, which meant she had to be always on her guard when walking in the streets. When I visited her once, someone got shot twenty meters from where we were waiting for the bus. Moabia, just as everybody around us, started running, and after five seconds, when the shooting ended, they just walked back and continued what they were doing, without even looking at whether somebody was shot. Another time, when I was walking near *Darue Malungo* with a 14-year old girl from the neighbourhood, all of a sudden armed police came running from several directions and stormed into several shacks and houses, where they captured several boys of about 17 years old, suspected of drug trafficking. I asked the girl whom I was with if we should hide somewhere, to which she laughed and said there was nothing going on. The stories of Moabia, Gabilo and Vanessa also make it seem as if to them, drug trafficking and violence are the most normal thing, even though they themselves are not engaged in it. Koster, in his ethnographic study on the life of slum dwellers in Recife, came across similar findings as I, namely that despite the fact that the existence of drug abuse and violence are experienced as common and are not received with shock, these phenomena and particularly the continuous awareness of an ever-present threat do greatly affect the daily life experiences of people living in the margins. They always have to be aware who to engage with, how to deal with trafficking or addicted family members and friends, how to avoid the temptation to make easy money, how to get home safe, etc. Several of my research participants reflect upon the issues a lot, and about how difficult it is to stay out of problems when growing up the way they did.

⁸ Fortunately, according to people I talked to, the occurrence of drug-related violence in Chão de Estrelas has become less regular in comparison to the past ten years. On the other hand, according to Vilma, head of the Chão de Estrelas based community education centre *Darue Malungo*, the amount of children who start using drugs is not diminishing.

The drug situation means that many children grow up in unstable and violent environments, in which it is not uncommon for family members to die. For instance, a mother of three siblings at *Darue Malungo* once explained to me why her children did not look alike: the father of the first got killed by a drug-related retaliation shot when he returned after one year of prison; the father of the second child likewise got killed because of his engagement in drugs; and therefore she married a third time to the father of the third child. Within the poorer neighbourhoods other social problems such as domestic abuse, alcoholism, depression, teenage pregnancy and physical disabilities are also more common than among middle class Recifenses (Koster, 2009; Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, 1993). Since the ladies with whom I lived in Chão de Estrelas is seen as a shoulder to cry on by many people in the neighbourhood, I got to know many stories about what daily lives in a *comunidade* may be like: children who stayed with their grandmother because their parents had abandoned them or passed away at a young age; a neighbour who saw her son walking in the footsteps of his older brother who had already passed away due to alcoholism; a lady who was worried about her children of 3 and 6 who seemed depressed since she had divorced her husband after many years of abuse. I have seen many other manifestations of poverty which illustrate the partially traumatic experiences of living in the margins.

The story of one friend of mine in Recife, Roberta, gives an idea of how growing up in *comunidades* influences children and their possibilities in society. From when she was young, Roberta's father used to beat up her mother, even with knives, or by throwing her against furniture, and he forced her mother to have sex with him. As the family lives in a small house with walls that do not reach the ceiling, Roberta would always hear her mother cry, and as her mother cried for her help, she often went to look but then did not know what to do. Though her father never beat up his children, Roberta has a scar from the time she tried to stop him from attacking her mother with a knife. Many times she did not go home at night but slept on the street instead, to avoid hearing her mother cry. When she and her siblings were all over sixteen years old, her mother left her dad, to which her father got depressed and became an alcoholic. Everyday when she got home she found her father lying drunk in the gutter further down the street. Roberta was so affected by this that she started using various hard drugs, while her brother got into drug trafficking. She explained to me that for children who grow up in the *favela*, it is very difficult to stay out of drugs. You do not even need to leave the house; drug traffickers will enter your house to offer you drugs or to ask you to work for them. After a few months of using drugs, Roberta realised that this was not the life she wanted for herself, and she quit drugs. Her father found out about her brother and sent him off to a military camp for one year, to which he also quit drugs. Several of her family members are still engaged in trafficking however. One day Roberta told me in shock that her cousin had killed a guy last weekend, because the guy started to randomly shoot people down in the street, and one of these people was an aunt of Roberta's.

Despite the difficult situation that he has brought upon his family, Roberta does not blame her father for his violent behaviour. Rather, she sees a vicious circle of poverty as the cause for people to engage in violent behaviour and drug engagement. She told me that now that she does not need to be scared of him anymore because her younger brother grew stronger than her father, she has forgiven him for his behaviour. She understands that her father became like this because having grown up as a street child, he never received any affection himself and did not learn how to love.

Partially, people such as Gloria and Gabilo feel that they would not have access to many social spaces that elite do have access to, even if they wanted to, so living in the margins is their only option. For many participants, however, living in marginal spaces, in a sort of parallel society that counters many forms of living in elite spaces in society, is not so much seen as something which they are regrettably forced to do, but as something they prefer, because they feel more at home and natural in this alternative space. From a state-centred perspective, the margins might be seen as the supplementary, the part that is not included and that diverges of normal society. They may be seen as dangerous moreover, as the police does not manage to fully control it and because it can be a source of unpredictable behaviour that does not abide to the 'sensible'. From the perspective of those who grow up belonging to this supplementary part of society, however, it is the margins that are the default, the space where they feel natural. In these spaces, while also hosting prejudiced people just as in other parts of society, it is more accepted, even common, to be black, gay, of the *Xangô* religion, unemployed, have frizzy hair, etc. From the marginal perspective, the 'sensible' spaces, the spaces that are most in line with the ways in which the Pernambucan presents Recife society to be, are seen as unsafe spaces. Boa Viagem, Casa Grande and other central neighbourhoods are seen as spaces where you can never fully develop and enjoy yourself because you always have to adjust to the 'sensible'. This version is not in line with the character and life style in the margins, so negroes are always a step behind trying to catch up with it. Thus, the ladies whom I lived with and other residents of Chão de Estrelas—a *comunidade* that is often considered as a dangerous neighbourhood by high middle class Recifenses—often warned me when going to the centre or to Boa Viagem, saying that it was dangerous there.

Throughout these paragraphs, I have touched upon a certain form of marginalisation existing in Recife's society that strongly rude in its technical service touch *cultura negra* participants, about which they generally narrate with much more indignation than about the distribution of social spaces in Recife. This form of marginalisation is manifested in the sensible: the common perceptions that exist in society about which voices, which behaviour, which bodies make sense and are to be taken serious, which are 'beautiful' and 'modern', and which are not. For many participants, I found, it is not so much the denial of access to particular social spaces that hurts or frustrates them most, but the reason for why they are denied that access: because they are seen as less worthy, less capable, less modern, and because they experience these perceptions to be based not in a judgment of their individual characters, but on superficial stereotypes regarding physical features, sexual preferences, fashion, religion, or neighbourhood.

The participants who feel most rejected by the categorisations of the sensible, to different extents, feel that they are not seen as capable persons; that they always have to try harder and put more efforts into proving that they are good persons and that they can do a job as any other. Augusto Cesar, who does not experience much discrimination himself because, he says, he is not physically negro, talked a lot to me about how strong racism still is in Recife. "If you are poor and black [...], you're at the bottom of the ladder in life". He describes how negroes are always a step behind, they have to try, work and fight harder, to prove more, in order to be seen as equal to non-negroes. "[T]he mother says to the child; being a negro, with all the prejudices that exist, you have to be twice as good. And the child will say: twice better, how? How is that possible if I am already 100 times as far behind?!" Henrique confirms his friend's remark by saying: "you don't know what it [the problem] is, you keep on playing through the apparatus, is it the colour? Is it this tattoo? I don't know what could be [the problem]".

Many participants moreover feel that negroes are always abused and have contributed substantially to Recife society in terms of labour, culture and genetic diversification, yet they are never appreciated for who they are. Many share Josuel's view that "negroes [...] have constructed Brazil while others were just taking advantage of them", without ever receiving credits for this, and while their stories are left out of the way history is told. This sense of not being appreciated as a person is a common theme in the experiences of participants. Wilson points out that while the art of the *favelas* is used by society, there is a general lack of appreciation for and understanding of the poor, the *favelados*. Josuel complains that whereas gays are used for their skills as hairdressers, fashion experts and decorators, they are not seen as the person behind the gay. "Let's see the good things about the gay, but at the same time, let's not abuse *me!*"

To rephrase the previous through the Rancièrian lens, the participants of the *Terça Negra* scene generally see themselves as being rejected by the 'sensible' because of their Afro characteristics. However, the sense of rejection is not only and not by all participants based in the experience of discrimination based on skin colour, religion, or other characteristics that are associated with negritude. Many of the participants also feel rejected by accepted norms that discipline behaviour, for instance related to sexuality, enjoyment, fashion, or narcotics. In other words, research participants' identification as negroes is based not so much in the sense of being excluded from many safe, comfortable social spaces, but in a fundamental *mésentente* (disagreement and misunderstanding) with the way that the dominant version of the 'sensible' views the world.

5.2.1 The 'sensible' and the negro body

When you live in Pernambuco for a few months and engage yourselves in these issues, in my experience the vivid remainders of colonialism are inescapable in the dominant aesthetics and in how aesthetic values continue to influence relations of oppression and being oppressed. Though among parts of the *cultura negra* scene an alternative movement has been arising, among the overall population of Recife the white, European body is still seen as the most beautiful.

Despite the recent introduction of affirmative action policies, which in local cultural expressions supported by the government have strongly enhanced the representation of blacks as beautiful and successful, this representation is still strongly lagging behind in other important media. Toys, children's books and education curricula have only quite recently began to put forth this representation. But as many research participants point out, as of yet they have little impact as they are often inaccessible to poorer black children and as the public education system is of such low quality that it does not succeed in transmitting the representation. Perhaps the invisibility of poor Brazilians and Brazilians with darker skins is most remarkable in the many primetime television soaps broadcasted at the channel *Globo*, the channel that is turned on everyday in nearly any house in Recife. Of the main actors of the casts of about 10-20 actors, there is generally only one black actor, all others could be Europeans in terms of physical appearances (in fact, several of them are Portuguese actors). In a city in which I have not met one local person with blond hair and blue eyes, the biggest soap hero during my stay was Anna from *A Vida da Gente*, a girl with bright blue eyes and blond hair. During the first month of my stay I lived among more middle class Recifenses near university, and none of them acknowledged that it is strange that blacks and

poor people are not represented in soaps. When I made a remark about it, people simply replied that the soaps were made in the south, where there are no blacks.

Having blue eyes and blond hair myself, this bias towards European traits was very visible, when on a daily basis women told me they wanted my blue eyes, and when children in the *comunidades* whispered to each other that a pretty woman was passing by. During carnival I wore a black Afro wig and sun glasses to cover my blue eyes, to which several people, particularly the ones less engaged in the *cultura negra* scene, responded surprised. They asked me why someone would want to exchange this beautiful blond hair for black hair, and why someone with blue eyes would want to hide them. Several girls whom I met in the *comunidades* asked me for pictures of my brothers, as they were convinced that the boys in the Netherlands would be more handsome than the boys around them. Partially, this might be explained by a preference for exotic, different people, just as it is observed by many Pernambucans that European girls are often attracted to Afro-Brazilians. However, the admiration for white bodies in Recife for many blacks (though less so for my research participants who are proud to be negro) goes hand in hand with attempts to hide afro features. Among girls in Chão de Estrelas for instance, I noticed that from approximately the age of nine onwards, hours per day are invested in hiding afro hair by straightening it, sometimes by getting blond highlights. Moabia explained how throughout her childhood and adolescence, she was told by the people of her church that she had to try to hide her afro characteristics and to try not to stand out of the crowd, because afro features are ugly. Viviane was raised with similar experiences in Recife, and explains how even when negro women are seen as attractive, this is always limited to a perception associated with negative stereotypes, as if all that negro women are is limited to their sexuality and dancing skills: “Negro women are *‘gostasas quentes* [hot delicious women]: a big ass, good in bed, sexually available and they dance the samba”.

People with black skins can be considered pretty in common perceptions, as long as their physical traits do not diverge too much from features accepted as descent, or in other words, if they do not denounce the ‘sensible’ too strongly. Next to a matter of what is and what is not beautiful, perceptions on the ‘sensible’ create prejudices regarding which bodies are trustworthy and which are bad, criminal, or otherwise dangerous. Whereas in Bahia dreadlocks might have become more fashionable recently, according to *Terça Negra* participants Gabilo, Jeff and Toni, in Recife this is not yet the case. Blacks feel they are feared and not accepted by society if they let their hair grow in the way that frizzy hair grows naturally: in dreadlocks. All three of them are dark black men in their early twenties, and have had dreadlocks in the past. After my interview with Gabilo, he went to have his dreadlocks cut off, as he experienced it impossible to find jobs other than as artist within the *cultura negra* scene. Gabilo explained to me how people see a black man with dreadlocks:

“When I pass on the street everybody keeps watching. [...] Even the police pass quickly, those men. *Cara*, you are [seen as] a *maconheiro*, a *maconheiro safado* [shameless pothead], *rapaz* [dude], you will realise it soon. [...] Here it’s crazy. When a guy is like this [with dreadlocks] and black he is always a thief, *porra* [fuck]. If you enter a shop it’s always like that, everybody watches as if you are going to steal something, like they don’t understand that you just want to buy something. But I need to buy things too.”

Gabilo’s cousin, Vanessa, went on to explain that in order for Gabilo to be seen not as a criminal but as a citizen, and in order for him to get a job for instance in an office or as a waiter, he would have to cut off his

dreadlocks. “For people who have prejudices, his hair shows that he is involved in all sorts of *malandragem* [trickery]. [...] They are scared of that. [...] So all these associations he cuts off”.

In Recife society, there is a range of symbols in physical features that people use to interpret each other, based on which they can decide for instance whether to offer someone help, to keep a distance from someone on the street, whether to close the windows and lock the doors of the car at a traffic sign, etc. Physical features can next to colour indicate if someone is rich or poor, lives on the street or not, sometimes even if someone is gay or straight and of which religion a person is. Vanessa explains how the combination of the black body with certain symbols, such as Mohawks, nose piercings or tattoos, are immediately interpreted as proof for the fact that the person wearing them is dangerous. Many other participants recognise the worsening of prejudices on criminality when the dark skin is combined with other symbols of marginalisation or poverty. Henrique, a negro of about 35 years old, employed by the *prefeitura*, is often taken to be a criminal because of the tattoo on his arm. When I met him at a friend’s place in Aruda, he just got back from an accident, in which his arm got injured and his scooter got damaged. He was swept off of his scooter by a passing car, which just drove on. Henrique and his friend were convinced that the reason why the driver had not bothered to stop and apologise was because he must have been prejudiced towards Henrique because he is black and has a tattoo. *Terça Negra* fans Gustavo and Leno, also in their thirties, told me that they are particularly aware of people looking at them as inferior when they are wearing their working outfits: overalls of construction workers. A friend of mine, who is often dressed in hip hop outfits (high baseball cap, Bermudas, sneakers), and who is black and about 1,90 meters tall, told me that when he walks in the streets in Recife at night, people quickly cross the street when they see him approaching. His friend and he often made jokes about this, for his friend, who wears similar clothing but is white-skinned with black hair, does not experience this.

There appears to be a divide, then, between those blacks who Viviane calls the ‘well-behaved blacks’, the blacks who behave more in line with the prevailing version of the ‘sensible’, who dress and behave like middle class Pernambucans, and those who do not. Viviane experienced this divide to be very strong in Recife, even in supposedly black spaces such as the *Museo da Abolição* (Museum dedicated to the abolition of slavery). In October of 2011, one of the hip hop alliances of Recife, called *Flores Crew*, organised an event that combined music with discussions about youth, sexuality, homophobia, Afro aesthetics, etc. Viviane had been at several events at the museum already, of Unicef for instance, but now that she was there with the hip hop movement, she felt unwelcome for the first time. She felt that the staff treated the groups in a cold way, and was rude in its technical service, they kept switching of the lights before shows were over for instance. This made her reflect:

“What is the type of negro that is welcome in the *Museo da Abolição*? [...] The negro who is welcome is *o negro bem comportado* [the well-behaved negro]. The negro with a higher education level. The negro who discusses Foucault, Franz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir. But the *negro do hip hop favelado, cheio de gírias* [negro of the *favela* hip hop, who uses a lot of slang], he is not? [...] Because the hip hop movement was rejected, it did not have that support to realise its event, but *esses outros negros finos e fofo* [those other fine and cute negroes] I talked about, they always did. [...] This made me wonder, could it be that we have a glazed model [*modelo do negro cristalizado*] of the negro in our heads?”

While Augusto Cesar was giving examples of racism that his friend Henrique has to face because of his looks, Henrique, who was listening, kept repeating after every example: “but that’s normal right, that’s

normal. That happens, yes, but it's normal right". It is often through jokes and sarcasm in conversations that it becomes clear just how common blacks consider it to be that they are discriminated because of their physical features. Many people, when you ask them who exactly is *negro*, will joke: 'don't ask me, ask the police, they always know!' When my friend Moabia was once touching my earring to have a look at it at an event in town, four police men were just walking by, and apparently one looked at Moabia with suspicion. Her cousin and her kept joking that the police thought Moabia was trying to steal me, for what else could they think when seeing a black girl touching a white girl's jewellery? For the rest of the night, when Moabia would put her stuff in my bag, she would joke that if the police would pass by they would catch her. Augusto Cesar, who though not having a black skin feels negro inside, also likes to joke around with his negro friends. They call each other by names that are usually used by racists, such as 'negro', 'negro *safado*' (shameless negro) and '*negro de cara de kinga*' (negro with a face of a whore). By exacerbating the racist dialectics through these sarcastic references, the participants demonstrate the absurdity of the prevailing version of the 'sensible'.

Next to the exclusion of afro characteristics and other physical symbols of the margins from the 'sensible', many of the participants of the *cultura negra* scene also identify with the margins because they feel that their behaviour, ideologies, and cultural and sexual preferences are not accepted as 'sensible'. Some of these forms of alternative behaviour are perceived to be discriminated against because of their African origins, such as the *Xangô religions* or the participation in negro art forms, while others have no direct link with negritude, such as the rejection of homosexuality or the use of coarse language.

5.2.2 The 'sensible' and supplementary cultures and ideologies

Vam: *"[When I was teaching at a school,] I was fighting already against the idea that our culture is something of the past. For the preparation of the day of folklore, my colleague said: "you go and read some history, read some stories of the orixás for the day of folklores". Because there exists this idea among educators and in academic thinking that our religion is folklore, that it is just a little story of the past. And I said: "no, you don't do that! You're not going to do that, are you? I for one will not read it". My colleague did not understand, and she was Christian, so I explained it: "You know what, why don't you do it, and then I will read some verses of the Bible and tell the kids that they are only some folkloric verses of the past".*

Discrimination of people based on their adherence to a religion of the African matrix is experienced as one of the most persistent forms of discrimination in Recife by most participants. This might partially be explained by the fact that religious discrimination, more than for instance racism, is partially based in institutional discrimination. Whereas racial discrimination has never existed in law since Brazilian independence, religions of the African matrix have been prohibited or inhibited in parts of their customs by Brazilian law for many years in the past, whereas the many Protestant Churches are still open in their denunciation of the religions of the African matrix, the so-called 'cult' religions. Some participants also experience discrimination by Catholics, but generally this Church is seen as more open to the existence of various religions.

It seems that in the eyes of many Protestant Churches (with probably many exceptions), the existence of different legitimate religions next to each other is not an option. Therefore, they see it as their duty to convince the population that the *Xangô religions* are expressions of the devil, to save its adherents

by trying to convert them into Christians, and by constructing Churches next to as many *terreiros* as possible. Thus, for instance, some friends pointed out to me that at several *afoxé* rehearsals that take place weekly in Recife Antigo, Evangelists are present, trying to talk about the Bible to *afoxé* participants. Moabia told me once that the week before, she and her friend were approached by two evangelists at *Terça Negra*, asking them why young girls with such angel faces would be at this place of *macumba*, a pejorative name used to generalise all religions of the African matrix. While in their eyes evangelists are welcome at *Terça Negra*, presenters Amauri and Demir get agitated when evangelists try to propagate evangelism at *Xangô* or *cultura negra* events: “we don’t go to your church to distribute words of the *orixás*, so *porra* [fuck], do this among your own people”. Once, on the bus to Olinda, a guy started talking to me and told me that he had “a fire burning in his heart to tell me that it is God’s institution that brought [me] to Pernambuco”. When he asked me if I had made any evangelic friends in Recife, I told him that most of my friends are *candomblistas*, and that I would go to a *toque* in Dois Unidos in the afternoon. He then started a plea about how *Candomblé* is of the devil, and summed up arguments and examples that proved his argument that *Candomblé* is against God’s will, and that I should not trust my friends too much as *candomblistas* are generally bad people.

