

PERIFACONNECTION: SHARING PROTAGONISMS

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- *Another way of defending human rights* •

ABSTRACT

Through the PerifaConnection network, five young, black Brazilians raise their voice to defend rights and reclaim the power of the territory of the periphery. They have become a reference in both the dispute over the narratives about the peripheries and collective organising.

KEYWORDS

Peripheries | Black youth | Voices | Power

To reduce me to survival is to steal what little good I've lived
 ("Amarelo", Emicida)

This is what we at PerifaConnection want to express when we say that our mission is to dispute the narrative about the peripheries. The Brazilian media has helped build the imagery of favelas and peripheries as places of violence and extreme poverty. Lots of people have only heard about favelas because of the film "City of God" (2002). We at PerifaConnection want to deconstruct this imagery. To show the world that our socioeconomic weaknesses are only part of a whole that, just like in any other region of the world, contains joy, sadness, strength and a great deal of hope.

It is important to celebrate our stories: peripheral and black. One way to celebrate is precisely by asserting what is good in us, as bodies and territories full of life and humanity. We are five young people whose ancestors were migrants that fled droughts, slaves and quilombolas, and we are influenced by Candomblé, by Christianity, by Racionais MC's and by Rappa.¹

All five members have previous experiences, with at least ten years working in other areas: Raul Santiago is one of the most active voices in the media from the periphery in Brazil; Nina da Hora works with one of the essential tools of our time, which is technology; drawing on all his ancestry, Wesley Teixeira has more than a decade's worth of experience in the Baixada Fluminense region mobilizing for grassroots education; Salvino Oliveira offers a reflection on the public sphere through Academia; and Jefferson Barbosa covers all this in the production of journalistic information.

When we say "peripheries", we are also including rural areas, centenary old quilombo communities, indigenous villages that are constantly under attack and that, through their resistance, set an example for collective and political organization. There are many and multiple peripheries that exist in Brazil, with strong connections created between them.

PerifaConnection is a gathering point, a meeting of these peripheral voices that, despite having been a reference for several generations, now have more possibilities to be protagonists in all processes. Our network is predominantly young and black, but it also draws on other peripheral experiences, including those in Maré (Rio de Janeiro), in Capão Redondo (São Paulo), in Nordeste de Amaralina (Bahia) and in Alto Zé do Pinho (Pernambuco).

Sharing protagonism does not mean a rotation of visibility, but the instead sharing our strengths. A *pajelança* ritual of different narratives, in the words of the historian Luiz Antônio Simas,² which in PerifaConnection are reinforced through several media outlets.³

When considering the different approaches that peripheral black youth can and already do take in the media, we developed initiatives, together with organizations and activists, that enhance our impact using technology as a major ally in the communication and

union of different cultures. PerifaConnection's first organized cycle is taking place this year, 2020, as we have started publishing weekly articles in the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper⁴ – also inviting other voices besides the five of us; bringing other activists and communicators to these hegemonic “media cannons” to wake up the big house from its unjust dreams, to quote Conceição Evaristo.⁵

In addition to debuting the first season of our podcast, we have also started organizing a meeting for 2021 for the Durban Conference, with the intention of recovering our achievements and presenting some of these legacies to the new generations of black and peripheral activists. A pluralistic diaspora, rich in life and wielding power in the face of injustice. We believe that the training process is crucial for our narratives to continue to take shape, such as the LAB on the environment and peripheries, in partnership with the Instituto Clima e Sociedade (Climate and Society Institute).

We debate among ourselves, and for society as a whole, relevant issues that our affective, geographical and political places present. We occupy spaces that have historically been denied us, connecting a network and making our voices resonate as human rights defenders, even at a time when everything points to inhumanity.⁶

When we think of PerifaConnection, we think of this collaboration with networks that are already engaged, but that are not always visible, since there is always someone trying to cover our mouths and speak on our behalf. We have our own voice and we walk our own walk.

Our commitment is to convey the fruit of years of work building democracy, and the legacy of activists/heroes like Abdias Nascimento, Nilma Bentes,⁷ Mãe Beata de Yemanjá,⁸ Raoni Metuktire, Chico Mendes and the doctor Jurema Werneck. We want to metabolize all this legacy, collaborating and increasingly strengthening fresh voices, which are not new, but essential.

We know that we need to stay alive and defend a healthy way of life. And this concern is not just about ourselves as individuals, but also about how collective our bodies are.

Our experience as black and peripheral defenders is underpinned by this fundamental premise: that we are alive. After all, what we are building are perspectives on life so other young people can also play the role they want in the building of a more just society. An essential part of all this is to remain active, as many activists have had their physical and mental health compromised by their daily struggles.⁹

This is why, when we propose other ways to defend and guarantee human rights from our own places, we are disputing narratives and lives. Essential.