These religions of the African matrix are generally referred to as *macumba*, and are strongly stigmatised among a big part of Recife society as black magic, voodoo, demonic. There exists fear for what happens within the *terreiros* among many Recifenses, particularly regarding the rituals of spirit possession and the slaughter of animals to be sacrificed to the *orixás*, the deities. The latter ritual hardly still takes place during the *toques* (religious services) in Recife’s *terreiros*. In the rituals of spirit possession, some of the participants in the religious activities enter in a trance state, during which spirits of *orixás* and other characters enter their bodies. This trance has always been received with fear and fascination by non-religious society, and has been studied and treated as psychological or even psychopathic phenomenon for a long time. In the 60’s for instance, several *terreiros* were ‘protected and supervised’ by the *Service for the Protection of Psychopaths* (Bastide, 1960, p. 194). Some of the *Pais de Santos* I talked to also told me how already in the early 20th Century, several *terreiros* were visited by psychologists who wanted to study the spirit possession. Vam, a devoted *candomblista* himself, notices the effect of the aura that is created around his religion. He says that at events such as the pre-carnival event we were visiting together in Recife Antigo, people look at him with fear: “If I walk outside and if I stay outside, people start watching. They already start thinking a thousand things in their heads. [...] [He is] from *Candomblé*, watch out! The others already look at me. If I want to go somewhere for a smoke by myself, I can’t, because they don’t respect me”.

The existence of prejudices about and fear for ‘*macumba*’ is so persistent in society, that many people who engage in *Xangô*, or even just in musical expression forms related to the religion, have to go against the wishes of their family and face stigmatisation by people in their close environment. This indicates how discrimination in Recife is a multi-layered process, in which not just the elite discriminate against the rest, but in which many people have a lot of prejudices against each other. Augusto Cesar for instance describes how even his own wife is against *maracatu* and *afoxé*, because she sees anything related to religions of the African matrix as *macumba* and as demonic. Both Shirley and Augusto Cesar describe how just engaging in *cultura negra* art forms already generates many prejudices. Shirley, who is not religious herself, explains that when she goes to *Terça Negra*, her own brother asks her what she wants

from that *macumba* party, whereas when she wears her hair loose, in 'afro style', people ask her if she is going to do a job for the *terreiro*.

Next to associations of *cultura negra* expressions with *macumba* and with drugs, many participants experience a general lack of appreciation of the *cultura negra*. When visiting Recife Antigo in the weekend one might be surprised about this perception, as *afoxé*, *samba*, and *maracatu de nação* can be found on nearly every street corner. Many participants explain however that these initiatives in popular culture do not nearly receive the amount of support that national or international groups that are already successful receive. One of the most commonly heard complaints of my research participants, is that while Alceu Valencia or Madonna would receive tens or hundreds of thousands of *Reais* (the Brazilian currency) from the *prefeitura* to give one show, the local artists only receive a few hundred *Reais* during a carnival performance, just enough to pay for the expenses they made for costumes and instruments, while having to wait for months to receive it. Moreover, people such as Shirley, Ana Paula, Flavio and Wilson, think that the essence of *cultura negra* art forms is that they are created in and by the marginals, they are from the *favela*. So, they argue, if the art forms in themselves are presented, but they do not relate to what life in the margins is like, if they are performed predominantly by non-negroes, and if the religious dimension and other traditions are erased from the expression forms, this is still exclusion of the art forms of the margins—or worse, a continuing attempt to rob the negro of his identity. Shirley complains for instance that when she applied for funding to do a *pastorile* dance performance with her children's dance group in Santo Amaro, she could just not understand why the other groups, whom she saw were of the same level as hers, got funding while her group did not. "Why not mine, of a poor neighbourhood, of a poor *comunidade*, with poor children, to give people an idea of what it is like?" Flavio is very indignant about the trend that in the process of the incorporation of *maracatu* into mainstream Pernambucan culture, the expression form loses its essence, namely its function of resistance against oppression, its identification with life in the *favela*, and its function to preserve traditions such as *Candomblé*⁹ practices:

"These days, *maracatu* is selling, *Candomblé* is selling. Those who do not sell themselves are excluded. They are left aside. They call those who are selling themselves. [...] Because the *maracatu* went from here [the *favela*] and divulged. Today, the *burguesia* [bourgeoisie] came into the story... *Aquelas pessoas dos pregios do Boa Viagem* [those people of the buildings of Boa Viagem] are inside the culture. [...] And few of them, of the *classe alta* [higher class people] [who became *mestre*] were actually interested in these groups of popular culture. But after the movement of *mangue-beat* many people got interested, because the media showed it on tv. [...] And today everybody is *mestre* [master], everybody knows how to play *alfaia*, how to dance in that way. [...] But in my time, here, it was only *o povo do ghetto quem resistiram essa cultura* [the people of the ghetto who resisted/maintained the culture]. To me, [in order to call someone a *mestre*] you need to know who his *mestre* is, what his *mestre* taught him, whether he is from *Candomblé*, if he knows how to play and to sing *Candomblé*. [But now] many people who want to go to the samba school continue to the *maracatu* schools and are called *mestre* just like that. That's different from the *maracatu* groups that the family passed on, the ones that I accompanied. [...] In the 60's, 70's, 50's, the *maracatus* didn't have that much *divulgação* [divulging], they didn't have funding, there wasn't

⁹ Note that *candomblé* is another term for, or a variation within the *Xangô* religions. In chapter 6 I will discuss the terms and explain why I generally use the term *Xangô* rather than *candomblé*, though participants use both.

a bus, they walked by foot. Maybe that's discussable, but everybody did respect them. They were respectable. Those [new groups] here go by car or by motor, and they don't respect themselves. [...] They lose it, they lose control. They don't want to admit that the money for them has become important above anything else. But for me above anything else it is culture that is most important. *A resistência, tradição* [The resistance, tradition]. Because we should remember that if you wouldn't have that, there wouldn't really have existed liberty in Brazil."

One last way in which many *cultura negra* participants feel that their cultural expressions are not taken serious as 'sensible' expression, is explained by Vam's introductory quote to this chapter. In their views, *cultura negra* expressions are represented as folklore, as something of the past. As discussed in chapter 4, one of the ways in which the government disarms the political potential of cultural expression forms is not by denying their existence, but by denying their importance in guiding the lives of marginal members of modern Recife society. Thus, the critical questions regarding inequality and fragmentation that are raised in these expressions are attributed to the unequal situations of the past, rather than the current distribution and representation system. The research participants feel that they are not taken serious as modern citizens through this folkloric representation.

5.2.3 The 'sensible' and supplementary behavioural norms

Lastly, the majority of the *cultura negra* participants experience there to be an abundance of norms about how to behave in Recife society which inhibits and discriminates them. For instance, according to the 'sensible', it is acceptable for people to have sex with people of the opposite gender; to not talk openly about sex; to use neat language; to not use marijuana or get drunk; to dress in styles that do not show your difference of the Pernambucan identity; to avoid associations with poverty and life in the streets; to not use the street as a place to live; not to complain; to tell the truth a little prettier than it is in reality, etc. Again, these norms should not be seen as strict divides. Many middle class members of society might smoke marijuana, use coarse language, etc. without being denounced as 'insensible', whereas the same behaviour by people who already perform other symbols of the margins might be interpreted as such sooner. Rather than a black and white principle, we are talking again of ambiguous, flexibly interpretable practices in which many double standards can be found.

An actor that is seen as particularly strong in forcing a version of the 'sensible' on Recifenses by many of my research participants is the Church, the evangelic Church in particular. In Church, people are told not to live abundantly, not to dance, to limit entertainment, particularly sexual entertainment. Josuel points this out a lot, though often indirectly, when comparing *Candomblé* to the Protestant Church:

"[*Candomblé*] doesn't ask much from you. [...] You can behave in whatever way. [...] In the Church it's not like that, everybody has to dress themselves in the same way. I am talking about Protestantism right, they have to dress in the same way, to behave in the same way, you have to respect only the people who are part of it, you have to give, you have to pay the Lord. [...] And if he [a gay] enters the religion, if he believes in God, why not respect him? It's His work, if the gay lives it's because God wants him to, isn't it? [...] If Christians have that much confidence on behalf of the Lord, they have to give peace to all, not just to some."

To many of the research participants at least some of the behaviours that the Church does not accept are very important for how they see themselves. They see them as inherent to who they are, and feel rejected by the Church or society at large for denouncing who they are as 'insensible'. It is this form of denunciation by the 'sensible' that seems to touch some of the participants most, as this form of discrimination hits them on the most intimate, personal level.

Moabia for instance explains that she has been ill for many years of her life, she was physically ill and puking a lot, and no doctor could explain why. During this time, she still attended evangelic church, where she was told not to dance, not to party, and to stay a virgin. Meanwhile, she was going through a tough period because of her instable family situation. After many years of being ill, her mother told her that she thought her illness was caused because she was not happy. Through contacts she made at her new job at the science park, Moabia started to get in touch with people who lived different lifestyles. They kept telling her: "you never party, but there seems to be an animated spirit inside you". At some point, she decided to release that spirit, and to go out, party, dance, flirt, in other words, she started to enjoy herself. She explains that it is as if she has finally discovered who she is, she has finally accepted her negritude, and that since she has decided to be how she feels best, she has stopped being ill and manages to be happy.

Wilson felt rejected by the government and his family because of their denunciation of the use of marijuana, and because of their demand for rational, money-oriented behaviour. When he had to go to jail for six months because of marijuana possession, and when his family kept getting angry at him for distributing food to poorer people rather than making money in the diner he owned, he decided to denounce the 'sensible' and to exchange his middle class life for the life of a *favelado*.

Many gays, lesbians, transgenders and travestites are engaged in the *cultura negra* scene. They have particular reason to feel unappreciated for who they are by society at large. From conversations with many people on the issue, I experienced there to be a rather persistent homophobia in Recife, which, just as the existence of racism, is brought in subtle ways however. Thus, many non-gay people whom I talked to would tell me, for instance, that they have nothing against gays, a remark that was often followed by 'but I will make sure my child will not become gay'. It is also seen as a serious insult to be mistaken for a gay, and it is common to insult people by using the curse name '*frango*' (which literally means chicken, but is used as fag). An incident that occurred when I was on the bus around midnight with a neighbour from Chão de Estrelas demonstrates how little many Recifenses respect and care for the feelings of transgenders. My neighbour had told me that as long as he himself is not mistaken for a gay, he does not mind what other people do in their sexual life. However, when transgendered youths of about 16 years old entered the bus in short skirts and exposing tops, my neighbour started pointing at them and shouting things related to their sexuality. When later they got off the bus without having had to pay a bus fare, my neighbour joined another guy in running through the bus, sticking their heads out of the windows and shouting to the youths that they forgot to pay, and to the driver that they wanted a 'promotion' as well. Josuel, who is gay himself, feels as if people never see and appreciate him for who he is, and just take him for a stereotypical image of 'the gay'. In his experience, society does not accept his personality, and has too many demands for how Josuel should dress, walk, dance, behave, etc. Josuel, Vam and Luana cannot understand that a Church that believes in the God that created them keeps excluding them as valuable human beings. For Luana, who is from a Catholic background herself, this means that she cannot marry her fiancée Gloria where her family would like her to get married; in a Church.

Overall, *cultura negra* participants vary in the extent to which they feel unappreciated and excluded from the access to comfortable living, the labour market, media representation, etc. Participants such as Gloria, Gabilo, and Vanessa were born in *favelas*, have never had access to elite resources and spaces, and feel that people do not appreciate them for their religious and artistic practices, physical features, and in Gloria's case, for her sexual preference. Moabia, Shirley, Viviane, Augusto Cesar, and Ana Paula have been raised in marginal spaces, but throughout their lives have managed to attain access to other spaces through jobs and education. Moabia got accepted at university; Viviane is doing her master in Anthropology in the US; Augusto Cesar works as mediator between the *prefeitura* and the people from his *comunidade*; Shirley got a job as a dance teacher at the Catholic *Movimento pro Criança*; and Ana Paula is councillor of *cultura negra* for Pernambuco's Secretary of Culture. This means they now have more access to elite spaces and to resources, and they are able to behave in ways that are accepted also by middle class Recifenses when this is requested of them. Yet, they keep feeling more at ease in negro spaces, because in several ways they identify more with the margins than with elite spaces, and because they do not identify with many of the social norms that guide elite Recifenses. Participants Josuel, Luana and Wilson feel rejected by how they think society sees them, rather than feeling marginalised in terms of access to social spaces, and made the deliberate choice to live in *favelas*, spend their time with other negroes, engage themselves in *Xangô* and Afro-Brazilian music, etc. I interpret this to mean that some participants do not actually experience discrimination in terms of being rejected for who they are in society, but despite that choose to denounce the 'sensible'. Their denunciation is based in the perception that this version is not inclusive of features that to the participants are actually very sensible, and that it is based in too many norms that categorise people in groups that are seen as more and less valuable.

Discussion

While an association of race is not completely erased from the interpretation of the meaning of negritude by Recife's *cultura negra* participants, negritude in their eyes mostly refers to a subjectivity that any Recife can choose to assume. This subjectivity is based in the awareness of the existence of oppressive structures in society, and in the belief that participating in a part of society that is excluded by these structures is better than abiding to these structures. For, abiding to the 'sensible' would mean leaving out features of their personalities or bodies that participants feel good about, characteristics of themselves to which they see no point in hiding or oppressing. Thus, what is seen as 'sensible' by society is denounced through the self-identification as 'negro' by the *cultura negra* participants.

This is in fact a rather revolutionary definition of negritude by the *cultura negra* participants, as it does not divide people around degrees of 'whiteness' as other notions of race do, or create new categorisations to which some people may and some may not fit. This construction of the negro subjectivity does not create a new 'sensible' in which for instance the black body would be more beautiful than the white, or in which African value systems would be perceived of as more modern and valuable than European ones. Rather, the construction of the negro subjectivity by the *cultura negra* participants creates a unity around the notion of oppression, meaning that anybody who identifies with the *consciência negra* and who wants a more just society can pick up the negro subjectivity for herself. I have described how the participants engage in this process of constructing negro subjectivities in spaces where the 'sensible' is less

dominant and among other negroes. In chapter 6 I will describe how this process of constructing negro subjectivities in the margins of Recife manifests itself in the daily life struggles and activities that the *cultura negra* participants engage in.

Chapter 6 – Manifestations of *cultura negra* and the search for egalibertarian alternatives

Authors such as Badiou and Swyngedouw have argued that in order to look for the most creative, the most radically different alternatives to ways in which a society is organised, we should study the activities that take place in the margins. The most interesting potential for political change, they argue, can be found in activities that do not search for a common ground, for a unifying identity, for a broadening up of the 'sensible', but that denounce the 'sensible'. The current chapter aims to provide insights in the ways in which my research participants engage in *cultura negra*, what it means to them, and how they use it to give shape to their daily life activities. Reinterpreting these activities through the lens of the Rancièrian thinkers, I shall discuss how this engagement reflects the participants' dissatisfaction with and denunciation of the 'sensible'. I shall describe moreover, how based on the ways in which my research participants reflect upon and engage with *cultura negra*, I have come to see the culture as a movement that is developing an alternative ideology in the margins of Recife under the banner of *cultura negra*, one that replaces values of capitalism, colonialism, and exclusive structures with utopian alternatives based on egalibertarian principles. The extent to which this alternative of the *cultura negra* scene has a political potential will be discussed in chapter 7.

6.1 *Cultura negra* as the counterpart of *mestiçagem* and oppression

Just as with the definition of *negritude*, *cultura negra* is a flexibly attributable term. When describing the essence, similar trends can be found in participants' experiences of the meaning of *cultura negra*. However, when describing which cultural expression forms are most representative of this essence, high divergence can be found. Although the cultural expression forms that are seen as characteristic of *cultura negra* far extend the discipline of music, this art discipline is the one most representative of and most used as instrument in struggles over the identity construction of the negro in Pernambuco. The music performances are moreover combined with other art forms such as dance, tailoring, or the painting and decoration of instruments. Musical genres that are seen by at least some of the participants as *cultura negra* are the following. I have placed them in a rough order, with the ones that are described as typically negro by most participants at the top.

- *Afoxé*
- *Maracatu de nação*
- *Capoeira*
- *Samba-reggae*
- *Reggae*

- *Samba de raiz*
- *Siranda*
- *Coco (de roda)*
- Hip hop
- More popular forms of samba, such as *samba de gafieira*, *bossa nova*, *samba-enredo*, *pagoda*
- *Frevo*
- *Maracatu rural*
- *Caboclinho* and other genres seen to consist mainly of indigenous influences
- *Mangue-beat*
- Other Pernambucan popular culture genres

The divergences between participants' views about which genres are most typically *cultura negra* is partially caused, next to individual preferences, by the different religious backgrounds of the participants, as this can influence the importance that people attribute to the musical traditions related to the *Xangô* religions. Grossly speaking, the *cultura negra* scene can moreover be divided into two movements, who interpret and use *cultura negra* differently. This rough divide of Recife's *cultura negra* scene is between on the one hand activists who situate the meaning of 'negro' and *cultura negra* mostly in the African continent; and on the other hand those who broaden up the meaning of 'negro' towards all Pernambucan people and objects that have some African influences. This rough divide I deduced mostly from existing literature on *cultura negra* in Recife (particularly from the works of De França Lima, 2005, 2008, 2009; and of LaFevers 2010) that is generally based on interviews with activists, academics, and others who are considered as 'experts' in the field. As I will describe in chapter 6.1.3, most of the scene's participants themselves do not consciously choose between these movements and do not make categorisations of what is and what is not *cultura negra* as demarcated as the 'experts'. However, their preferences often reflect elements of the ideologies and activities represented by the two movements.

6.1.1 African essentialism

To the former, practices, moral guidelines, and inspirations for self-identification that characterise the *cultura negra* are represented mostly in *Xangô* religions, in musical expressions related to the religion such as *afoxé* in particular, but also *maracatu de nação* and *capoeira*, and in stories of *quilombos* and African myths of royalties and divinities. This movement, which I shall refer to as African essentialist, is more radical in its denunciation of the Pernambucan *mestiçagem* identity through its emphasis on differences rather than on the mixture between Pernambucan and African culture. As pointed out by LaFevers (2010) and De França Lima (2008), it is generally also more confrontational; it focuses on pointing out the existence of structures that still oppress blacks in Recife society today, and it refuses any symbols that stem from or represent colonial practices. Thus, for instance, as symbol of negro heroism this movement has replaced the Portuguese Princess Isabel (who signed the treaty of the abolition of slavery) with Zumbi, a fugitive slave famous for having led revolts against slavery in the 17th Century.

The views on different musical genres are representative for the movement's philosophies and position in society. For instance, it is more critical of *maracatu de nação*, because the performance presents the coronation of the king and queen of Congo, a ritual that served the colonial regime (De França Lima,

2005; LaFevers, 2010). African royalties were acknowledged and financially supported by the colonial regime so they could be used as mediators between European exploiters and slaves. Given their understanding of both Portuguese and different African dialects, and the respect they had among their communities, having the royalties on the regime's side was a strategy to repress resistance of the slave population. The embedment of the African royalties in the system of European oppression, some activists say, is represented in the *maracatu* manifestation, in which the king and queen of Congo and their royal company parade and dance in costumes which remind of European Louis XV court fashion. Within the African essentialist movement, *Maracatu de nação* is therefore interpreted as *cultura negra*, but is used less for instrumental purposes in the *resistência*.

The same goes for *capoeira* and the more traditional versions of the samba. Both the samba and *capoeira* are seen as having originated from practices of the *resistência* by black activists. *Capoeira* is said to have arisen out of practices of slaves who wanted to hide their fighting rehearsals from their slave masters; and the samba was created in the *favelas* where slaves lived after abolition, and is seen as one of the first expressions of the Brazilian negroes that made it undeniable to the world that '*o negro tem o seu valor*' (the negro has his value), that negroes have talents and beauty too. Despite these origins in the *resistência*, both genres have lost some of their value for the African essentialist activists because of their current popularity in Brazil, which has turned them into symbols of the Brazilian rather than the African identity. In the process of popularisation of *capoeira*, *maracatu de nação* and samba, the ways in which the genres are performed by many groups have moreover deleted elements that were most related to their 'African' origin; such as the *Xangô* religious practices and the lyrics about the life and history of Afro-Brazilians.¹⁰ If Recife's African essentialist movement uses the samba, it is mainly in the more traditional form, the *samba de raiz*. Demir, MNU activist and presenter of *Terça Negra*, explains that he much prefers presenting the *samba de raiz* to popular sambas at its events, because it is the samba that is purest, that is nearest to the African roots, that still has poetic lyrics which tell the history of the negro. He sees this as the 'truthful' samba, as opposed to the popular samba genres with *brega*¹¹ influences:

"The real samba has poetic texts, tells history. It should be respected, because it's a well-performed samba, a truthful samba. But the samba *putesa brega* [slutty *brega* genre]... I'm ashamed of it. You have the *samba gafeira* which I think is the samba that is most *brega*. We respect it, but [...] what the people call *brega*, which we critique, [...] talks only about *bobagem* [foolishness], which stylises the female sex, or discriminates, or they speak about sex in bad ways."

While *capoeira*, *maracatu de nação* and samba are acknowledged to be *cultura negra*, from the African essentialist perspective genres such as *frevo* and *mangue-beat* are not negro, as in these genres too many African traditions have been replaced with European and other influences. *Mangue-beat* became famous

¹⁰ On the part of the samba, a lot has been written on this phenomenon for Brazil in general, often referred to as 'the theft of samba' (Pravaz, 2008; Sheriff, 1999). Both LaFevers and I, in interviews with some of Recife's black activists, were told similar accounts regarding the *maracatu de nação*. Particularly my research participants and *capoeira mestres* (masters, teachers) Meia Noite and Flavio were passionate about this phenomenon in regards to *capoeira*.

¹¹ *Brega* is a genre that is highly popular in Brazil, particularly among poorer Brazilians. '*Brega*' actually means brothel, which is characteristic for the often sex-related lyrics and types of dancing that are used in the genre. It has the reputation of being music of very low quality. The fact that *brega* is seen as bad music yet is very popular is illustrated by the phenomenon that middle class Recifenses sometimes organise parties at which they dress up like *favelados* and dance to *brega* all night long (note that they rather pay 15 euro entrance to a party at which poor people are imitated than go to a party in the *morro* for free).

world-wide in the nineties, with Chico Science as the genre's renowned creator. It is generally perceived as a unique Pernambucan genre because of its combination of the drums and rhythm of *maracatu* with rock and rap. LaFevers describes how African essentialists in Recife refute *mangue-beat* as being *cultura negra*, because the genre presents itself as if it revives rhythmic traditions of the past (LaFevers, 2010, pp. 48-49). It thereby presents Afro-Brazilian culture as belonging to an anti-modern heritage, which is no longer of relevance in the daily lives of Recifenses. *Mangue-beat* can moreover be seen as an ode to the *mestiçagem* identity in its mixture of local, African and global features into a unique Pernambucan genre. In line with the African essentialist thinking, author and black activist Nei Lopes (born in Rio de Janeiro) portrays the *mangue-beat* as a racist attempt to de-Africanise popular music in Brazil. He sees the popularisation of genres such as *mangue-beat*, in which African traditions are replaced by international pop music characteristics, as modern practices of slave domination. In his view, these genres are the attempts of white elites to make blacks forget about their *africanidade* ('Africanness'), in order to prevent unrest, or as Ranci re would say, to prevent the display of fragmentation (Lopes, 2005).

6.1.2 Inclusive *mestiçagem*

The second movement within Recife's *cultura negra* scene, just as the African essentialists, aims to enhance the black population's understanding and pride of Pernambuco's history of oppression and the African heritage. However, the extent to which it emphasises the continuous existence of oppressive structures differs; some do not demonstrate criticism on the issue in their performance of *cultura negra*, while others have similar views as the African essentialist movement. What differentiates the Afro-Pernambucan most from the African essentialist movement is the idea that the way forward for the empowerment of the black population is through less confrontational strategies which aim to create a common ground between black and white, and privileged and un-privileged Recifenses. They do so for instance by demanding attention for the Afro influences in cultural expressions that society at large has long celebrated, such as *frevo*, *samba*, *capoeira* and *maracatu*, and for the contribution of negroes to the construction of bridges, roads, or in other words, to the construction of Recife. Thus, more than the African essentialists, this movement also aims at enhancing society's appreciation of its black population and African origins. Within this vision of *cultura negra*, the cultural expression forms can include all Pernambucan popular culture genres, varying from *maracatu de na  o* and *capoeira* to *coco*, *samba*, *frevo*, *maracatu rural* and also *mangue-beat*.

Frevo for instance is more accepted as *cultura negra* in the inclusive *mestiçagem* view. This genre also has its origins in negro practices: the genre is said to have emanated from *capoeira*. In Recife, the story goes that when Recife's *capoeiristas* wanted to participate in carnival marches in the early 20th Century, they replaced the machetes, which were used in older versions of the dance form, with umbrellas. *Capoeira* has long been prohibited, so the use of umbrellas served to hide the fact that these negroes were in fact dancing *capoeira*. The acrobatic dance with colourful umbrellas, particularly during the carnival epoch, has become the most famous symbol of the Pernambucan identity. In the view of African essentialists, on the other hand, the negro influences in the *frevo* are illustrative for the negroes' skills and unappreciated contributions to Pernambuco, but do not make the genre typically negro. The genre is too much representative of the *mestiçagem* identity through its mixture of march music and features of show dance and outfits with *capoeira* movements. Moreover, it does not tell the story of the negro in Brazil. To the Afro-Pernambucan movement, however, *frevo* serves as an example that Recife society is much more

negro than it has always been presented to be, and can serve as a symbol that can enhance society's appreciation for the negro population.

Hip hop and reggae do not fulfil particularly strong purposes in either movement, as the genres do not contribute to the pursuit of a 'pure' African identity, nor of a Pernambucan identity. However, as the genres form part of what Sansone calls the 'global Black Atlantic' (Sansone, 2003), have texts that are contributing rather than opposing the *resistência*, and because '*o negro gosta*' (the negro likes it), hip hop and more strongly reggae are accepted as *cultura negra* in the general *cultura negra* movement.

Activists of the MNU, *afoxés* and *Xangô terreiros* are generally more associated with the African essentialist representation of *cultura negra*, whereas many smaller initiatives and activists who work separately of the MNU represent the Afro-Pernambucan conceptualisation of *cultura negra*. As discussed in chapter 1, in my experience some MNU activists who work for the government tend somewhat more towards the Afro-Pernambucan ideology than independent MNU activists. However, in practice it is difficult to distinguish between the two directions, as its participants often combine their forces, and as many actors make use of ideas and symbols of both movements. For instance, MNU activists Demir and Amauri are flexible and see hardly any cultural genres that are definitely not *cultura negra*. Demir: "There are groups who insist to just include the same type of music, that same style [in the *Terça Negra* programme]. I'm not against it, but it is limiting as well. [...] The point of *Candomblé*, the *afoxé*, of reggae, is that everything has music in it, so we have to open up to everything." Cultural expression forms that are often not seen as purely African, such as reggae or *Jurema*, a religion that mixes African with Indigenous influences, are used by many actors who adhere most to the African essentialist ideology. While pointing out the fact that these expressions are not African, MNU activist and *pai de santos* Amauri, Recife's public face of *cultura negra* activities, for instance likes to make references to the inclusion of *Jurema* and indigenous genres. Several of the *cultura negra* participants also talk with high esteem of the '*Jurema sagrada*' (sacred *Jurema*) and the indigenous people who, though not being shipped from their land, have gone through similar oppression by the colonising powers as the negro. In my interpretation these cross-references partially serve to welcome a broader audience to the movement, and to point out that unlike in white society, in the *cultura negra* scene everybody is welcome and respected. Meanwhile, MNU also participates in some of the government's multicultural *mestiçagem* policies. The fact that in practice the movements generally flow over into the other is also visible in the views of *Terça Negra* participants on the meaning of *cultura negra*.

6.1.3 Participants' interpretations of *cultura negra*

Overall the *Terça Negra* audience members identify most with the ideas behind the African essentialist movement. The fact that the participants self-identify as African and negro rather than accepting a Pernambucan *mestiçagem* identity, as has been described in chapter 5, is in line with the African essentialist line of thought. The majority of the participants moreover see *cultura negra* represented most in objects that have their origins in Africa and that are aligned to the religions of the African matrix. Yet, the manifestations that they consider as *cultura negra* do not in all ways represent those that the MNU and other African essentialists use most for the *resistência*.

Religion

Of all the people I talked to at *Terça Negra*, as well as among the participants who participated in the participatory observation studies, approximately half is of a religion of the African matrix. The following introduction into the *Xangô* religions is based mostly on the stories I have heard from various Pernambucans on the topic throughout half a year, from adherents, *Xangô* priests, and from Frei Tito, an academic specialised in religion in Pernambuco.

In this thesis I mostly refer to these religions as the *Xangô* religions, as according to some research participants and written sources, *Candomblé* is the name given to religions with African origins in Bahia, whereas *Xangô* is the official name given to these variations in Pernambuco (Bastide, 1960). *Xangô* religions are said to have more non-African influences than *Candomblé*, and as I interpret it, *Xangô* therefore refers to both *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*. *Umbanda* is a variation that has more indigenous and Catholic influences. These variances in ‘*pureza*’ (purity) and mixture should be interpreted in the context of an ongoing debate between black activists of Bahia and Pernambuco, about whether or not Bahia can make a more legitimate claim than Pernambuco to calling itself a ‘part of Africa in South America’ (Sansone, 2003, p. 66). Bahian activists describe Bahia’s religions of the African matrix as more ‘*nagô*’, as nearer to the ‘authentic African tradition’, and those of Pernambuco as more ‘polluted’ with non-African influences—something which some Pernambucan activists denounce. The difference between *Umbanda* and *Candomblé* is not distinctly made by people I talked to, who regularly use the terms interchangeably, and several of my participants are of *Jurema* or of *Umbanda* but refer to themselves as *Candomblista*, adherent of *Candomblé*. It is merely the ones who most strongly adhere to African essentialism who emphasise that there is a difference, as it is in their interest to present their religions as most purely African. Because in my experience it is not always possible in Recife to differentiate between *Umbanda*, *Candomblé*, and even at times *Jurema*, I use the term *Xangô* religions to refer to all variations of religions of the African matrix. Note that most research participants themselves use the term *Candomblé* however.

Within the religions, various *nações* exist. *Nação* (plural: *nações*) stands for nation, and originates from the different African nations and their religious and other practices that were brought to Brazil. The African ethnicities that were shipped to Pernambuco are Congo, Angola, Haussé, Fanti, Ashanti, Fon, and Iorubá (Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira, 2012). Because colonising powers separated members of the same tribes, these nations were divided and re-organised in mixed groups of various backgrounds in *terreiros*, the terrains of the slave-owners where the slaves were accommodated and got together after work. These *terreiros* are seen by many *cultura negra* participants as important spaces where the slaves maintained cultural practices and created new ones through the interaction of their diverse backgrounds and the adaption to Brazil. The term *terreiro* nowadays is used to refer to a particular ‘family’, a community of people who engage in religious practices together, led by the *pais de santos* (priests). It is also used to refer to the building where they do so. Thus, *Xangô* exists of various *nações*, some of which are considered more ‘*nagô*’ or purely African (*Candomblé*), some more mixed (*Umbanda* and *Jurema*). Examples of *Xangô nações* that I have come across in Recife are *Nagô*, *Angola*, *Jeje*, *Ketu* ad *Ijexá*. Within most *nações*, several *terreiros* exist.

These nations can be seen as variations of the same religion, since the deities, myths, and practices are very similar among the different nations and *terreiros*. This can be explained partially by the intermixing of African influences. However, the fact that most variations of *Xangô* have become very alike is also greatly attributable to the fact that the variations had to adapt themselves to similar conditions in Brazil.

They all had to, for instance, disguise some of the rituals as Catholic rituals, and align them to activities of Catholic Church, in order for the adherents to be able to perform them without getting persecuted. Moreover, the *nações* over time have gathered their strengths and emphasised their union in order to form a stronger power against the persecution of the religions.

During the initial phase of my field work, I estimated the amount of *Xangô* adherents to be lower than half of the *Terça Negra* audience, because only an estimated 10% of the audience wears the typical clothing that *candomblistas* are known for: wide, colourful or white gowns and dresses in the style of Nigerian and other West African fashions; colourful necklaces with shells and big stone beads; big (often spiralled) earrings, and bandanas and cloths around the hair of women; and often flat caps or Nigerian hats for the men. I entered the research setting somewhat biased, as I had read in works of authors such as Kulick (1998), Sansone (2003) and Van der Port (2005) that *Candomblé* or *Xangô* religions are mostly adhered to by activists, who like to make very visible references to their *Africanidade*, and that to most other blacks it does not play a big role in their daily lives. After having talked to about forty audience members about their religion, I realised that in fact, among the *cultura negra* audience members, there exists a big group of religious people, and that the majority do not seem to invest particular efforts to demonstrate their belonging to the religion in their fashion choices. Some have subtle references; adherents of some *nações* for instance have scars of little crosses cut into their arms, and others like to wear t-shirts in the colour of their patron *orixá*.

The research participants I talked to who said they were of *Xangô* were open to talk about it, at least to me, as an outsider interesting to learn about the religion. However, I also noticed that some people of *Xangô* see their religious practices as private, and hide their religious identity to outsiders, or only share it with people once they have reached a level of friendship. Once, when I paid an unexpected visit to a couple in Agua Fria with whom I had been friends for a few months, I saw that they had decorated a storage room as altar to the *orixás*. Unaware that it was a sensitive topic, I told them that I did not yet know they were religious, and asked them about their *terreiro*. The lady got very annoyed with her husband for having left the door open, as she was always careful for visitors not to discover the secret altar. She explained to me, almost as if she was excusing herself, that there are *terreiros* and *pais de santos* that are unreliable or fake, and that they do not like all practices that take place within the religion, but that they had found a very talented *pai de santos*, whom has helped them a lot when they went through hard times. The husband then began to talk about their religion for hours. One of my research participants told me that she is the only one of her family who openly admits her faith, and that her family members, many of whom I had met and talked to about my research regularly, were all of *Candomblé* but were scared to admit this because of the prejudices that exist. Another participant pointed out that even though religion is one of the most important elements in her day to day life, she does not always share her religious identity with anyone. She explained that she prefers to tell about this identity only when she has the possibility to talk more in-depth about the topic. Her family goes by the expression that there are three things you do not discuss: your preferences for religion, for political parties and for football. Discussing these, she explained to me, only lead to disagreement. Instead of discussing it with people who do not understand the religion or who are expected to be prejudiced against *Xangô* religions, some people prefer to practice and talk about their religion only in negro spaces such as the *terreiro*, their homes, or *Terça Negra*.

I do not intend to argue that *Xangô* adherence is much bigger in Recife than it is generally assumed to be. Such conclusions would be impossible to draw based on my study of a small segment of the population—next to the fact that it is of course difficult to study a phenomenon that people actually might try to hide. I do want to point out the possibility that a group of *Xangô* adherents in Recife might exist that is hardly visible and not open in its expression of the religion, likely due to the discriminative practices described in chapter 5.2.2.

As said, the other half of the *Terça Negra* audience I talked to is not *Xangô*. Several of the non-religious people who attend *Terça Negra*, though I do not expect them to be the majority, do have an interest for the *Xangô* religions. Several of those people for instance have figured out who their patron *orixá* is and like looking up stories about them to relate these to their own character, and enjoy the music played in *terreiros*, as well as the *afoxé* and *maracatu de nação*. For instance, Moabia, who has recently left Church, does not refute the possibility of one day becoming *candomblista* herself, as she feels a spiritual connection to and curiosity for the religion. Viviane is not religious herself, because she was not raised with *Xangô*. Despite that, she does feel that the religion is part of her identity: “I am not of *Candomblé*, but *Candomblé* is *minha historia que me foi negada* [my history, which was denied to me]”. Gabilo, to the contrary, has been engaged in the *terreiro* since he was a child, and still today likes to play the drums during religious *toques* (services), but he does not believe. Just as Viviane, he does see the religion as part of who he is though, “because it’s my culture right? *São as raízes do povo nè?* [They are the roots of the people right?]”

Because of this view that the *Xangô* religions are the roots of the negro population, nearly all participants, when explaining what *cultura negra* is, attribute an important role to the *Xangô* religions as corner stone of *cultura negra*. As Marta, Pernambucan coordinator of the MNU, explained to me, the importance of the religion does not only lie in its function as religious practice in daily lives of many negroes. The MNU also sees the religion as carrier of a shared memory of the Afro population. From the first days of slavery onwards it was made very difficult for the negro population to keep using the language, fashion, and religion; to tell the stories of the countries where they came from; to live in family structures and in relations to nature and each other, as they and their ancestors have been doing in the African regions where they came from. As said before, the colonising regime tried to erase the shared African memory. For a long time, only few negroes had the time and possibilities to maintain some of these cultural practices that the negroes or their ancestors had performed back in Africa. *Iyalorishás*, *Xangô* priestesses, are said to have played essential roles in preserving African traditions and passing them on to the next generations. They were supported by their communities so they could devote their time to this function, for instance through the secret *toques* (religious services) they organised at night when slaves returned from their work, through the passing on of stories of the ancestors and the *orixás*, through the creation of hidden *terreiros*, in the *quilombos* where runaway slaves lived and later in *favelas* where free negroes lived. That is how several research participants told me the story of how *Xangô* religions, the *iyalorishás* in particular, have always served as home front to the resistance, and as preserver of the ‘African memory’. In that function, from the African essentialist perspective the religion has come to represent the history of the negro population, which helps explain why to many *cultura negra* participants, even when they are not religious themselves, the religion is an essential and respected element of the *cultura negra*.

As said, the participants describe that *Xangô* is a natural feature of who they are, that, perhaps because African blood flows through their veins, perhaps because the beats of the drum and the energy of

the *orixás* resonate well in their body and mind, or for another reason, they have been almost predestined to get fascinated with the religion. This becomes very clear from a quote of Vam, which represents similar statements as those of Josuel, Gloria, and Amauri:

“*Candomblé* fascinates me a lot. When I returned to *Candomblé* I went to a *toque* of *Xambá*, there nearby Olinda. I went there as a researcher, to see the kitchen there. But when I arrived my imagination went, it was flowing, and it was natural, I was like ‘*meu deus* what’s this?’. When I entered the *terreiro* they were playing music about my *santo* [saint, patron deity], and now that I started again I began to admit Yemaja [name of the *santo*]. And nothing will manage to explain this. It was something that nobody will manage to understand you see? And that enchanted me, a life of science, but science can’t explain everything, not everything. It can’t explain everything. [...] It’s seems to be a thing of the *tambores* [drums]. When they start, only those who like it stay. I already saw people arriving to leave immediately, because they didn’t like it. It seems that the [ritually initiated] *tambores* make some people feel uneasy. [...] I feel... Ai, I feel super *leve* [light]! Light, light, I feel super *tranquilo* [at ease], I don’t get tired. When I’m really exhausted I still go, I go to every *toque*. Because the *divindades* [divinities] are all there, their energy is there. They stay close, and I feel the energy flow. I don’t know why, because there is this spirituality since I was young, I feel super light, I entertain myself.”

When describing why they are attracted to the religion, participants generally describe both that it is natural to them, that *Candomblé* is a part of their roots that they need to take care of by living *Xangô*, but also that *Xangô* is an open religion that does not limit people in what they can and cannot do. The religion represents an ideology that does not limit people in their behaviour, it is not associated by the participants with a set of norms as to what behaviour, physical features, sexual preferences etc. are acceptable. Many people see it as Josuel does:

“[*Candomblé*] doesn’t ask much from you. You can dress yourself in whatever way. You can behave whatever way, you can talk whatever way, you can put whatever kind of clothes on, you can go bare feet if you want, you see? [What you do is] a personal question, it’s not a question within the *Candomblé*. Here [in *Candomblé*] it’s destined that we are all equal. [...] If you do an *obrigação* you do an *obrigação* [obligation, a religious task or promise you set for yourself], *you* have to deal with that, not me!”

Because of this perceived lack of rules and norms, people feel more appreciated for who they are rather than stigmatised for how they look, who they love, etc. I suspect that this is part of the explanation for the phenomenon that *Xangô* is remarkably popular among LGBT’s. Other reasons have been given for this phenomenon, such as the splendour of the *Candomblé* scene (Van der Port 2005) and the fact that the dangerous, deviant reputation of gays situates them outside of political and power structures, so that people are more likely to trust them in searching for counselling among *pais de santos* Fry (1986). I have also heard Recifenses try to explain the phenomenon based on the existence of more fluid gender roles that exist in *Candomblé*. Not all *orixás* have a defined gender, Ossãe for instance is half man and half woman; some say part of her body is male, part female; others say she swops gender depending on the time of the year. *Xangô* is moreover seen as not as macho as Pernambucan culture in general. Women play important roles as *mães de santos* and in the mythical stories. In fact, one story I was told has it that there never used to be any violence when a female *orixá* was queen of the earth—until she fell in love with a man who created the iron that would be used to make weapons. The gay *Terça Negra* audience members I

talked to, however, see the attraction of gays to *cultura negra* as caused by the respect for differences, the liberty that *Xangô* represents to them.

Thus, just as with assuming the subjectivity of the negro, the initiation in the *Xangô* religion for most participants relates to their African roots, but also represents a choice, with a preference for the values and practices that are represented by the religion as opposed to those pursued in Christianity or overall society.