Photo: PerifaConnection.

NOTES

1 • Bands that formed in the urban outskirts of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, respectively, that are known for portraying the reality of life in the favelas. Among their best known songs are “Diário de um detento” (Diary of a detainee) and “Minha alma” (My soul).

2 • Luiz Antônio Simas, “Da Costa Africana às Matas e Esquinas do Brasil: A Fé é Festa” (Course, Livraria da Travessa, Rio de Janeiro, September 14, 2019).

3 • A series will be launched in the audiovisual field in 2020. Previously, we participated in the magazine CartaCapital and the podcast Mamilos.

4 • “PerifaConnection,” Folha de S.Paulo, [n.d.], accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/perifaconnection/>.

5 • Davi de Castro, “‘Não Escrevemos para Adormecer os da Casa-grande, Pelo Contrário’, diz Conceição Evaristo sobre escritoras negras.” TV Brasil, June 8, 2017, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://tvbrasil.ebc.com.br/estacao-plural/2017/06/nao-escrevemos-para-adormecer-os-da-casa-grande-pelo-contrario-diz-conceicao>.

6 • We have been in existence for just over a year;

in 2020 we felt the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and, in collaboration with the NGO Criola and the Marielle Franco Institute, we helped 20,000 families in the fight against hunger during the quarantine.

7 • Founder of the Center for Studies and Defense of Black People of the State of Pará (Cedenpa).

8 • Ialorixá of the religious site of Ilê Omiojúârô in Miguel Couto (Nova Iguaçu), an important religious

leader and activist for blacks, women and LGBTQs and against religious intolerance.

9 • In order to tackle this, next year a joint initiative of ours will focus on assuming and promoting self-care/cure strategies. Ana María Hernández Cárdenas and Nallely Guadalupe Tello Méndez, "O Autocuidado Como Estratégia Política," *Revista Sur* 26 (dec. 2017), accessed June 8, 2020, <https://sur.conectas.org/en/self-care-as-a-political-strategy/>.

RAULL SANTIAGO – *Brazil*

Raull Santiago is a member of the Papo Reto (Straight Talk) Collective and from the Alemão favela complex he tackles the debate on drugs from a constructive angle that he also develops at #Movimentos, a group of young activists and residents of favelas who address the issue of drug policies from the perspective of the favela. He is also one of the leading voices denouncing human rights violations in Brazil.

NINA DA HORA – *Brazil*

Nina da Hora works primarily with technology for black women and girls. From Duque de Caxias. Computer Scientist from the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro with a major in computational research. 2018 Scholarship Apple WorldWide developers conference. Research Scholarship Youth Program Internet - CGI 2020. Creator of the Ogunhe Podcast (in which she explores important names from the African continent who have contributed to the sciences and to technologies). Member of PerifaConnection. Developer of #Merepresenta #TretaAqui #Agoraeahora and a volunteer at Pyladies.

SALVINO OLIVEIRA – *Brazil*

Salvino Oliveira is a public administrator and institutional relations advisor. He lives in the Cidade de Deus favela where he works in the defense of human rights. He has been coordinator of the +Nós community project, which offers preparatory courses for university entrance exams with the goal of democratizing access to higher education in Brazil, and is the cofounder of the Manivela project, which aims to drive changes in favelas and suburbia. He currently works as a consultant at the Rio de Janeiro State Public Defender's Office.

WESLEY TEIXEIRA – *Brazil*

Wesley Teixeira lives in the Morro de Sapó favela where he runs the Movimenta Caxias neighborhood movement in the city of Duque de Caxias and is an activist for the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) black movement. He became an activist at age 12 in the student body at his school C.E. Irineu Marinho. He was coordinator of the student union in the city and is one of the founders of the RUA group, which was created after the street demonstrations of June 2013. He is a member of the Voz da Baixada group and runs the +Nós community education project. An evangelical since childhood, Wesley combines his faith with social issues through his church, in the Evangelical Front for the Democratic Rule of Law.

JEFFERSON BARBOSA – *Brazil*

Jefferson Barbosa is a journalist, member of PerifaConnection and of the free media group Voz da Baixada. A resident of Duque de Caxias, in the Baixada Fluminense region of the state of Rio de Janeiro, he works as a human rights defender through the media and as an advocate of Afro-Brazilian, youth and peripheral issues. He is also a member of the Nuvem Negra Coletivo (Black Cloud Collective) and the Coalizão Negra por Direitos (Black Coalition for Rights). As a reporter, he writes for press outlets such as Folha de S.Paulo, NEXO and Globo.

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