Genres in music and dance

Since *afoxé* is seen as the musical expression of *Xangô* religions, the participants generally name it as one of the first genres when describing what *cultura negra* means, just as *maracatu de nação*. To about half of the participants, these are also the genres that are most important to them personally, particularly *afoxé*: they attend performances and events of these genres, perform in *afoxé* or *maracatu* groups themselves, like to study the meaning of the lyrics of the songs, and feel best when dancing to this genre. The other participants enjoy *afoxé* and *maracatu*, but see them as two of the many *cultura negra* genres they enjoy. Various other genres are seen as manifestations of *cultura negra*, at times widening the MNU's interpretation up to nearly all forms of Pernambucan popular culture, just as the inclusive *mestiçagem* movement. Let me use some examples to illustrate how in different ways, these various constructions of which manifestations are essentially *cultura negra* can still be aligned to the African essentialist ideology, in the sense that the musical expression forms are used to strengthen an alternative negro identity rather than for the creation of a common Pernambucan identity.

Flavio, a black activist and *mestre* (master, teacher) *de capoeira* active in Chão de Estrelas and other *comunidades*, devotes himself to the preservation of Pernambuco's popular culture: the *coco*, *capoeira*, *frevo*, *maracatu*, *siranda*, the traditional samba. He makes a rough divide however, between the 'authentic' versions of these expressions and the popularised versions that receive most support and visibility in Pernambuco. The authenticity of cultural objects lies in the stories they tell, the ways they are connected to the religious and other traditions that they originate from, in who performs them and what relation this person has to the traditions of people of the *favela*, and whether they are used for artistic and religious aims, and not for the aim of making money. Flavio, as stated before, is very concerned about the fact that traditional Pernambucan genres keep on being adapted into popularised forms, they are being taken over by 'the people of the buildings of Boa Viagem' (a richer neighbourhood) in ways that in his eyes make them lose their authenticity. Several participants, like Flavio, see *cultura negra* as the authentic, poetic opposite to popular music such as the globally popular song 'Ai se eu te pego', *brega* and the Brazilian funk, which by many are associated with vulgarity and sex. Thus, in Flavio's conceptualisation, *cultura negra* does not principally originate from the African continent, but from the practices of Afro descendents and others who lived in the *favelas*, who made art about their daily lives, for aesthetic rather than commercial aims. He mirrors the 'true' music genres to commercial practices oriented towards money. In Flavio's view, whether or not genres such as *frevo* or genres with indigenous influences are *cultura negra* depends on the extent to which their participants identify with the identity and practices of the *favela* and the Afro Brazilian population. He is not against the performance of popular culture genres by for instance non-religious whites, but does not interpret it as real *cultura negra*, and worries that the increase of this phenomenon endangers the survival of true *cultura negra*. Likewise, Wilson, when talking about negroes and *cultura negra*, also uses language and refers to musical genres and religious practices

that are generally seen as more indigenous. He refers to himself as both negro and indigenous, and is of both the *Jurema* and of the *Candomblé* religion. He strongly associates *cultura negra* with the life styles and cultural practices of the *favela*, and of 'the oppressed' in general.

In a similar vein, *Terça Negra* presenter and musician in the band *favela reggae* Demir sees the essence of *cultura negra* music not as situated in a particular set of genres or only in the colour of the performer. Rather, to him *cultura negra* is about the message that the music displays, as well as the origin of the music in peripheral scenes. *Cultura negra* is music that is not yet accepted or offered space to be performed and developed in society:

"The rock, the one who started to do rock was a negro, Chuck Berry is a negro and he started doing it. But I think that because of Elvis Presley rock *ficou branco* [has become white]. Nothing against it though! But I think that rock already has the space to renovate itself everyday, including here in Recife, it has a space. I think that *Terça Negra* should be specifically for *a musica, a cultura, a religião negra em geral* [negro music, culture and religion in general]. I'm not just saying this because I do reggae, but I think that reggae has everything to do with negro, as its big leader in Jamaica is a negro, he talked of the *liberdade do negro* and of the African diaspora. He said the negroes should return to *sua terra natal* [their native country], and that they should be respected religiously, so *isso tem tudo a ver com cultura negra* [it has everything to do with *cultura negra*]. Reggae is reminiscent of *cultura negra*, just like rap, which was born among the blacks *nos ghettos Americanos* [in the American ghettos], who combined rhythm with poetry, and mix this with *as letras falando de resistência e contra a systema* [the lyrics talking of resistance and against the system]. All of this has everything to do with negro music."

Viviane, as well as other hip hop fans of the *Terça Negra* scene whom I talked to, identify as Afro-Brazilian, but are less engaged in preserving an identity that is based only in traditional African practices. All the ones I talked to also play or dance to *afoxé*, and feel connected to *Xangô*, but combine these traditional manifestations with Global Black Atlantic practices and other adaptations to their lives in Recife. Viviane's engagement in Recife's hip hop scene illustrates the ways in which hip hop can contribute to aims similar to that of the African essentialist movement. For several years Viviane has been engaged in the organisation of social youth projects which through hip hop aim to enhance the *conhecimento*, the affirmation of negro youth that they are proud of their negro identity, and the awareness about the existence of unequal structures in Recife society. The hip hop group *Yabas* for instance, one of the hip hop groups Viviane worked with, and whose performance I once attended at *Terça Negra*. *Yabas* consists of two girls who, next to social issues such as sexual health and homosexuality, rap about the beauty of negroes ("I want that negro, mama!"), and in their videos and texts show a pride for and satisfaction with being from the *favela*. To Viviane, her engagement in hip hop is not principally aimed at enhancing society's respect for and creating a common understanding and appreciation of the *negro favelado* inside the Pernambucan identity. Rather, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 7, she is interested in '*assumir novas bandeiras*' (raising new flags): "In fact, my suggestion is to think profoundly and critically before assuming one of them [a flag] and to sometimes recreate flags based in our *nossa própria lógica* [our own logic]"

Thus, the cultural activities of Viviane, Flavio and Wilson broaden up the 'traditional African' conceptualisation of *cultura negra* to a contemporary Afro-Pernambucan or negro conceptualisation. Despite using similar expression forms as the inclusive *mestiçagem* activists, the participants do not intend to construct *cultura negra* in ways that contribute to the construction of a common ground between blacks

and non-blacks, or between *favelados* and middle class Recifeenses. Rather, just as African essentialists, their constructions of the meaning of *cultura negra* emphasise the existence of fragmented segments in Recife society, of marginal groups which have essentially different practices and values and want to have the space to enjoy and construct their culture. Next to that, the essence of *cultura negra* to them is that its manifestations show an awareness of the historic and modern situation of negroes in society, and to build new identities on top of this *conhecimento*.

Several authors have criticised the MNU's emphasis on a shared African identity. Sansone for instance talks of the symbol of 'Africa' as a "great cultural freezer" (Sansone, 2003, pp. 65-66) that restricts the black identity to a set of symbols that were of relevance, if they ever existed, to people who lived in a different continent several Centuries ago. Adaptations of influences of the negro to the modern situation in which it interacts with various other influences are seen as 'de-africanisation'. I did not find this to be the case for the *cultura negra* participants I engaged with. The participants whom I talked to about the meaning of the preservation of the African history did not at all see this as implying that cultural objects should stay the way in which they were used centuries ago. Rather, as Gloria describes, *cultura negra* means "working on top of our ancestors, slaves, *orixás*. [...] Study the religions... and you create a culture on top of that". Flavio, who keeps advocating the 'preservation' of *cultura negra*, explains that this term in his eyes does not mean to keep traditions the way they are, and to avoid adaptations to relevant modern forms. Rather, it means preserving the essence of *cultura negra* as art form that represents the world views and daily life practices of the *favela*, rather than for instance for commercial objectives. Viviane's interpretation of *cultura negra* is also very much based in situating herself in modern society:

"To me, *cultura negra* is the product and process of being negro in the world. Acting, impacting, transforming and also relating yourself to others and to the world itself. It is memory, it is a strategy, it is contemporary and it is present in all spaces and moments of my day to day life."

Rephrasing these definitions given by participants in my own words, engaging in *cultura negra* means to use a mental framework that is based in *Xangô* and African philosophies in order to construct modern negro subjectivities on top of this understanding. *Cultura negra* pursues the construction of subjectivities and practices for the negro population that fit the situation of 21st Century Recife, but, as Viviane puts it, this construction should be based in on '*nossa própria lógica*' [our own logic]. This logic will be described in the following subchapter.

Summarising, in the view of the research participants, a broad set of manifestations can be considered *cultura negra*; which expression forms represent the culture's essence most depends on individual preferences. Throughout all of these manifestations, however, there is a set of recurrent characteristics that are seen as essential in describing the meaning of *cultura negra*. Mostly, in the view of the *Terça Negra* participants, *cultura negra* represents the history and both traditional and modern practices of a population that differentiates itself of the Pernambucan *mestiçagem* identity and culture. It demands attention for the existence of unequal structures in Recife society, and of groups who are not part of the Pernambucan identity, who are proud to be different, to disagree with the 'sensible'. For that purpose, an important marker for whether or not cultural objects are considered negro is whether they demonstrate the *conhecimento* (understanding, awareness) or pursue the struggle to enhance the *consciência negra*. This *cultura negra* identity is presented as alternative, almost as opposite to the Pernambucan, and through

its basis in the culture of enslaved African populations, in many participants' views represents the resistance of the oppressed against the oppressors. In fact, many participants literally call *cultura negra* the 'expression of liberty. Josuel describes how the negro has always fought for her freedom with blood, and should therefore be seen as the example for everybody in the world, particularly those who are searching to be freed of some form of oppression:

"Cultura negra, ela dá a livre, espontânea, liberdade de expressão [Cultura negra, she gives the free, spontaneous liberty of expression]. [...] I think that the negro, the only thing most important for him was liberty. And his liberty should be the example for all of us, everybody in the world. All of us search to be freed from something. Liberty of expression, religious liberty, the liberty of women [...] Todo mundo luta [everybody fights] for one thing only! It's li-ber-ty! Liberty of being who you want. [What you experience] through the music, through the instruments, through the forms of dancing, that's liberty."

Based on these observations, I conclude that *cultura negra* is not only associated with blacks, but with *favelados*, the poor, and other marginal people and objects who share the disagreement with world views and constructions of the 'sensible'.

6.2 *Cultura negra* as lifestyle and philosophy

To most participants, *cultura negra* is not just a preference for cultural expressions, or a way to reflect upon themselves. To the ones most engaged in the movement, *cultura negra* is a life style and world view. Many work in the cultural scene as activists, teachers and performers; some paid, some voluntarily. Shirley and Ana Paula were lucky; both having started off as dancers and teachers to children in their *comunidades*, they have managed to find stable and paid jobs related to dance and *cultura negra*. Others have less stable means to come around only from their participation in the *cultura negra* scene, but nearly all participants are closely engaged in arts groups, *terreiros*, or in activities aiming to empower their communities. They like to spend the majority of their spare time with fellow negroes, if possible at *cultura negra* events such as *Terça Negra*, and rehearsals and performances of *afoxés*, *maracatus*, reggae groups, etc. in Recife Antigo, Olinda or in their own *comunidades*.

Next to the ways in which they pass their days, *cultura negra* contains an ideology behind the ways in which the participants construct and interpret their subjectivities, take care of themselves, and relate their daily life practices to society. Partially, and to part of the participants, this is in line with practices and values of their religion, which they see as guiding them in every step they take and sentiment they feel. A broader set of inspirations, moral guidelines, meaning-giving processes and activities exist however that characterise the lives of those who 'live the *cultura negra*', or, in Wilson's words: "*O povo que vive a resistência, a cultura, para o movimento*" (the people who live the resistance, the culture, the movement". In this subchapter, I will argue that the *cultura negra* life style is based in a search for forms of oppression that the participants perceive there to exist in Recife.

So far, I have given several examples of actors and structures that are seen as oppressing the research participants. Just as there is not one example of being marginal that all participants experience—some feel unappreciated because of their sexuality, others because of their poverty, physical features, because of their disregard for money, or preference for living in the *favela*—there is also not one example

of an actor that all participants identify as the cause of unjust structures in society. Many point to the whites or the European descendents and influences that have biased Recife society to live in a way that they do not see fit for their own situation. Vam sees the dominance of European dogmas as making negroes “wanting to frame themselves as whites”, which for most brings about only dissatisfaction, as within that frame it is difficult for negroes to gain status. Gabilo and Vanessa see whites as being too much oriented towards technique and rationality and feel this as a dominant force in society that does not allow them to be appreciated for less rational and more creative qualities. Wilson, Augusto Cesar and Marta (director of the MNU) see oppression as embedded in capitalist structures that force people to act out of profit interests rather than to follow their hearts and take care of the people and world around them. Marta argues that it is capitalism that makes people ignorant of who they are and what is important to them, as they are distracted by capital. This ignorance that is caused by capitalism in turn leads to racism and the exploitation of others, which is in turn necessary to uphold the capitalist system: “Capitalism survives from racism, it survives of the exploitation”. During our interview, after having talked about prejudices against negroes, discrimination of homosexuals, and the destroyal of nature in Recife, Augusto Cesar for instance said:

“These problems are a reflection of capitalism, for people stay with their wallets and don’t care about the other. Since the time of the slavery it’s been like that. [...] In Brazil the [only] law is capital. They [politicians] destroy *mangues* [mangroves], they end with the environment, they destroy the fauna and flora, they end with nature... And the laws do nothing. There is nobody to fight it, because capital speaks louder and buys everything. [...] And for instance here at the firm, the social technician makes 1600 and something, and we receive 600. And we all do the same thing. How’s that? What’s that? That’s a reflection of what? Of capitalism!”

Flavio shares the strong concern that profit orientation inhibits people from following their hearts, but never explicitly uses the term ‘capitalism’. Flavio, Josuel, Augusto Cesar and Wilson perceive of processes of industrialisation and globalisation as having distanced the negro from nature, traditions, poetry and a search for beauty. On the other hand, Moabia and Josuel talk most of Christianity (Protestantism in particular) as forcing norms and values that do not respect characteristics that are important to the participants. Several participants moreover describe the government as actor that is part of the oppressive system; they see it as consisting of many actors that care more about their own pockets than about the people in the *favela*, or that try to commercialise the *cultura negra* expression forms by downplaying their *favela* origins. Lastly, oppression is represented by the ‘*elite*’, the ‘*burguesia*’ (bourgeoisie), ‘*a classe alta*’ and ‘*a classe média*’ (the high and middle class), or ‘*o povo dos prédios do Boa Viagem*’.

Though the structures and actors that are seen as causes for injustice in Recife differ, they have in common that they all categorise people into valuable versus not valuable: as more and less capable; beautiful; effective; productive; modern; etc. I will explain in this subchapter why I interpret the search for subjectivities and forms of *convivência* based in *cultura negra* as a search for new forms of living together in which equality, rather than categorisations of people, is the starting point.

6.2.1 Constructing negro subjectivities

A few years ago, in her late twenties, Viviane realised that she was raised with fundamental lies about herself and her identity. As many women in Recife, she was influenced by the aesthetical preferences that were presented in the media, the education system, by religious actors and the people around her, to believe she was ugly. Trying to live up to expectations of white aesthetics that were impossible to reach for her as black woman, she wasted a lot of energy into hiding her natural features, trying not to draw too much attention to herself, and into being unhappy and unconfident about herself. In an attempt to distance herself of the negative associations of negro women as sexual '*gostasasquentes*' [hot delicious treats] with big asses, she denied fundamental characteristics of her own identity, perhaps most importantly the desire she felt to dance.

When a friend asked Viviane if she could help out as pedagogue in some activities of the *Associação Metropolitana de Hip Hop* (Metropolitan Hip Hop Association), she attended some of their meetings without even really knowing what hip hop was. The meetings were not just about musical expression itself, but discussed issues of negro identity and life in the *favela*. Through her interaction with the hip hop movement she also started visiting *Terça Negra* in 2007. The event presented the history of the negro, in a positive version that countered all the racist perceptions she was raised with, through the stories of the *orixás* that were told in the *afoxé*, the black women on stage who were not trying to hide their black features, and the centrality of dance.

To Viviane, the hip hop meetings and *Terça Negra* turned out to become spaces where she started to re-interpret and understand herself, and where she started to '*afirmar uma identidade negra positiva*' (affirm a positive negro identity). Stimulated by the *afoxé* lyrics, she started studying about the *orixás* and her ancestors; and recognised the racism behind constructions of Afro Brazilian cultural practices as inferior and of the devil. She came to understand that she was robbed of her history. This realisation made her turn around the stereotypes she used to have for negroes and *cultura negra* and to affirm her own negritude with pride, for instance through wearing her hair big, in afro style, and through wearing colourful clothing rather than trying to hide herself. What was of extreme importance to her in this process of self-discovery was that she started to dance, and to realise how fundamental dancing is to her identity and her happiness. "Through attending *Terça Negra* I reconnected myself with dance. And I can tell you that this really defines me, you know? [...] There is this line in a book of Isabel Allende, which says 'The slave who dances is free'. That's exactly how I feel when I dance. I feel like I can liberate myself when I dance."

Viviane and her sister wanted to raise Viviane's nephew in a different way than how they were raised. "My nephew is six years old now. He is a negro boy with a bright skin, with curly hair, but when his hair is cut short it is almost straight, so in Recife he is easily considered white. So, when he started school, every day he left home as a negro and came back from school as a white, because the school told him that he was white. My sister was desperate and concerned about this, and started to work with him about this idea that being negro does not only have to do with skin colour. [...] [S]he started to tell him about the Egyptians, about the pyramids, the mathematics—because my nephew is a nerdy kid you know? And he loved it. She also took him to some hip hop events where he saw the b-boys and the rappers. Since then, he became very proud. He always talks about his

ancestors who came from Africa and who invented mathematics and philosophy. One day he was playing chess with my father. And my father, who is white, won. And he said: "Grandpa, you aren't negro, but you're actually quite intelligent!" For him negro is a reference to everything that is good, pretty, that is intelligent you see? We also show him that white people are pretty, intelligent, but in a different way. And [...] he understands that negritude is more than the colour of skin now. He got a cat last week, a small white one, but with a dark brown tail, nearly black. And when I talked to him [...] [and said] "how pretty, your little white cat!" he said: "no auntie, it's a negro cat with a bright skin, like me!". Enfim, he is only six years old, and my sister says that she will let him think like this a little longer. When he is bigger she will work more with him but now it is important that he accepts this negro identity beyond the skin colour."

In Viviane's eyes, to anybody in the world it is important to know the history of their population, and also to know what differentiates their identity and culture from other cultures. Although she is careful not to say that the affirmative negro identity is necessarily the natural identity for all blacks in Recife, she thinks that generally people fit best with their own adaptations of the identity and culture of their ancestors. This is particularly important for the Afro-Brazilian population, whose history was erased of their memories, and whose African identities were replaced with those of slaves. *Cultura negra*, in Viviane's view, is therefore of extreme value for this population, to give people the opportunity to regain an understanding of the real identity behind that of the slave. That way, they can re-position themselves in history and contemporary society, recognise oppressive structures that have tried to make them feel inferior or have made it difficult for them to participate in white spaces and activities, and decide for themselves how to present their body, which religion they want to adhere to, whether they dance or not, etc. She thinks that once people have this understanding, they can construct contemporary identities on top of this that fit them, that enable them to act in confidence and to appreciate themselves.

Just as Viviane, various of the younger participants of the *cultura negra* scene seem to struggle, or to have gone through struggles recently, to make sense of their negro subjectivities, and are reconstructing these through the use of *cultura negra*. Not all participants go through this process in equally conscious or radical fashions as Viviane, but particularly among young adults it appears to be common.

The search to make sense of their mixed roots, and of their dissatisfaction with the identity that is constructed for them by society (or, as Ranci re would say, by the police), as described in Viviane's story, is recognisable in many of the youths' experiences. Slavery has been abolished for many years, and it was centuries ago that their ancestors were kidnapped from the African continent. Their ancestry is generally a mix moreover of both African and other influences. Yet, the humiliation of the African slaves and perceived continuation of humiliation and marginalisation, seems to have made a lasting impact in their sense of identity and belonging, and in their self esteem. The erasure of big parts of the African cultures, they feel, has robbed them of the opportunity to choose themselves between the Pernambucan identity as constructed by the elite, or an alternative that they perceive to exist in African philosophies and forms of *conviv ncia* (living together). Re-phrasing this through the Ranci rian lens, they see themselves forced to either abide to the police and embed themselves in Pernambucan identity, or to nearly start from scratch in (re-)constructing a subjectivity that they see as more fit to the negro, a modern Afro-Brazilian subjectivity

adapted to the Pernambucan context. In this process of constructing a new (group) subjectivity, the idea of 'Africa' plays an important role in searching for alternatives to oppressive structures.

So far, I have given several examples of actors that are seen as oppressing the research participants. Just as there is not one example of being marginal that all participants experience—some feel unappreciated because of their sexuality, others because of their poverty, physical features, because of their disregard for money, or preference for living in the *favela*—there is also not one example of an actor that all participants identify as the cause of unjust structures in society. Many point to the whites or the European descendents and influences that have biased Recife society to live in a way that they do not see fit for their own situation. Vam sees the dominance of European dogmas as making negroes “wanting to frame themselves as whites”, which for most brings about only dissatisfaction, as within that frame it is difficult for negroes to gain status. Gabilo and Vanessa see whites as being too much oriented towards technique and rationality and feel this as a dominant force in society that does not allow them to be appreciated for less rational and more creative qualities. Wilson, Augusto Cesar and Marta (director of the MNU) see oppression as embedded in capitalist structures that force people to act out of profit interests rather than to follow their hearts and take care of the people and world around them. During our interview, after having talked about prejudices against negroes, discrimination of homosexuals, and the destroyal of nature in Recife, Augusto Cesar for instance said:

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Though the structures and actors that are seen as causes for injustice in Recife differ, they have in common that they all categorise people into valuable versus not valuable: as more and less capable; beautiful; effective; productive; modern; etc.

Particularly in literature on Bahia, there has been quite some contestation about the 'Africanness' of *cultura negra* expressions and the discrepancies between the actual continent and Afro Brazilians' constructions of Africa. Indeed, I came across various examples of *cultura negra* participants talking about the continent as if it consists of one culture, one population, one history. One of them for instance has written on her CV that she masters the 'African language'. When people tell me about paintings or traditions from Africa, or about friends who went to Africa, they generally cannot answer me when I ask them which country in Africa they are talking about. The Pernambucan MNU coordinator Marta was

particularly romanticising her construction of one African identity, through generalisations regarding behaviour of all Africans in remarks such as “the African *povo* always did that, it never destroyed it [nature]. It preserves the nature. The sea, the river, the forests. [...] Africa is no longer interested in that use of the land, in taking of petroleum etc. which kills the planet.”

Several authors point out the mythical and unrealistic character of ‘Africa’ as presented by many black Brazilians, a construction which they see as based in “memory, fantasy, narrative and myth”, (Hall, 1996, p. 70). Covin describes that the notion of ‘Africa’ was invented in the Americas, where the populations who used to identify themselves to be of a certain tribe all came to be categorised as ‘African’ by their colonisers (Covin, 2006, p. 17). The reason for the creation of these myths, at least by black activists, lies in an attempt to mobilise groups of people who suffered from similar forms of oppression to denunciate the myth of racial democracy together by defining what it is to be ‘negro’ (Covin: p.17; De França Lima 2009: p.155). De França Lima points out that the emergence of the *afoxé* in Pernambuco for instance has little to do with actual religious traditions taken from Africa, but rather, was introduced in the late 20th Century by black activists. He forwards evidence for the fact that the majority of *afoxé* participants were not religious themselves, but were connected to black activist groups such as the *Movimento Negro Unificado*. Similarly, *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian religions are said to be used as a symbolical instrument to unify black Brazilians (Capone, 2010; Sansone, p. 99; Selka, 2005., pp. 74-76; Van de Port, *Candomblé in pink, green and black. Re-scripting the Afro-Brazilian religious heritage in the public sphere of Salvador, Bahia.*, 2005). Sansone states that this instrumental use of the notion of Africa has led to the diverse populations and characteristics of the continent being represented in a package consisting of “essentialized bits and pieces of African cultures and sweeping generalizations on the nature of the African people” (p.64).

Thus, by many authors the Afro-Brazilian subjectivity is seen mostly as a construction that serves an instrumental role in creating an alternative to the *mestiçagem* ideology. Some even suggest that this black subjectivity is not really experienced or recognised by the black population itself, and is really only instrumental, and a subjectivity that the MNU tries to force upon the black population.

Let me first point out that the fact that negro identities are shaped by social structures in Recife society cannot be interpreted to mean that they are any less real or meaningful to the negro population. As long accepted in discourses on identity construction, ‘ethnic’ and ‘cultural’ identities are always constructions, constructions which are not so much attributable to a shared set of features that essentially distinguish one group from another. Rather, constructions of group identities are products of the social relations and struggles that exist among groups in a society (Baumann, 1999; Eriksen, 1993). The construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity is as much of a construction for social purposes as that of non-negro Brazilian identities, or the identity of a village community that has been living without much change somewhere in Nigeria for centuries.

Perhaps the biggest difference is that the construction of Afro-Brazilian identities has been a more visible and radical process, as after centuries of the denial of its existence, some negroes took the challenge of rebuilding a cultural subjectivity, of which many past elements had been erased throughout time. It has been impossible to figure out where their ancestors were taken from, what cultural practices they had had to abandon, and what Afro-Brazilian identities would have been like if they had undergone less disturbing transfers to next generations. Therefore, these negroes have had little choice but to use their imagination and base their interpretations of Africa on the bits of information they attained, and to combine

generalised, romanticised views of African identities with the manifolds of variations and adaptations that had come to represent the mixture of different Afro descendent populations in Brazil (Howe, 1999, p. 103). Their goal was moreover not to reconstruct in detail how different African identities have taken place centuries ago in different settings in Africa, but to construct an alternative to Pernambucan identities that Afro-Brazilians can feel comfortable with and can use in the modern situation on the South American continent. In my experience, research participants also do not go through lengths to make their practices be interpreted as directly inherited from the African continent. They openly admit that they have little knowledge about the real continent itself, and that the culture they adhere to is probably more representative of the interaction of Afro descendents with the Pernambucan context than of actual cultures in Africa. Thus, I interpret this process quite differently than Sansone, who critiques African essentialists for basing their references to 'African' cultural objects not on the determination of their realistic status through careful research, but on their impressionistic determination of the 'African', in which "objects, lexicon, and musical beat were labelled African based on observation and superficial association rather than by determining status through careful research" (p.65). The way I interpret the references to 'Africa' in *cultura negra* is as a struggle that many negroes whom I have met in Recife face in the construction of subjectivities that enable them to make sense out of their experience of being different in contemporary Recife society. The *cultura negra* scene uses symbols and practices that are associated with the African continent, not depending on whether they are realistic, but on whether participants can identify with them and see them useful in contemporary adaptations to Pernambuco.

As I think is often the case in processes of fundamental transformations of peoples' sense of their own subjectivity, both the overall African essentialist movement and the individual participants seem to go through phases in their uses and representations of their negro identities. As White describes for the North American case, in the process of affirming their afro subjectivity, many blacks first go through a phase in which they are fascinated with this alternative subjectivity that represents them in positive ways and gives them pride, they talk about it all day long and, in my experience in Recife, are still very much exploring the exact meanings and implications of this new subjectivity. This is generally followed by phases in which the negroes "have internalized the Afro-American ethos into their life space" (White, 1984, p. 10), and they have come to better understand the real meaning of this subjectivity to them individually. I noticed that many people are still in this explorative phase, so that during the interviews they were asking out loud questions to themselves about how to explain or interpret certain characteristics of themselves. And Energia for instance described how after several years of being engaged in the reggae scene, all of a sudden he realised that all along he had been talking about a construction of Africa that was not based in the actual continent itself. He realised that in fact, Africa does not exist, only Luana, Angola, South Africa, etc. which all have their own populations and cultures. "If you go to France you don't ask: 'how is Spain?' 'Rapaz [dude], how can I know I've never been there'. [...] It's very silly, but that shows how we thought about Africa, as if it was one and the same". Through this realisation, he learned to understand better what he actually referred to when he was talking of his Afro subjectivity, and how this was situated in Pernambucan society. The MNU also seems to be continuously adapting and specifying its views on the meanings of *cultura negra*, an observation that I base on the fact that what I heard from activists such as Amauri, Demir, Almir, Lindivaldo Junior and Marta is quite different already in comparison to descriptions I read in older accounts on the MNU's stance. The activists I talked to are much less severe in differentiating between

'nagô' and mixed expression forms, and have a more flexible interpretation of the African essentialism, as discussed in chapter 6.1.

In this process of exploring their subjectivities, *cultura negra* plays an essential role. Just as Viviane, several participants like to study the lyrics of *afoxé* songs; they like to read about cultural practices and *Xangô* myths. In interviews, several people told me stories about the *orixás*, which they liked because it gave them support in their daily lives. Moabia for instance had recently discovered who her patron *orixá* is, namely Oxum Opará, a combination of the *orixás* *lansã*, a war goddess, and Oxum, the goddess of the rivers. *lansã* went through a similar experience as Moabia, of being told all her life by the beautiful Oxum that she was ugly, and of one day, when she got hold over a mirror herself, realising that she was actually beautiful herself. Oxum did not like it that *lansã* realised this and killed her, for which she was punished by having to live in *lansã's* body, while *lansã* lived in that of Oxum. Viviane's story describes the importance for negroes' identity construction processes to see examples of other negroes who are not hiding their characteristics but affirm their negritude with pride. In performances of *afoxé*, hip hop, *samba-reggae*, in *terreiros* and in the audiences that are drawn to these cultural practices, they can see the diverse ways in which other negroes have constructed their identities. This offers them inspiration to think outside of the *mestiçagem* identity that the police has tried to force upon them.

Viviane's experience of discovering dance as part of who she is is also echoed in many of participants' stories. For some it is more through dancing, for others it is through listening to or playing the drums, that they feel that they are accepting practices that are natural to who they are. The religious participants feel the presence of the *orixás* when the *Xangô* related *cultura negra* genres are played. Many non-religious participants find it hard to explain this feeling in words, but describe that there is something inside of them, perhaps the spirits of their ancestors, their African blood, or perhaps it is just a personal preference, that makes them feel right, happy, at home, free, when they are dancing or listening to the drums of Afro-Brazilian music. They present themselves as having been destined to enjoy the music of the *cultura negra*, as if the *cultura negra* expression forms are the natural expression forms for their bodies. All participants feel that taking care of themselves requires taking care of that urge inside them, to engage in dance and music and to entertain themselves. The following two quotes are very illustrative of the feeling that many of the participants describe (in fact, particularly the female and homosexual participants)

Moabia: "It's such an immense pleasure to me to dance. I feel so good when I'm dancing, really, really good. It's a good spirit that enters inside me. [...] Like, it's inexplicable; I just know it's good. I feel really good when I'm dancing, really good, I liberate myself. Looking at the spirituality, it could be that it's about the encounter of my ancestors. Definitely, looking at the spirituality, that could be it. [...] [When I dress like a negra] I just feel good, I feel pretty, when I put it on. It's really nice. Like if you put a little piece of... help me, how can I explain... a little piece... It's like I get back to my past, as if I was with my family, dancing, it's so good. [...] And that question of identity, like I said, *salvei a minha identidade* [I saved my identity]. *Estou valorando minha identidade* [I'm valorising my identity]. [...] I think that this is crucial, to return to your roots. That's what happened to me. It's very beautiful, so beautiful! I observed that, *pronto*, it's a very interesting thing that happened to me."

Shirley: “That ‘negro’ or ‘negra’ has some sort of influence right? When I dance *capoeira* I relax. Because of the rhythm, which I like. I like these types of dances. [...] I don’t know how to explain to you why I feel so good [when dancing at *Terça Negra*]. If I will tell this to the *Mai de Santos* she will quickly say ‘because you have a spirit’. [...] I see myself like this: I’m continuing a *cultura Afro-Brasileira* in which I admit that I live. Because I’ve been doing *capoeira* for twenty-one years! That’s a whole life of *capoeira*! So how can I not feel good in a space from where I can say I was created? Because where I come from, *estou na cultura negra*, [I am inside the *cultura negra*], inside the history of *cultura negra*! I don’t know how to explain. How I feel in that moment, it’s without explanation. It’s the moment that I can really relax. If someone will see me at *Terça Negra* he will always see me happy. He will only see me *brincando* [playing, having fun]. When I dance I live in the moment.”

As I have also argued in chapter 5, I interpret the *cultura negra* subjectivity to be more of a choice than a race or natural identity which people were destined to discover. When trying to explain the essential feeling of what it means to them personally to be negro, research participants tend to describe how they feel when they participate in *cultura negra*: they describe that they must be negro because they feel natural, at ease, at the right place, because they entertain themselves and can relax when they play the drum, dance *afoxé* or *capoeira*, when they connect to the *orixás*, when they wear their hair afro, when they are among other negroes, etc. They explain their identification with the negro life through their African descent, and thus uphold a relationship between the *vida negra* and race. However, as discussed, how people identify themselves depends on whether they choose to emphasise the African or other origins they have in constructing their race. As I see it, therefore, whether or not you have African origins does not decide if *cultura negra* feels natural to you. Rather, whether or not you enjoy dancing, like to meet people who do not judge you, believe in *Xangô*, identify with values of caring and respect, enjoy engaging yourself creatively, or in other words, whether or not you feel natural living the *cultura negra*, decides whether you choose to construct a subjectivity that is inspired by the construction of African rather than Pernambucan ideologies and practices.

Thus, whereas several of the participants relate their engagement in the *cultura negra* as strongly related to their African origins and as what they were pre-destined to do, I argue that instead, this engagement is a choice that reflects a preference for an alternative to the Pernambucan lifestyle. The African origins are of high importance, however, less because of their racial dimension, and much more because negroes identify themselves with ideas and practices symbolised by the Pernambucan construction of ‘Africa’. While the actual common denominator that brings participants together seems to be that they feel underrepresented in the ‘sensible’, the *cultura negra* is persistently presented in relation to African descent and race in order to construct a shared subjectivity, one that is based in the preference for what is perceived as African rather than Western ideologies and lifestyles.

In short, various *cultura negra* objects such as performances of music, dance, clothing, stories, and religious rituals offer representations of diverse black identities, of alternative versions of beauty and skills. They are used for inspiration to draw from, while the overall scene is used as platform where people can explore

different sides of themselves and try new forms of behaviour. In this platform, people can experiment with constructing subjectivities other than the police's version of the Pernambucan identity.

Also for people who are not so much concerned about making sense of their mixed descent, the *cultura negra* scene serves as a space where they feel comfortable exploring their identities, and presenting sides of themselves that they perceive to be unappreciated in society at large. This can be attributed to the fact that the *cultura negra* scene is seen as a tolerant space where people are less judged based on ideas of what is and what is not 'sensible'. It is also easy to become part of the scene, to turn your life into the *cultura negra* life, because due to the flexibility of the terms 'negro' and '*cultura negra*', participation is accessible to people of various skin colours, backgrounds, and other characteristics that might exclude them to participate as appreciated members in mainstream society. I suspect that it is therefore also attractive for people who feel otherwise excluded, such as LGBTs, to reconstruct their identities in ways that embed them in an inclusive and appreciative community. Indeed every single one of my research participants points out the fact that they feel very much at home, relaxed, themselves, when they are among other people of the *cultura negra* movement.

6.2.2 *Cultura negra* as the manifestation of alternative forms of *convivência*

After Wilson was imprisoned for three months for marijuana possession, spent two months in coma after a motor accident, and when he realised that his wealthy family and family-in-law were all 'selfish capitalists who were against him', he made a radical move: he divorced his wife and went to live in the *favela* Os Coelhos, and later Santo Amaro. He made himself a feathered hat, and got himself a carved wooden walking stick, to which people have come to refer to him as '*o Índio*', the Indian, though he does not have physical features that remind of an indigenous person, nor of a negro. His motives for the swap from a rich life to *a vida negra* are diverse. Firstly, he felt that having money was not worth a thing, and did not want to live a capitalist life knowing that his fellow Recifenses live as '*miserables*'. When he was still married to his first wife, he owned a diner, which he used to serve poor people, and his family-in-law was always complaining as he did not make any profit. Through that experience, he started to hate capitalism, and came to see the *favela* as a space that is not driven by money, but by creativity, respect and caring for the other. This is why he feels more at ease in this space, where he can moreover peacefully smoke marijuana, and where he feels useful as he can contribute to the *luta* to improve the lives of the *favelado*.

What is not exactly clear, however, is which *luta* Wilson is fighting. He is so passionate about the fate of the oppressed that he cannot seem to choose between the different oppressed people, religions, cultural expressions, nor with the ideological movements from which viewpoint he wants to represent the oppressed. Instead he just chooses to become part of them all, contradicting as they might all be amongst each other. So he shouts from the roof tops that he hates whites, politicians and capitalists, yet becomes friends with many of them, likes to embed his 'social projects' in structures of the government, and changes his mind and says he actually does not hate them as every individual is different when asked to explain—easily proclaiming again what criminals they are in his facebook posts the next day. He proclaims himself to be both of *Jurema* and *Candomblé* and alternates the use of terminology and references to deities of both

religions in his speech. He regularly talks about starting a new *terreiro*, not because he has ideas content-wise of what his *terreiro* can add to those that exists already, but because “*cada terreiro novo marca a presença da resistência do povo oprimido*” (every new *terreiro* marks the presence of the oppressed). He agrees with the African essentialist ideology that the purity of ‘our African traditions’ should be maintained, while being of a non-religious *maracatu* group himself and believing that everybody has a black side to them, as well as celebrating the mixture of people and cultures. Likewise he always complains about the ways in which politicians and capitalism destroy nature, but for weeks did not stop posting about how we have returned to a dictatorship in which the government has changed the location of the *Festa da Lavadeira* in order to preserve the beach where it has been traditionally organised. He complains that artists from outside of Pernambuco receive more money than the local culture, while saying that *cultura negra* is not about money, but about the inherent artistic value.

Wilson, like the other *cultura negra* participants, sees himself as marginal, negro, *favelado* and likes to emphasise his otherness. He continuously denounces social norms that prevail in Recife society, for instance through the Indian hat and walking stick; through making pictures of everything and person he sees; smoking marijuana and always carrying a bottle of strong liquor with him; through not wanting to have money; or through the way he does not stick to many conventions of what you do and do not say to people whom you just met, and does not try to be polite or avoid conflict. In the first five minutes Wilson and I talked for instance, he kept talking about how he generally hates whites. He is less engaged with the construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity, perhaps because he does not have that much African ancestors. Though he calls himself *candomblista*, I could never get him to talk about the meaning of this religion to him personally. *Cultura negra* events also seem to be more of a social event to him, at which rather than paying attention to the music, he can walk around and chat, make pictures with himself and visitors, and go backstage. Perhaps it is because of his generally short concentration span and energetic character that when I spent a day of carnival with him, rather than standing at the same stage for more than twenty minutes, Wilson preferred to keep walking around, and to tap people he knew at the shoulder with his walking stick. I also hardly saw him playing music in his *maracatu* group himself, though he is always visible when Rosa Vermelha performs, and if possible grabs the microphone to shout something to the audience in the end. He likes to picture himself on the side of MNU and other activists, and as a critical person who sees through the ‘politics of camouflage’, who awakes ‘the *povo*’ and walks ‘*em frente*’ (in front) of the movement that will pull the population out of its misery. It seems that participating in *cultura negra* to Wilson is a way of situating himself in society as *lutador* (fighter), and even more, as a way to give purpose to his life by ‘*viver a resistência*’.

Living the *resistência* offers Wilson a life that enables him to combine all that he loves in life on a daily basis: the *favela*, people, fighting for justice, smoking joints and drinking liquor. Thus, he is manager of Os Coelhos’ *maracatu* Rosa Vermelha, for which he organises rehearsals and performances as social project for the children and youths of the community. He also organises well-attended cultural festivals in Os Coelhos, as well as exchanges between cultural groups of different *comunidades* to teach each other different rhythms. He refers to himself as social worker in the *favelas*, though it is unclear how he comes around exactly, as during the time we met up regularly he was not employed for anybody in particular. Wilson is the kind of person who knows his ways through the system however, he knows where to get funding and support, invests a lot of

time in networking, and somehow he ends up regularly in NGO projects, news papers, and even on the *Globo* news channel. He always has ideas and imaginations about what he could do in the future for the *luta*, he connects everything that enters his path to it, and all day long sees opportunities to get people involved and create links between people. Next to his activities with Rosa Vermelha, Wilson spends his days posting tens of messages daily on his facebook page in capital font, in the trend of “LOOK HOW THEY ARE TREATING US!”; “THE DICTATORSHIP ISN’T OVER YET”; or “*TODO MUNDO TOME RESISTÊNCIA!*” (everybody bring your resistance!). To everyone who wants to hear about it, he complains about the ‘*sacanagem*’ (sluttyness, shamelessness) of the government, about how politics and the elite do nothing but make the poor suffer more. He also spends his time by attending almost every single cultural activity that takes place in Recife and Olinda; and by walking around through the *comunidades*, where he stops to make a little chat with every neighbour he passes, and through the city centre, where he knows many people of all professions and backgrounds.

As Wilson’s transfer from his wealthy family to the *favela* illustrates, living the *cultura negra* generally implies feeling home in the *favela*, and identifying yourself with marginal practices and spaces. I have already pointed out in chapter 5 that my research participants feel at home in marginal spaces and are proud to identify as different from most Recifenses, and as negro. In terms of their life styles, this is manifested in the fact that in many ways they rebel against or differentiate themselves of the Pernambucan identity, of common norms and values, of the ‘sensible’, by emphasising their embodiment of an alternative: of a shared, positive subjectivity and way of living together, an alternative *convivência*. This alternative comes in the form of the *cultura negra* scene, which in many ways I see as disagreeing with the way Recife society is organised. In the following paragraphs, I shall explain the ways in which I discern what Rancière would call disagreement with the ‘sensible’ in many of the activities and ways of living together among the *cultura negra* participants. They themselves do not put it in these words, nor do in all cases explicitly say that the way they present themselves for instance is a way of rebelling against prevailing perceptions of what is valuable. I shall give examples to illustrate how I came to these interpretations.

The *cultura negra* lifestyle rejects financial wealth as important value. People such as Wilson and Augusto Cesar even point out that they prefer living the life of poor people in the *favela*, even though they have had the opportunity of living in more comfortable situations. Though of course some money is needed to come around, several participants emphasise that what creates value and happiness is not at all situated in money. The changes they wish to see in society moreover hardly relate to resources. Even to the contrary in the view of Flavio, who fights the negative impact of money as it turns *cultura negra* into commercial products for tourists, and makes artistic groups compete for funding; forcing them to replace the authentic, artistic meaning with popular features. One of Wilson’s favourite things to say for instance, is that you engage yourself in the *luta* and in the *vida negra* not because you want to make money, but because you want to commit yourself to the culture and the social cause, to improving society.

Various participants also seem to have re-structured their overall value system based on which they judge their own capability, worth, beauty, intelligence, etc. Instead of seeing themselves as persons who do not manage to participate in the economic society, they reframe their capability by using alternative value-systems to account for themselves, and by pursuing alternative goals which they see as

more valuable—and which are more possible to reach moreover. Thus, several of the research participants profile themselves as adequate persons, by emphasising their artistic skills or their spirituality. With Gloria for instance I often had the feeling that she felt the need to prove to me that she was not an inadequate person. Through what some of the participants call a ‘Eurocentric’ frame, the fact that Gloria has been unemployed and broke for a long time might be seen as a proof of her inadequacy by me. If I would call her to ask her about her plans and if I could stop by, she often told me for instance that she was very busy with the *afoxé* group she and her brother had recently set up, even when she did not turn out to be engaged with these activities when I actually visited her. In the way she presented herself to me, moreover, she placed much emphasis on her strong engagement in her *terreiro* and on the fact that she had been playing in locally famous *afoxé* groups since she was a child. Various people indeed present themselves as people who are very devoted to their arts groups, as creatively talented, as people who spend their time fighting for their community, or as people who are very spiritual. In short, some of the characteristics that make people less successful in a capitalist, efficiency-oriented or Eurocentric society, such as being black, poor, uneducated, or less interested in rational behaviour, actually enable them to participate, be successful, and even to become important in your community in the *cultura negra* community.

Wilson’s story presents such an example of a way in which people design purposes for their lives that give them a sense of worth and satisfaction, and, not unimportantly, of enjoyment. Next to the MNU activists, Wilson, Ana Paula, Shirley, Augusto Cesar, Energia, and many other people I have talked to at *Terça Negra* see themselves as *lutadores*, as people who have as one of the main purposes in their lives the *luta* for the *consciência negra* among the population, or more broadly, to stand up against inequality in general and commit themselves to improving the living conditions of their communities. Flavio, who works with “cultural politics in the *comunidade* that pay attention to the people, smarten them up, and wake their interests”, sees his role as important for the people in his *comunidade* to “always remember that there is a person here *lutando* for them, for their cause”. In fact, all participants consider themselves as contributing in some way to the *resistência*, some because they organise activities themselves, others because they are loyal participants in its activities. This *luta* is not even for all participants based in clear views of what should change. In my experience, complaining about the unequal political situation and referring to the *prefeitura* as oppressor is not only related to actual feelings about the political situation of Recife; it is also part of the performance of *cultura negra* based on the shared characteristic of being oppressed. Next to giving shape to your philanthropic ideals, profiling yourself as *lutador* is also the process of being engaged together in the struggle for your ideals: being able to say that you do respect nature, that you do respect people around you, that you are engaging in the *luta*. To be able to place a picture of yourself being wounded by the police while you were just peacefully protesting against the oppression of the *prefeitura* who wants to increase the bus fares. To be able to show on facebook that you also think it is horrible that the *prefeitura* tries to destroy negro traditions by changing the location of the *Dia da lavadeira*. To wait for one of your fellow ‘*lutadores*’ all night outside of his house, whereas it is clear that he is not going to show up for you to organise anything together, just so you can say to the people walking by that you ‘*esta fazendo um trabalho para a comunidade*’ (are working for the community). This profiling of the negro as *lutador* constructs the negro as someone who is critical, fights for liberty, and who does not act based on individual interests, but on solidarity with the community; as opposed to the docile, satisfied identity that *mestiçagem* ideologies have long tried to force upon the negro.

I also see the dissatisfaction with the 'sensible' as represented in the *cultura negra's* denunciation of the categorisation of people into more and less valuable. One of the most essential characteristics of the *cultura negra* scene that was described and highly esteemed by all research participants is the fact that "in *cultura negra*, we learn to respect everybody" (Gloria). In almost every interview, the word 'respect' was mentioned many times, for instance: "In my religion, I learn to contribute, respect, and I hope that everybody respects each other" (Ana Paula), "*O povo das orixás* advocate that people should respect each other, that they should let other people be" (Junior). It offers a space where people are welcome and respected, not judged based on their sexual preference, looks, religion, behaviour, etc. Every single person I talked to at *Terça Negra* described the *cultura negra* audience as a tolerant, relaxed audience who easily adapt to differences among people. With few exceptions of people who wish there would be less use of marijuana and alcohol in the scene, according to the research participants the normative prescription of the *cultura negra* ideology consists of one principle only: appreciate rather than judge every individual for his or her differences. Apart from that, people see *cultura negra* as a set of norms based on liberty, and on sharing. Again, one of Josuel's quotes is insightful on this issue, from when he explains why so many gays are attracted to the *cultura negra* scene:

"[In the Church] there doesn't exist 'everybody is equal'. That's what they [gays] search in *cultura negra*, they are respected. That's how it should be. He has an intention for how he wants to behave himself, which only concerns him, it's only his problem, it's not anybody else's. It's his! We have to respect that. It's his problem. That is, if he wants to respect me, and respect the nature, you see? We have the obligation to respect each other."

A recurrent theme in the interviews with adherents is the contrast that they perceive to exist between the *Xangô* religion versus Christianity. While hardly speaking in directly negative terms about Christianity, in between the lines a clear contrast is sketched in which the former represents freedom and respect for differences, and the latter a never-ending list of rules which people feel they cannot live up to: whom to have sex with, when and how to enjoy that; what to wear; where to go; whom to engage with; how to develop yourself; which urges and passions to repress; etc. Based on these norms and values, Christianity divides the population into those who are good and those who are bad. *Xangô*, to the contrary, is not claiming to present an absolute truth, and sees the meaning of what is 'good' to differ for every individual, MNU activist Amauri explained to me. He illustrated this with the example of the deity of communication, Exu, who is often narrated in describing these divergences. Christians have come to see Exu as the devil, because of the association of Exu with temptation, playfulness, and trickery. However, according to Amauri, the concept of 'bad' did not exist in the world views of *Xangô* adherents before it was introduced to them by European world views. My research participants, like Vam, have a preference for looking at the world through the *Xangô* perspective, rather than through that of Christianity, as they perceive the former as allowing them the liberty to decide for themselves what behaviour they think is good for them:

"What the *terreiro* is concerned with is not whom you date, whom you sleep with. That's just respect to you. There are many people who break with this respect for other people, but it [*Xangô*] accepts it like this: what you do is good, there is no problem. There is no problem."

Instead of being based in rules, the negro lifestyle is based in a rather utopian set of values. Participants describe that the negro, knowing what it is like to be oppressed is driven by respect and love for the people and world around him. Many have an image of the negro or African as having historically always been more community-oriented and less destructive than whites or Europeans, who are more driven by a wish to

make profit. This becomes clear from remarks such as “*o povo Africano* never destroyed nature” (Marta), “We [of the Afro-Brazilian religions] like nature, the wind, water, the land, [...] we valorize it” (Vam), “my African roots teach me to respect *a natureza* [the nature], the things you need, you love, to let in the nature” (Josuel).

Cultura negra to many people means caring, being at the service to the people around you, as well as caring for nature. Many participants describe how in their daily lives, the environment is very important to them, which is difficult to imagine for people living in an urban setting like Recife, where there is hardly any green to be found. They see the fact that they hardly have access to nature as one of the many destructive injustices done to the negro population, by capitalism, European life styles, or industrialisation. They see it as yet another way moreover in which the history and cultures of the African populations have been erased, as they perceive of traditional African lifestyles as always having been in balance with the environment. MNU activist Marta is particularly expressive on this issue:

“The *povo negro* is a *povo* who lived, who alimented itself practically with natural food. Alimentation which we planted. How do you say that, a *povo* that fed itself with food that has roots. [...] Today we are in this world, where it’s all meat: bull, chicken, fish from a polluted river. Today we live in apartments, so nobody still plants. Pollution, illness, [...] how is it that we will survive on this planet like this?”

Several participants present themselves as active in the *luta* for the environment, through attending conferences on the environment, planting trees, and protesting against deforestation practices (for instance through facebook posts). Constructing the negro as always having been in balance with his surroundings, both in terms of people and nature, in my view serves the construction of an alternative form of *convivência* that distances itself of practices of pursuing individual gain at the cost of other people and the environment. Marta describes how also the MNU is broadening up its ideology towards environmental issues, when describing recent meetings with MNU representatives about the philosophy of the movement:

“And this philosophy [of the *movimento negro*] is exactly this. It’s more than colour. Think about this division, of these goods. Think on the question of the *luta* against capitalism. And think that another world is possible. Based on these experiences, we are reflecting upon the question of sustainability, of the preservation of the planet, the environment.”

Though participants did not use the following term themselves, how they imagine the characterisation of African forms of *convivência* appears similar to ‘*umbuntu*’. *Umbuntu* is a common, idealistic term used in different African countries to refer to a logic that is alternative to the individualism that is seen as more characteristic for western countries. In this logic, people do not see themselves as isolated individuals, but act in relation to the world around them based on the view that their well-being is connected to that of the world around them. They therefore do not pursue personal gain, but instead take care of their communities and the environment around them.

Lastly, in my interpretation the *cultura negra* lifestyle for many participants also means to profile themselves publicly as disagreeing with the ‘sensible’ and the *mestiçagem*, as someone who prefers the marginal life to middle class life. Fashion plays an important role in this. Through their appearances they mark that rather than the Pernambucan mixture identity, participants identify with the *cultura negra* identity. Generally, the most important of the affirmative negro fashion is the emphasis on Afro features, particularly manifested in the hair. Several participants describe that to them it is denial of the negro identity to style hair or dye it blond for instance. Instead, it is worn frizzy, in dread locks, braided with

beats, or covered by colourful clothes, flat caps, or African hats. Most of my research participants often wear colourful clothing, with flowered patterns, the *rastafari* colours red, green and yellow, or some in the colours of their patron *orixá*. The most fashionable negroes, both many men and women, also wear bandanas, flowers, and big jewellery, particularly big spiral-shaped earrings appear popular among men. Yellow is moreover a popular colour among negro women, a colour which is generally seen as fitting more beautifully on black than on white-skinned women. Many also make visible references to Africa and *Xangô* religions in their appearances, particularly through wearing West African fashion, or through *Xangô* related tattoos and ritual carvings in the skin. I have even seen two girls at *Terça Negra* who both have a picture of the African continent tattooed on their shoulder and chest. Others make more references to symbols that are not accepted as 'sensible' in general rather than *Xangô* or Africa, such as through many tattoos, references to Indigenous influences, hip hop t-shirts, spiked jewellery, or outfits that play with gender expectations among gays and transgenders.

Other than through fashion, several people also demonstrate their alternative negro identities through facebook for instance, at which many engage in group discussions about the *luta*, and daily post inspirational texts spoken by negro militants or pictures of *orixás*, or invite people for *cultura negra* events and protests. Lastly, participants profile themselves as part of the *cultura negra* and as *lutador* through language, for instance through greeting each other with the word 'Axé!', or through answering the question 'how are you?' with 'Estou na luta!' (I am in the *luta*).

Discussion

In this chapter, I have discussed how *cultura negra* is used by its participants to structure their daily lives, both in terms of activities, and in terms of how they interpret themselves in relation to the world around them. I have argued that *Cultura negra* in this process has come to stand for a set of objects, practices and ideas that represent a subjectivity that the participants see as fitting and having more potential for creating happiness, success and confidence among themselves and their fellow negroes.

A continuous interaction takes place between the *cultura negra* and the Pernambucan identity. While hardly ever directly denouncing them as wrong in so many words, the Pernambucan, capitalism, Eurocentric ideologies, Christianity; all seem to serve as some of the biggest inspiration sources in the construction of the *cultura negra* identity, by demonstrating the roads that the alternative identity does *not* want to go. In the construction of an alternative subjectivity, all the aspects that negroes do not feel comfortable with, all those practices of these structures that they have personally experienced to be excluding and painful, are used as starting points to decide on which fundamentals an alternative should be constructed. The Pernambucan identity for this group represents a social system in which identities are policed by the elite, and in which people think in terms of personal gain, rather than for the people around them, particularly the ones less advantaged by the distribution system. The system, rather than focussing on the community by looking for a space for everybody to live in balance with each other, creates rankings among people, in which who can be successful, beautiful, modern, capable, and who therefore has a bigger chance of being happy, is greatly influenced by Eurocentric value systems. *Mestiçagem* and populist participatory government approaches are seen as having served to broaden up the 'sensible' so that alternative versions of beauty have come to be part of the Pernambucan: *cultura negra* music genres and

black bodies have become more visible and appreciated in society at large. However, in the eyes of the *cultura negra* participants, these policies have not done enough justice to the fundamental structures that keep finding ways to divide society in those who are considered successful and unsuccessful, appreciated and unappreciated. Based in the search for an identity that opposes these fundamentally exclusive structures of the Pernambucan, I have described the *cultura negra* scene to be in the process of developing a utopian alternative. This alternative is manifested in a shared ideology that is based on the fundamental principles of equality, the acceptance that every individual has his or her value and should be appreciated as such—in other words, on egalibertarian principles. In *cultura negra*'s egalibertarian version of living together, people would not be focussed on making individual profits, but on finding ways to live in balance with and care for the people and nature around them. In this society, differences between people would be seen as beautiful and every individual would have full liberty to be how they want to be, with as the only limit that they should not inhibit others from expressing their liberty.

This egalibertarian alternative to how a society could be organised is given shape through drawing inspiration of a construction of Africa. The continent serves as a source of symbols that are re-constructed in ways that oppose and denounce the Eurocentric, capitalist principles that govern Recife society. Thus, participants of the scene construct 'Africa' and 'Eurocentric Pernambucan society' as binary in terms of social practices; for instance as community versus individual-oriented in attitude; as rural societies living in harmony with nature versus urban, industrial, destructive societies; as magical, spiritual, creative cultures versus cultures grounded in technology, ratio; and as colonisers versus *lutadores* for freedom and equality.

The construction of this new subjectivity is a rather radical process: it aims to create an Afro identity that is not based in any existing cultures, but that re-interprets pieces from all over the African continent, as well as from other transatlantic and local ideologies and practices, and compliments these to existing features of the *cultura negra* lifestyle. It is an ambitious project; providing a versatile, grounded, modern identity which both individuals and the *cultura negra* scene as a whole can use to situate themselves in a society where it does not see itself fitting in existing structures. The project of reconstructing Afro subjectivities among bigger segments of Brazil's population is associated mainly with the MNU and related activist groups that arose halfway during the 20th Century. In Recife, the MNU has been active only for thirty years. In other words, the negro subjectivity and the egalibertarian alternative to social organisation of the *cultura negra* life is a process. Perhaps more radically so than for ideologies, subjectivities and forms of *convivência* in for instance European societies that have existed for centuries, the *cultura negra* is still under construction.

Chapter 7 – Politics, social change and *cultura negra*

In the previous chapter I have described how within the *cultura negra* scene, a communal lifestyle is being developed among marginal groups of society, based in egalibertarian principles. This chapter discusses the political potential of the *cultura negra*, in terms of the various changes in Recife society that *cultura negra* participants envisage and pursue. Through Rancière's conceptualisation of politics, I will discuss the extent to which the egalibertarian alternative can be considered radical and political.

7.1 Cordial disagreement: wanting to fight, rejecting the conflict

What stood out as remarkable to me throughout my research, is the fact that despite the contrast that has been sketched between *cultura negra* and other practices and ideologies, and despite the forms of stigmatisation with which many *cultura negra* participants have dealt throughout their lives, they are not outspokenly critical of the structures that govern society and that construct the sensible. Firstly, all participants discern that oppressive structures govern Recife, but seem to find it difficult to place the finger at what these structures are exactly and who is to blame for them. Secondly, with several exceptions, I experienced it to be uncommon for people to speak in direct negative terms about other people, such as the government, Christians, whites, rich people, or others which from their accounts appear to be the ones they actually consider as their oppressors. Thus, a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon is visible, in which on the one hand much of the *cultura negra* ideology is based in the wish to construct an alternative to the oppressive structure, to present the negro as the alternative to the Pernambucan way of living, while on the other, dichotomous thinking is avoided, or presented in disguised forms, in the ways in which participants speak about the relation between the scenes.

When explaining to me what the problem in Recife society is, what it is that oppresses the negro and that creates inequality, a common reply relates to "*manipulação*", manipulation. Society at large, the media in particular, and to a lesser extent the government, manipulate the population to believe that the African heritage is of the past, that white aesthetics are more beautiful, that there is no inequality in society. While the elite pretend that everybody is equal, only some manage to profit from the Pernambucan wealth.

Regarding views about the government's contribution to what Wilson calls the 'politics of manipulation of the *conhecimento*', I noticed a recurrent pattern in interviews with the majority of the participants, including MNU activists and others who are most active in the *luta*. With some exceptions, they would initially reply with answers in the trend of Energia's answer: "How could I accuse a government that has installed all these ministries and instruments and laws [to stick up for our rights] from using culture to manipulate a false impression?" Overall, people are positive about the PT, and when I ask them about their views on the government they answer that their policies have made huge improvements in the daily

lives of the poor. Then, when I asked them more specific questions about for instance what could still be improved in Recife, or how they felt about the ways in which *cultura negra* is represented in the government's policies, it turned out that in fact, various critiques exist about the government among nearly all participants. Several participants changed their attitudes throughout the interviews. Though I did not intentionally influence their answers, in response to questions such as "do you think the government represents the *cultura negra* well?" or "what do you think the government should improve?", some became more negative as they were reflecting upon specific activities and attitudes of the *prefeitura*. Energia for instance, when explaining the support he got for several projects in the past few years, at some point bumped his fist on the table as if he had just finished a puzzle. He replied that, contrary to his initial response, indeed "the political class doesn't see culture as an instrument for conscious-raising and social transformation".

The most commonly heard critiques are the idea that the government does not support local arts and *cultura negra* sufficiently in comparison to established national, and international artists, and that it does not invest enough in improving the public education system, so that policy plans of teaching African and Afro-Brazilian history are not implemented in practice. A critique of Flavio, Viviane, Energia and Wilson that I already discussed is that the government stimulates de-politicised or de-africanised versions of *cultura negra*, or that it only promotes incidental *cultura negra* shows but is much less active in the organisation of cultural activities embedded in long-term social programmes. The current *prefeitura* is even seen as strongly inhibiting the continuation of *Terça Negra*. However, as critical participants point out, the *prefeitura* is inhibiting the *cultura negra* in a subtle way, so it is difficult to recognise. By supporting a *maracatu* performance every now and then they distract attention from real topics. Also, Energia and Flavio regret that it is not really accepted by the government to criticise its functioning in activities that receive its support, such as *Terça Negra*. The government is seen as giving some space for *cultura negra* to be performed, but tries to downplay the origin of the music in the *favelas*, the elements of the music that raise the issue of injustice, of unequal distributions that exist today. Rephrasing this in Rancière's and my own words, the current mandate is not really committed to admitting the existence of a fragmented society through stimulating African essentialist representations of *cultura negra* and through critically debating unequal distributions in society.

The fact that many participants are not predominantly negative about the government, or easily change their opinions during the conversations, can partially be attributed to the various representatives of the government that exist. João Paulo's management, including the staff that worked in the *Núcleo da Cultura Afro Brasileira* during his mandates, is much more appreciated than the current mandate under João Da Costa. Overall, many people are so positive about the overall improvements that the PT has made in Recife's society in the 21st Century, that they think it would be incorrect to express critique, or are convinced of the PT's good intentions and attribute shortcomings to practical rather than intentional factors. The many layers and actors that function in the government, the different intentions among them, and the sometimes manipulative practices, make various people moreover perceive it as difficult to talk about governmental politics. They have the feeling that something is wrong, and initially reply that politicians just think about their own purses, but when I ask them to explain in more detail where the government is failing and what they would like to change, they say that they do not know, that I should ask someone who knows more about it, or they change their opinion and say that actually the PT is quite alright. Many of the negroes are just not that interested in what takes place in institutional governance

structures, which is perceived to be a lost case that will not benefit their situation anyway; a finding shared by Owensby's study on a national level (2005).

Throughout my stay in Pernambuco I noticed a tendency to be strong among most segments of Pernambuco, at least if I compare it to my experiences in the Netherlands, namely of avoiding direct conflict. As discussed in previous chapters, participants regularly describe how, contrary to the Christian Church, *Xangô* is very tolerant and caring; how African societies are less destructive than capitalist societies; how whites, or residents of the neighbourhood Boa Viagem, are more rich and powerful as opposed to the negro who is not oriented to individual power or wealth. However, it is very uncommon for negroes to point out Christians, whites, Eurocentric life styles, or any particular actors as the ones who are of less value or to blame for inequality in Recife today. The research participants feel that a vague group of elites have always done them injustice, and that they disagree with fundamental principles that structure society. Yet, this does not lead them to denounce a particular value that Brazil is often associated with, the value of 'cordiality'; of avoiding confrontation and settling disagreements subtly and on friendly terms. Next to the fact that cordiality might be a form of interaction that Recifenses are raised with, I see another explanation for the avoiding of blame and rejection of certain actors in society in the ideology of *cultura negra*. As some of its core features, it counters the judgement on others based on differences; it is based on the freedom of everybody to decide about their own lives and respecting the other for doing the same. Rather than an ideology that divides people into more and less valuable, it presents itself as inclusive for everybody who wants to be part. Thus, there is a tendency to think that if being Christian, living for consumption, wearing European fashion, etc. is what makes other people happy, they should do so: a *cultura negra* participant will not mesh into or disapprove of other peoples' lifestyles.

Though their dissatisfaction with Christianity is clear from their experiences, hardly anybody speaks negative of Christians. Sometimes they do at first describe blacks who go to Church as not having the *conhecimento*, but then correct themselves and say that they should respect different choices that people make. Moabia for instance pointed out several times after having described how Church made her unhappy that she should add that her Church had also done good things for her. Rich people, whites, Christians; several participants stress that it is not their fault that they have racist ideas, it is just the way society works that raises them believing in the 'sensible'. Vam and others therefore explain that rather than judging whites, they should teach them that '*o negro tem o seu valor*' (the negro has his value) and to respect other people. Josuel's life philosophies and experiences with discrimination indirectly oppose several practices of the Church and Eurocentric societies, yet to my questions about the differences between the movements he refused to let out any valorising or hostile words. He kept emphasising that *cultura negra* respects other choices and can live in harmony with others who choose to live differently. The MNU activists also contradict an image that some critics of the organisation create, that MNU activists are anti-white racists and see the world through a dichotomous lens of black versus white. While emphasising a differentiated Afro identity, they regularly talk about how whites, Christians, anybody is welcome to participate in the *cultura negra* scene.

It seems to be an accepted thing for participants that they just do not speak in confrontational language to other people, as well as that they do not criticise the government because it also partially shows support for the *cultura negra* scene. The fact that a government official once had the microphone be switched off when an artist at *Terça Negra* criticised the *prefeitura* is not supported, yet seen as normal by presenter Demir. As the MNU receives support from the *prefeitura*, it feels that it cannot complain too

much about their partner. I have heard several proverbs by people who explained the sense behind this, such as 'You do not spit in your own plate', or 'you do not pee against your own leg'. Several participants describe also that they do not like discussing their religious or political convictions with others, as they do not want to enter in conflict. Only Energia and Flavio show frustration for the fact that the government does not allow critique, Flavio in particular is annoyed that people in Recife do not like telling the truth:

"I like to express myself with the truth. I like to express myself truthfully. Often it seems that when I go in Recife and I express myself truthfully they don't call me anymore. Because they want me to be part of that game. But no, I am a truthful defender of the popular culture of Pernambuco."

Demir describes the road of critiquing that the *cultura negra* movement prefers:

"[we do it in] a way that at least doesn't hit in the face, it is respecting, knowing your limits. Another form is through my songs, my music, which can also do this combat. [...] You can say what you want without offending, or maybe while offending, but using more sophisticated words, and we arrive at the same point".

I asked people regularly if they did not think that discussions or protests through spoken language would not be more efficient to complain about injustices, but most did not think so. Participants are convinced that if you just talk, nobody listens anyway, and that performing a message through music gets the attention of a much broader audience.

Owensby argues that if we want to understand the Brazilian case, we should not search for approaches to pursuing social change as we are accustomed to from western situations, through attempts to change governmental structures and through verbal denunciations of the state of the art. Instead, he urges us to study the cultural objects that are negotiated in the creation of national and subversive subjectivities.

Let me give an example of an activity that in my view illustrates very well how the *cultura negra* denounces the 'sensible' without entering in direct, outspoken conflict. Whereas for Centuries, *Xangô toques* (religious services) have been hidden inside of *terreiros*, Gloria's *terreiro* turned part of the eight hour *toque* that I assisted into a public parade through the streets of Casa Amarela. For an hour, we walked, all dressed in white *Xangô* outfits, including some adherents in outfits of *orixás* who for one hour long were 'manifesting', who were in the trance that occurs when an *orixá* enters the body. The *pai de santos* and two drummers led the songs, which were magnified through speakers attached to a truck that led the parade, and were echoed by the participants. The parade took place on Sunday evening, exactly during the time that several churches were having their services as well. Every time we passed by a church, the volume of the music was turned up and the people sang and clapped louder. Fire crackers were lit with most frequency when passing a Church. The party moreover carried hundreds of white roses, which were distributed to the bystanders who were dancing, or seeing the parade pass by with their eyes wide open of amazement.

In my interpretation, this public display of the *Xangô* participants in various ways symbolises disagreement with the way in which the religion is commonly hidden, its importance in Recife downplayed, and its adherents marked as untrustable, scary people. As Josuel explained to me, *cultura negra* is doing the opposite of what the mass wants the oppressed to do: to be quiet and hide themselves. Thus, the fact that the religious community demands attention for its existence by walking the street in full splendour, proud to be dressed in the *Xangô* fashion, with the remarkable outfits and appearances of the ones who are in trance, and with a lot of noise, shows the refusal to abide to the 'sensible'. This is particularly clear in

relation to the Christian Church through the noise that is made when passing some of the institutions—without however outspokenly judging or speaking negatively about Christianity. While demonstrating the community's disagreement with the 'sensible', it also shows the stigma of danger wrong and shows goodwill to other people, also those who choose to abide to the 'sensible' by distributing white flowers to all bystanders.

Thus, on the one hand the *cultura negra* scene denounces the 'sensible' and the way society is divided, through the radical alternative that it creates. At the same time, however, it seems to aim to wrap this denunciation in a subtle way, in order to avoid too disrupting a disagreement. A question that Rancière and others raise is whether political change can ever occur through approaches that avoid conflict and do not radically denounce the cause of injustice in a system. Badiou would argue that the *cultura negra* scene is not fulfilling one important duty of those who search for radical egalibertarian alternatives, namely to rigorously expose oppression in all its details. This would mean placing the finger on not just which practices, but also which actors are responsible for the current situation in which they benefit at the costs of others. It implies denouncing any form of common ground, as this would mean to try and partially maintain practices that are essentially wrong because of their characteristic of downplaying fragmentation. I perceive the *cultura negra* scene to be in a continuous struggle: of disagreeing with the 'sensible' because of its judgmental and exclusive character, while avoiding becoming judgmental and exclusive to those who create and abide to the 'sensible' themselves.

7.2 Desires and imagined futures: the quest for utopian opportunities for the *cultura negra* scene

To those research participants with whom I got into deeper conversations, I sometimes asked a difficult question: if they could radically re-design society, if they could turn the whole way in which society is organised upside down, what would Recife look like? This question perhaps reflects the changes that participants desire as much as the width of their imagination, and proved to be difficult to answer for several of the participants. Through their answers and other remarks about the 'sensible', oppressive structures, and the aims of *cultura negra*, I discovered however that there is high variation regarding how far the imagination stretches as for what changes they would want. Though all participants feel uneasy and disagree with aspects of the 'sensible', the extent to which they denounce it rather than just escaping it every now and then or trying to adapt it varies. Variation exists moreover in the commitment of the participants to the egalibertarian alternative that the *cultura negra* life offers.

Broadening up the 'sensible'

In fact, despite the fact that they identify with and feel at ease in the *cultura negra* scene, some of the participants do not really want the way in which society is organised to change. Ana Paula and Shirley do not envisage radical changes, but see the *movimento negro* mainly as aiming to create a common ground between the marginal and the rest of society, in which the latter is stimulated to enhance its understanding of and appreciation for the different lifestyles lived through the *cultura negra*. Ana Paula, who works for the Pernambuco state Secretary of Culture, describes for instance that her goal is to change society's

perception of the negro and of *cultura negra*: “[We at the Secretary of Culture] believe that *cultura negra* can show to them [no indication in previous sentences who ‘them’ might refer to] that we exist, that people like myself exist. We have to show, and bring to the fore that we exist. It’s not that dancing is just for slaves, or for poor people, not even just for marginals.” Thus, what these participants ultimately want is to be recognised as worthy participants by the rest of society. Unlike neo-*mestiçagem* views on *cultura negra*, these participants do see the negro as an essentially different identity than the Pernambucan, as described in chapter 5. Compared to some other participants, I noticed they however tend more to the interpretation of the negro identity as a racial construction rather than as a choice or mental orientation. Ana Paula and Shirley, in their explanation of the meaning of ‘negro’, were some of the participants who answered that I as white-skinned person cannot be negro for instance.

Constructing their participation in *cultura negra* as a situation they were born with transforms the *cultura negra* identity from embodiment of disagreement to an identity that deserves equal treatment based on the consensus that racism is illegal. Constructing the *cultura negra* identity as racial therefore makes participation in it inherently a-political, the Rancièrian authors would argue.

These participants are willing to adapt the negro identity towards the Pernambucan identity if that at the same time encourages society’s appreciation of the beauty, the modernity, the skills of the negro population. For that reason, Shirley is not so concerned for instance that in this process she has to teach her pupils a *capoeira* or an *afoxé* that is de-connected of its religious practices, as this makes a bigger part of the population enjoy a negro art form. Answering my question of why she thinks *cultura negra* is important for Recife, she gives the following example:

“Here [in the Catholic school] there used to be another teacher of *capoeira*, and he did *capoeira* and *dança afro* and used the *orixás*, he used *uma forma que parecia como eles se manifestavam* [forms that look like the dancers are embodied by an *orixá*]. [...] And when I entered here, I did the dance still, but I did nothing like that, I only showed the culture. And the director valued me for that, she told me that I did it in a way that she changed her ideas. Because she was completely against the *dança afro*, and the *capoeira*, she didn’t like it, no way. Because she thought that it was of *Candomblé*. [...] And when I arrived, she said it changed everything she thought before. Today she says it changed her nature for everything, because she saw that she was stubborn before, that she thought this way about it. [...] If you do it in the actual way you are using it [the *Candomblé* rituals] right, but we don’t insist on doing it as if you were in a *terreiro*. And today she likes it, and she tells me very seriously: ‘you made me change my thinking’, and today she loves it.”

Ana Paula has embedded herself in the Secretary of Culture, she says, because she can make recommendations to the Secretary on how to represent *cultura negra*. In other words, she tries to influence the representation of the negro in the Pernambucan identity construction. Rather than radical change, Shirley and Ana Paula are satisfied with the fact that through their participation in education and government, respectively, they can contribute to re-configuring common perceptions on what is beautiful, modern, valuable, respectable (‘sensible’). They believe that through the contribution of *cultura negra*, it is possible to force society to be more inclusive, to respect every individual citizen as equally valuable. Thus, rephrasing it in my own words, in line with government ideologies presented in chapter 4, they do not see a capitalist system as inherently contradictory to the egalibertarian promise of the *cultura negra* scene, and unlike Rancièrè believe that equality is something that can be pursued through policies.

Other than Shirley and Ana Paula, there are various research participants who want the 'sensible' to broaden up. They want society to get a better understanding and appreciation for what life in the *favela* is like, they want white children to be educated to be tolerant towards differences. Several of the *cultura negra* activities, such as the *Xangô* parade through Casa Amarela, next to serving for the personal desires of the participants, partially function as a statement to society: 'we are here, we are different, but we do not let ourselves be oppressed and demand your respect for that'. Through demonstrations of alternative beauty, through showing pride of being different, and through a bit of shock therapy by showing pride of 'insensible' behaviour (e.g. parading a person who is manifesting an *orixá* in the streets), public *cultura negra* events display the *luta* for the margin's right to be seen and respected in Recife.

However, in my interpretation, to the majority of the participants, the broadening up of the 'sensible', of the respect of overall society, is not the main project of *cultura negra*. It is seen more as a desirable side-effect of *cultura negra* that can make life just a little more comfortable while advancing in the actual project.

From political ambitions to participation in the police

The actual project of *cultura negra* to the independent representatives of the MNU whom I talked to is more radical than that of Ana Paula and Shirley. They see the lack of representatives of the negro population in the construction of a Pernambucan identity as unjust, and through *cultura negra* and the *resistência* aim to repair this injustice.

In the utopian desires of a few of the participants of the scene, the *cultura negra* could serve as an alternative to the current system that structures and organises society. If Wilson, Augusto Cesar and Marta could design society to their personal preference, they would put the capitalist system upside down and let Recife be governed by a system that is based in the starting point that every individual is equal and free. Wilson has such utopian visions, in which the marginal take over the power and become responsible for politics. He calls this 'the politics of the *cultura negra*'. From then on it will only change for the best, as everybody will be valued equally. What exactly should be different in this politics is not very clear; the aim is to create "something better, everybody happy and helping". To how a universal society should be organised, how the democratic chaos that arises out of the proposition that everybody is equal should be organised, nobody has a detailed answer, other than that it should be inspired by a construction of how Africans live together in systems that are not driven by the will to generate capital as a goal on itself, but by the will to live in balance with the community and nature. The following quote by Marta, coordinator of the Pernambucan MNU delegation, is the most concrete explanation I got to the question of how the egalibertarian universal could be manifested:

"The people have to have another way of living. Because the capitalism is only breaking the world down. [...] The people are realising that there is no potential in this model anymore. This model of the exploitation of one man by the other. Of the persecution, the violence, [...] of destroying the nature, polluting the sea. [...] We have to return and live in a way that we can liberate ourselves together with this nature, with this world, without needing slavery, violence, discrimination. Including all! Because the planet is made by and for everybody. You have to look at LGBT, at women, principally at the old people, at our children who are the future. [...] It doesn't work anymore for us to think about the world as a model based on the vision of a few people, while the rest remains to die, live

in bad houses, have hunger and live in misery. [...] We have to think about the construction of the collective. We have to believe that another world is possible. Another form of living. With the plants, the plantation, with the nature, the fishery, healthy fishery, natural food. [...] So the ideologies return to African knowledge. We talk of the power of various things, the plants, the nature. [...] [People are returning] to the African continent and are seeing the importance of the continent.”

“The people say the negro race doesn’t have a political project, but we do. Zombi had it. Everybody ate, everybody had a house. Everything was divided over everybody. There was no conception of hierarchy, of political profession. Palmares¹² demonstrates that. Which isn’t different from the African nations. But they were sold to the world as if they were primitive, savage people.”

The difficulty that participants have with envisioning a concrete egalibertarian alternative that they see as realistic, and the lack of faith they have that it is realistically possible to replace capitalism, makes nearly all participants, including the ones most critical of capitalism, search for ways for the *cultura negra* to co-exist in a society structured through capitalism. Marta, Wilson and Augusto Cesar readily put their utopian desires to break capitalism aside to think of ways forward that they see as having more realistic potential. Rather than wanting to reconstruct the way society is organised, they are satisfied with being allowed to participate in and influence the police, within the continuing structure of capitalism (and, Rancière would say, within the structure of post-political democracy). Authors such as Badiou plea for us not to give up on the quest for alternatives to capitalism based on the perception that ‘it is less bad than the alternatives’ (Badiou, 2001), but many *cultura negra* participants perceive this quest to be too difficult to completely cut themselves lose of governmental structures, phrased as follows by Augusto Cesar:

“Because when Germany was divided: who wanted to be on the side of the orient? Nobody wanted, because everybody wanted to grow. And everybody wanted their commerce, this is what capitalism does. In socialism it’s not like that, the state receives everything and the state itself distributes it equally to everybody. But today there’s no way that that will happen. The construction worker doesn’t receive the same as a doctor. The teacher doesn’t receive the same thing as a laborer. [...] An alternative to capitalism for Brazil, Today? That wouldn’t be possible, no. Like I said, it doesn’t work to be capitalist or socialist or to employ marxism. But if the situation would be more socially divided, definitely that would be better. [...] But it’s not like the socialism will come and will... No, it won’t. Because our ideologies can be socialist, but definitely there will also be something capitalist in it because we grew up in a capitalist society. But definitely, if it would be possible, it would be better.”

For over ten years the MNU has embedded itself in the government structures that police the Pernambucan identity. The movement relies on the support of the government and takes for granted that this sometimes means it has to embed expressions of *cultura negra* in broader programmes that propagate the multicultural *mestiçagem*, and that *cultura negra*’s aim to enhance the negro’s awareness of oppressive structures has to be presented in not too confrontational manners. In an attempt to enhance legitimacy for its calls for being represented in the sensible, the MNU links the cause of the negro to international debates

¹² Maroon community famous for having accommodated the runaway slave and symbol of negro heroism Zombi de Palmares

and practices that have been accepted to be important by elites, such as the equality of race, homosexuals, and the environment. Rather than demonstrating that despite the consensus on the importance of supposedly universal values and rights, the way in which society is still fragmented in those who do and those who do not benefit from the distribution of social spaces, the MNU opts for attempting to make government policies more inclusive of the negro. The MNU activists I talked to see negritude as the choice to identify with the Afro rather than the Eurocentric ideology (see the quotes of Amauri and Demir in chapter 5.1). Yet, in embedding the cause of the negro in the police through linking it to international human rights debates, they tend to construct negritude as a racial matter rather than as a choice.

In other words, contrary to MNU's philosophy as described by Marta, the MNU policies in practice do not deal with the problem as being situated in the way society is organised as a system that pretends to grant everybody the same rights while in fact it turns individuals into subjects of more and less value. Instead, features of the system itself are used as arguments to make this system which (part of) the MNU sees as erroneous in itself more inclusive. One of the MNU activists for instance in an interview explains that homosexuals should be respected as equals, based on the argument that they also consume and participate in the economic system. The aim is to affirm the existence and value of a marginal group among overall society, but through an interaction that avoids the display of dissensus. Real fragmentation, or *mésentente*, is replaced by the search for consensus that broadens up existing structures to include some of the ideas and practices of the *cultura negra* at the expense of other core elements of the *cultura negra* philosophy.

Augusto Cesar, not directly aligned to the MNU himself, phrases the hope that MNU activists and some *cultura negra* participants have, that the current capitalist system is capable of becoming more centred around values of love, caring, and equality. He gives the example of a story he came across in the film *Quanto vale ou é por quilo?* (How much is it worth, or does it go per kilo?). It tells a story of a white woman who lived in colonial times and who, out of respect for her fellow human beings, created pacts with slaves that in Augusto's view combine capitalist thinking with love. She bought slaves their freedom, and in return the slaves signed a contract that after their liberation they would pay back the price plus a small rent over a period of several years. To Augusto, this example illustrates that it is possible to use capitalism not to oppress, but to liberate people as equal human beings. It requires every individual to use their hearts more than their heads, he says, in order to judge and respect people for who they are, rather than trying to "measure their value".

Through this non-radical approach, the *cultura negra* scene has brought about many changes in the representation of blacks in the police system. The government has come to include several people who used to not be considered appropriate candidates: blacks, *Xangô* adherents, homosexuals, *favelados*. The fact that Ana Paula, a black *Xangô* participants born in Chão de Estrelas, is now part of the body that governs Pernambucan culture, on itself is a substantial change compared to twenty years ago. Through setting up unofficial education programmes outside of the public schooling system, and through performances, facebook discussions and *toques*, the *cultura negra* scene moreover fights the presentation of what is accepted as beauty, moral, Brazilian history, etc. as it is represented in mass media and other education structures in Recife. Through these methods, the *cultura negra* scene has stimulated various of the research participants to re-configure what and whom they perceive as beautiful, modern, skilful, interesting, valuable. At the same time, however, the MNU also receives critique of several activists from outside the movement, for having lost many of its radical stances and its independent role to represent the

cultura negra. *Terça Negra* for instance is commonly seen as having lost most of its political function over the past years, while the organisers keep passing on the responsibility for the downwards developments to the *prefeitura*. In my interpretation, the MNU has taken on a more lay-back attitude in their satisfaction with the fact that the government has embedded affirmative policies and has created a weekly stage for the *cultura negra* to be performed, and has lost some of its inspiration for what it wants to change next. When *Terça Negra* or other affirmative policies aimed at the negro population are cancelled, fingers are easily pointed towards the *prefeitura*, who has come to be seen as shared owner of the MNU's agenda, which in the view of Rancièrian thinkers thereby necessarily becomes an a-political consensus agenda.

A representative of the MNU who does have clearer ideas for what she wants to see changed in society, is Marta. She argues that, if it is not possible to replace capitalism, affirmative policies should support *cultura negra* objects to participate in it on equal terms, as compensation for the Centuries-long attempt to erase the negro culture. Thus, she thinks that the government should not just represent negro art forms in public events, but create funds or micro-credit systems that will enable negro hairdressers, cooks, tailors and others who partake in re-constructing parts of the marginal identity to set up their own businesses. As it is, only people who already have resources and entrances can participate in the construction of the market of cultural objects. Thus, she says, a new McDonalds is being installed every few months, while the negro population is not capable of finding out whether they might prefer healthy, locally produced Afro-Brazilian recipes, as the negro kitchen does not have the resources to expand. The erasure of Afro-Brazilian history has erased the demand for the products that represent it on the market, so a temporary set of incentives by the government should enable *cultura negra* objects and the Afro-Brazilian history to be equally presented in the capitalist system. She thinks that this way overall society will come to better appreciate the negro and its expressions, but more importantly, those who have been raised with capitalism and with Eurocentric and white products and practices will be able to see alternatives as well, and be better capable of choosing whether they might not prefer the *cultura negra* identity to the identities with which they grew up. Thus, on the short term Marta's wish is for the *cultura negra* to be included in the structures that organise society, so that on the longer term, the support for the negro lifestyles will increase. In the future, this may lead to the *cultura negra* lifestyle to become more popular and versatile, so that it can have a stronger ground to stand on and more chances of having an impact in pronouncing its disagreement.

We see, in short, that the ones most actively committed to changing Recife society, MNU and other activists, continuously have to situate themselves at the border between being incorporated in the police, in the state of the situation, versus in the margins. In order to represent the interests of the latter, they have to engage with the police and in elite spaces. In doing so, they continuously move between versions of the 'sensible' and the margins. They have to negotiate and give in on some characteristics of their marginal side in order to be taken serious by the elite and receive provisions that they can access through the police. At the same time, if they give in too much of their marginal sides, they run the risk of being incorporated in the policing of the consensus, in which they can only participate on other people's terms. The stories of Wilson, narrated in chapter 6.2, is illustrative for the skills that many of the activists have in moving between these spheres, and the playful manners in which they deal with the appropriation of the 'sensible'. Also Augusto Cesar, who is one of the mediators between his *comunidade* Chão de Estrelas and the *prefeitura* in his job for the *Orçamento Participativo*, smoothly gets the sympathy from people of diverse segments of society due to his skilful adaption to different versions of the sensible. He refers to this feature

as the chameleon character, which he sees as characteristic for *cultura negra* participants in general. Thus, when travelling back home together with Augusto Cesar after *Terça Negra* one night, we missed the last bus and had to walk the last part from Agua Fria to Chão de Estrelas at 1.00h at night. At the event, he had introduced me to government officials and activists, whom he had elegantly explained about my research and that it would be interesting for them to talk to me, and had behaved on very friendly terms although he had not met all of them before. Now, in the streets of Agua Fria by night, with a similar smoothness but a different attitude and language he approached everybody in the streets: some older men playing board games; some youth hanging around a scooter; and two youths in an empty street, high on crack, of about 15 years old. Meeting a black young boy, dressed in bermudas and with a baseball cap, with his view on infinity due to crack, in this particular street and at this particular hour, equals trouble in the eyes of most Recifenses. Augusto however proved his chameleon character true by joining in the performance of an attitude very alternative to the one he showed when talking to officials earlier: he approached the youths as his friends, hitting them on the shoulders, using coarse slang, and shouted about the boy's sex life from across the street.

The construction of a universal alternative in the margins

Interestingly enough, and in partial confirmation of the hypotheses of Žižek, Swyngedouw, Rancière, Dikeç and Badiou, in my experience the most consistent forms of disagreement of *cultura negra* participants with the ways in which society is organised, are to be found among those participants who are most marginal. The MNU representatives, Shirley, Ana Paula, Augusto Cesar: all of them engage both in marginal spaces as well as in elite spaces, and apparently are judged 'sensible' enough to be accepted as teacher, employer or partner of the government. Next, I will elaborate on my observation that searching for consensus, nor turning society upside down through radical and confrontational disagreement, is seen to offer a valuable potential for change by the participants. They do not see either of these approaches as potentially successful in allowing them to live the life styles in which they feel most comfortable and free. Instead, while living in an overall society that does not recognise equality as inherently embedded in every individual, they try to construct a bubble inside, or parallel to it that does.

The fact that this part of the *cultura negra* scene is tired of trying to adjust their desires, ideologies and lifestyles to be allowed into the 'sensible' and in social spaces constructed by the elite, is visible in the following anecdote narrated by Viviane. During her engagement in the hip hop movement, the scene managed to launch a graffiti magazine in Pernambuco, which was a well-produced magazine and by itself an important achievement for the movement. The organisation behind the magazine managed to have the official launch of the magazine take place in the *Livraria Cultura*, Pernambuco's biggest book shop, "and some people said: *Nossa!* The hip hop is inside the *Livraria Cultura*, this is a victory!" However, during the opening, Viviane noticed that about 40 security men were present at the opening, an amount tenfold of the usual security present at the institution. This got Viviane thinking:

"I just wondered: what did we actually win? What does it really mean to be able to say your magazine is sold in the *Livraria Cultura*? To be present in a space that does not respect hip hop? To me, *hip hop pra mim é periferia e comuniade* [hip hop is periphery, it is the *comunidade*], and the *comunidade* is not in the *Livraria Cultura*, it is in *as quebradas* [the shacks]. Bringing the magazine back to the *comunidade* would be to return it to what inspired the *comunidade* to create this provocation, this unrest [that

inspired the magazine]. So sometimes we are fighting for things and spaces that aren't actually that cool, because *a nossa lógica é outra* [they are different from our own logic]. [...] My critique is not just that we are fighting for *valores ocidentais ou brancos, ou de classe média* [values of occidentals, whites, or the middle class], but that we are assuming flags that do not represent us, nor respond to our real needs.”

As discussed before, many participants distrust politicians, most also do not seek interaction with the government or try to engage in activities or stimulate changes through the government apparatus. Rather, stimulating social change for them means making art, passing on the stories of *orixás* and the African-Brazilian history, treating people with respect—all of this with a focus on marginal spaces: *favelas*, *Terça Negra*, *terreiros*, Afro-Brazilian community centres, etc. Through the *cultura negra* lifestyles I have presented in chapter 6, and the custom of several participants to spend as much time as possible in marginal spaces, among other negroes to whom the ‘insensible’ is sensible, participants live in social spaces where they have little interaction with the elite, and where the police has less presence. In their own communities, consisting of family members, networks of the *terreiro* families and musical groups, they can recreate a parallel society in which they restructure and experiment with manifestations of the communal *cultura negra* lifestyle. To some participants, this disinterest for changing the rest of society is rather extreme: they do not invest energy in trying to change what is going on in what the elite does and focus all their attention to the construction of a parallel society instead. Others see more potential for this parallel society to develop itself if the rest of society becomes more tolerant to the existence of alternative ways of living together. Some, like Wilson, also do not completely distance themselves from the government, if they can get funding for some of their activities for instance, though this does not let Wilson get rid of his stance that the government is in fact messed up.

Thus, this group of participants does not search for common ground with the elite, with the government, with the ‘sensible’. As I interpret their attitudes to social change, their idea is that the *cultura negra* fundamentally disagrees with the ‘sensible’, and is not willing to create a consensus in which some of its ideologies and practices are included in and adapted to the ‘sensible’. Rather, in my interpretation this group of people is in the process of constructing a society parallel to those social spaces governed by the ‘sensible’. They are constructing their own space in which the egalitarian *cultura negra* ideology governs the interaction and situation of the participants amongst each other, demonstrating disagreement with the fundamental characteristics in which social spaces in Recife are distributed and the principles behind this distribution. Sansone refers to the *cultura negra* scene as ‘safe spaces’, which he does not see these as spaces of contestation because negroes go there mainly to avoid, rather than fight discrimination (Sansone, 2003, p. 100). Indeed, events such as *Terça Negra* are seen by many people as spaces where they can relax, feel at ease, where they are not received with racism by the people around them. This is different than the argument that I am making here, namely that overall the *cultura negra* spaces that my research participants are constructing in the margins of Recife are not seen just as an escape, but as spaces where, in non-confrontational ways, they can denounce and search for alternatives to oppressive structures.

As the parallel society is embedded in overall Recife society, the participants can also not completely avoid interaction with the elite: the *favela* also houses prejudiced people, some participants need to work in non-negro spaces, and electoral campaigns in Recife for instance reach far into every *favela*. This is why, Augusto Cesar describes, the chameleon character of the *cultura negra* participants, and their tolerance towards people with different lifestyles, is essential. He explains that whereas when non-negroes attend a

negro space they will leave as soon as they can, as they will immediately judge the use of marijuana, the *Xangô* practices, the people who look different. However, the negro knows how to adapt his language, not to smoke marijuana, how to present himself, and that way gets by living the *cultura negra*, while knowing how to come around in non-negro spaces.

As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, I see the *cultura negra* scene as in the middle of the process of constructing their alternative individual subjectivities and forms of *convivência*, of understanding in detail how they see themselves in society, what that means for the variety of practices they engage in on a daily basis. Several participants are consciously searching for ways to manifest what I have called the egalibertarian ideology of *cultura negra* that they are passionate about in practical terms in their daily lives. They indicate that they are still reflecting upon how the pieces of the puzzle could fit together, and how they still want to further explore issues such as how they can interpret or oppose differences without judging, how their behaviour affects others, how an alternative logic can combine influences of different backgrounds without losing the essence of the alternative identity. Josuel for instance, describes that one of the things he likes to do when he attends public events, is to just observe people around them and reflect on them, about 'how they have taken care of themselves, whether they have money or not', about their colour, beauty and sexuality. That reflection inspired him to conclude that indeed, there is really nothing that can differentiate between people in terms of value, and that therefore every individual should be valued for whom he is. Everybody is ultimately equal, he says, because everybody has the same aim of searching for happiness.

Many of the participants are still figuring out what it is exactly that they expect of an alternative way of living, and can therefore only give rather vague answers to this question. In accounts such as those of Josuel, Vam and Marta, I recognise that they are inspired by more community-oriented distribution forms such as how they imagine traditional African societies to have been organised and see the system that is based in industrialisation and more Eurocentric, individual-driven as countering this type of *convivência*. However, when I ask them what it is they would want to change it seems that they do not have the courage to stretch their imagination so far as to search for ways to replace the current system. What Rancièrian thinkers might call the 'political potential' of *cultura negra* still seems beyond the imagination of some of the participants, though based on their experiences of the world around them I am inclined to believe that several, if given the choice, would fight for an egalibertarian alternative rather than changing some of the rules while in essence keeping on playing the same game.

The many still unresolved characteristics about the society that *cultura negra* proposes make that the *cultura negra* does not come up with a clear set of egalibertarian-democratic demands, 'scandalous in the representation order of the police yet eminently realizable', which Swyngedouw describes as essential for actual political change to occur (*Where is the political?*, 2008, p. 31). In interpretations of Rancièrè, Swyngedouw, Badiou etc., the *cultura negra* activities are therefore not yet to be seen as radical politics. The way forward, as I have interpreted the views of the more marginal participants, lies in strengthening the *cultura negra* identity as essentially alternative to the 'sensible'. This is partially done through the continuous reflection on and experimentation with identity features in marginal spaces among the ones who already identify with the movement. The sense of belonging to the movement and of solidarity with each other is stimulated through cultural symbols that strengthen the identification with the marginal alternative. Thus, Amauri regularly encourages the audience of *cultura negra* events to put on their African ropes the next time. Many of the participants fight the *luta* to preserve and develop the local negro artists.

This way, since the beginning of *Terça Negra* over a decade ago, the amount of *afoxés* that exist in Recife have grown from 4 to nearly 30, and that of *reggae* groups from 8 up to nearly 70. Next to strengthening the identification and solidarity within the group, the movement also aims to increase the amount of adherents. Through public events of *cultura negra* art forms; through the offering of objects of *cultura negra* on the market; through pointing out oppressive structures; and through passing on the story of the *orixás* and the African philosophies in daily encounters, participants of the *cultura negra* scene aim to spread the *consciência negra*. Many are convinced that the movement will naturally grow if more people are aware of the unjustness of the oppressive structures that have governed Recife over time, and get in touch with the alternative lifestyle that has enabled the participants themselves to feel liberated.

Discussion

Again, through the analysis of the *cultura negra* scene through the Rancièrian framework, the existence of plural tensions and balancing acts have been demonstrated to exist between the revolutionary desires of the *cultura negra* scene and the structural attempt to incorporate subversive expressions under the control of the police. I have argued that this latter attempt greatly influences the choices and revolutionary character of the activities of the *cultura negra* scene. The scene has to continuously negotiate between possibilities for advancement through accessing resources via the police on the one hand, or through the exposure of the truth by denouncing the police and the state of the situation as inherently disrespectful of egalibertarian principles on the other. The framework enables a critical understanding of the choices for a-political change that MNU and other activists make in these contexts, and points out that the more radical possibilities for revolution based in egalibertarian principles can be found in the margins, most distanced from governmental structures.

In this thesis I have thereby also tried to illustrate that indeed, the study of politics should not be confused with the study of structures of governance and domination. The study has offered reason to believe that marginal spaces and practices may offer interesting insights into both the shortcomings and anti-democratic practices of these governance structures, as well as in the existing quests for more democratic alternatives. These processes might become less visible when studied from the vantage point of policy-makers, historians, or leaders are labelled qualified to speak by the 'sensible'. The fact that on various issues, my study of the *cultura negra* scene through the Rancièrian lens has offered substantially different understandings from those generated through studies of how the scene relates to the government, national identity and non-marginal perspectives on society, to me indicates that essential parts of Recife history are left out when the story is only explored from that perspective. This perspective to my view is too much in line with how elites in Recife frame stories through including some at the expense of others in the policing of the 'sensible' for it to be used as the only perspective to build our understanding upon. I see it as the task of social sciences to offer societies a critical mirror to reflect upon the way they organise themselves. Therefore, exactly the stories of those whom are chosen to be downplayed by elites for the good order of consensus, should be highlighted in a sociology that aims to contribute to the quest for more egalibertarian forms of social organisation.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have reconsidered the meaning of *cultura negra* in Brazil, Recife in particular, by looking at it from a vantage point different than that which existing literature has done: from that of a group of participants of Recife's *cultura negra* scene that disagree with common Brazilian perceptions on how society should be structured, who gets to participate in that distribution, and based on which qualities. Interestingly enough, studying the topic from this alternative vantage point has yielded radically different understandings of Brazilian and Pernambucan identities, the meaning of Africa and *Africanidade*, the importance of cultural expression in the organisation of daily life, quests for the stimulation of political change, and even on the long-debated issue of the meaning of 'race' in Brazil.

Perhaps the most different from findings of other studies on the topic is the way in which the participants of a segment of Recife's *cultura negra* scene interpret negritude as frame of mind, an attitude and ideology, rather than a racial disposition in which people are born and raised. Negritude can be subcategorised in the negro colour, which is still connected to individuals' predetermined phenotypical features; and in the negro subjectivity, the latter of which is given more weight in the participants' interpretations of themselves in relation to the world around them, and in the way they construct their daily lives. To assume the negro subjectivity means to have the *conhecimento*: to search for the truth, to seek exposure of the existence of exclusive structures that categorise Recife society in people who are and those who are not considered valuable. Therefore, in this construction of the negro subjectivity, to assume negritude means to radically denounce commonly accepted perceptions of which persons are valuable, beautiful, modern, and capable, and to search for universal norms and values that do not divide populations into categories of people who are of more and less value. Instead, this universal assumes the starting point that is forwarded in the *Xangô* religions' world views; namely that every individual is inherently equal and free as anybody else. This principle of *égalité* (Balibar 1993) implies that anybody can choose to become negro. There are no features to the negro subjectivity that deny some from assuming the *cultura negra* life, based on skin colour, ancestry, class, etc.

The ways in which social spaces in Recife are distributed are often not to the advantage of the negro research participants, who feel discontent with the dominance of Eurocentric, white, capitalist, or Christian value systems upon which the distribution is based. I have represented the *cultura negra* scene as a platform for the explorative quest for alternative forms of *convivência*, of living together, organising interpersonal relationships, and for alternative ideologies and lifestyles. This platform, located in marginal spaces and *cultura negra* activities, offers a space associated with liberty, where participants can construct subjectivities and lifestyles independently from the police, which from the day they were born has tried to incorporate them into a shared Pernambucan identity grounded in an imposed consensus on what constitutes a modern, sensible, beautiful, capable person.

Thus, I have argued that the *cultura negra* scene offers a counter space, a society parallel to elite spaces, in which norms and values alternative to those of the 'sensible' govern the way people live together. The ideology that characterises this space is strongly related to African ideologies, that is, African ideologies as they have been re-imagined and re-appropriated in the context of Pernambuco. An

interesting contrast has therefore developed, in which the negro subjectivity for most participants has come to represent a deliberate choice to denounce the state of the situation rather than a body or situation in which people are born, while at the same time references to Africa, ancestry and race are common in the dialectics of the *cultura negra* scene. The aim in exploring ties with the African heritage in Pernambuco is not so much however to reconstruct historical identities. They do not intend so much to reconstruct practices and ideologies that might have been relevant for people living at another continent in another era, but rather, to explore different forms for them to develop their subjectivities and for people to live together. The idealised view of Africa that participants have, reminding of the *ubuntu* ideology of seeing your well-being as connected to everybody around you, offers inspiration in the quest for forms of living together that are not based in capitalist, Eurocentric, white, Christian principles. These principles are seen as inherently anti-egalitarian, since they imply the pursuing of personal benefits at the cost of others and categorise people as productive versus unproductive; modern versus backwards; beautiful versus ugly; good versus bad; etc.

Different movements can be discerned within the scene, which have different imaginations of future forms of *convivência* in Recife. Some of them use the African heritage as form of identity politics; they pursue participation in the policing of Recife society by forcing society to recognise their interests based on the existing consensus that racism is wrong and legally prohibited. In doing so, they give in on their radical denunciation of the state of the situation by incorporating themselves in it, so they can access resources and create impact on the shorter term. To most of the research participants, participating in the policing of the 'sensible' is not the main goal of their *luta* however. They see the broadening up of the 'sensible' as necessary on the short term, in order to enable the alternative forms of social organisation to be strengthened and developed in the margins in the meantime. For, whereas MNU activists are much more engaged with pursuing changes in the police, to most *cultura negra* participants the meaning of their participation in the scene is in fact rather to the contrary. Most have given up on the police's capability to represent their interests and to create a society founded on the egalitarian principle, and choose to distance themselves from the elite and spaces governed by the 'sensible' where possible. Thus, in the margins of Recife society, a parallel society is being constructed, guided by the fundamental norms and values of equality and liberty, and of taking care of each other and of nature.

The power of subversive cultural expression forms constructed is visible in the impressive attempt of the government throughout the past Century to continuously incorporate *cultura negra* expressions into the domain of the police. This attempt creates an ongoing dilemma for the scene, which is offered more participation in the police and an increasing status as 'sensible', though not being in charge of this policing of the 'sensible' itself. It seems plausible for participants to imagine therefore that refusing these facilities and to pursue instead a much more radical change which is more difficult to obtain, is unlikely to work out to the advantage of the scene, at least on the short term. Participants therefore continuously have to reconsider their stances towards questions such as how much weight they attribute to resources versus liberty; how committed they are to replace consumerism and capitalism with *convivência* based in *ubuntu*; to what extent they are willing to give up attempts to be respected by overall society in the construction of alternative perceptions of what is respectable, etc.

The stances that the *cultura negra* participants will give to these answers in the ongoing exploration of marginal subjectivities will decide the real potential of the egalitarian utopia that the scene offers for re-organising society. As it is, the utopia does not appear to have enough body to form a

realisable alternative as of yet, and the courage to imagine alternatives behind the current form of social organisation is moreover slim. A plausible future scenario for the scene therefore is in line with trends visible in the past decades, in which the police manages to keep up with the movement so well, and keeps incorporating its practices into the 'sensible' with such subtlety, that *cultura negra's* urge to disagree will fade. On the other hand, perhaps the movement will indeed manage to expand itself by offering broader parts of Recife's population the option to choose negro subjectivities over the policed Pernambucan one. Perhaps the urge to disagree will only be strengthened in Recife's future, thereby enhancing the commitment to the *cultura negra* ideals. In that case, in a utopian future scenario the *cultura negra* scene might develop into a strong subversive entity, capable of demanding a revolution that replaces the current post-democratic, capitalist-based system into an Afro-inspired *umbuntu* society, in which it is attempted to structure Recife society from the basic acceptance that every individual is of equal value.

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