

# Laughter Out of Place

*Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality  
in a Rio Shantytown*

Donna M. Goldstein

With a New Preface



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## Preface to the 2013 Edition

When the editors at University of California Press invited me to write a preface to *Laughter Out of Place* for its tenth anniversary edition, I was a bit hesitant. Would writing this imply that *Laughter* was a relic of history, an outdated snapshot of the social life of inequality that characterized the early 1990s in Rio? Or would it imply that something about the book endures in situ, in spite of Brazil's spectacular economic achievements over the past decade? In the years that have passed since the first publication of *Laughter*, I have often been asked for an assessment of what appears to be an unwieldy and new Brazilian miracle. Readers and friends want to know if life has improved, if domestic workers like Glória are better off now. Is Brazil's rising economic tide lifting all boats? How will the economic successes and transformations brought on by changes in politics, economics, and the much-anticipated 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympic Games affect the lives of the people there? What should friends and lovers of Brazil and Brazilians be looking forward to?

This new edition of *Laughter Out of Place* coincides with my return to Brazil, to look again and from another angle at this beautiful awakening giant, a metaphor that has been harnessed during different time frames in Brazil's historical record and that refers to its potential as an economic behemoth.<sup>1</sup> My current research on Brazil's widening engagement with nuclear power is in some ways worlds apart from the work that informed *Laughter*, yet it has given me new perspectives on old

questions. As I traveled last summer from the cosmopolitan hub of São Paulo across a forgotten highway to an affluent gated tourist community in Angra, I was reminded all over again of how utterly beautiful, amazing, playful—and dare I say perverse—Brazil is, and I am grateful to have this opportunity to write about the well-debated changes, both real and imagined, that are now taking place there. In my comments below I reflect on the past and present and on some of Brazil's most pressing questions. These are the everyday topics that I addressed in *Laughter Out of Place* and that I hear in the conversations not only of Brazilians and Brazilianists but also of the diverse global audiences that desire contact with the pulse of this rapidly growing economy.

#### NUCLEAR UTOPIAS

The philosopher and social critic Slavoj Žižek speaks passionately about “the violence of liberal utopia,” clarifying the idea that liberal capitalism has benefited from its apparent antiutopian stance and parading today's neoliberalism as the sign of the “new era for humanity” (2008). Žižek asserts that there is indeed a utopian core to this project, one that is accompanied by the socially disruptive effects of capitalism—different forms of violence. What brought me to Brazil during my first research trips that concluded with *Laughter Out of Place* and now brings me back again is the sense that there is a quiet form of violence at the inner core of some of Brazil's most spectacular dreams of liberal modernity, whether they are about racial and economic equality or about harnessing the potentials of nuclear energy. Last summer, these dreams led me to Brazil's nuclear power plant and brought me to the treacherous stretch of road between Cunha and Paraty.

The compass of modernity called Google had shockingly misrepresented that road. I found myself driving on a harrowingly steep, muddy switchback with cliffs that fell off the earth on one side—the last ten kilometers of my route, starting in Cunha and heading toward Paraty through the surreal and tropically gorgeous borderland, in the Parque Nacional Serra da Bocaina, between the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This is a stretch of the Caminho do Ouro da Estrada Real (Gold Path of the Royal Road), which marked an initial colonial violence, as it is well known to have carried slaves and gold beginning in the seventeenth century. Google Maps in 2012 makes it look like a viable car route that can save hundreds of kilometers of driving between São Paulo and my final destination of Angra dos Reis—the Anchorage

of Kings, or King's Cove—an ecological patch of the Atlantic Forest where some of Brazil's most notorious celebrities own homes. But this was definitely not the “good mommy” trail, a comment I offered to my eight-year-old daughter and my partner as they clung to their grab handles while we slowly bumped along at a 45 degree angle in terror.

I was on my way to initiate research at the Angra dos Reis Nuclear Power Plant and was encouraged at the little prayer spot—was it a chapel?—where the final bit of pavement met the dirt by two enthusiastic dirt-bike riders who had come from the other direction and were resting. They were pretty muddied up and looked to be exhausted; they had obviously found it a challenging ride. They gave us the Brazilian thumbs-up, encouraging us to continue in our tiny Renault rental car, a risk we took because the sun was soon to set and the road back was much longer and had no lighting. I had plans to visit the communities surrounding the nuclear power plant, to speak with its administrators, and to tour its control room and interior. In 2008, the Brazilian government authorized Electronuclear, a government-controlled company, to get back to work on Angra III, a project that lack of money and political disagreement had stalled for twenty-two years. In 2008 and then again in 2013, the government signaled its willingness to involve the private sector in limited stages of the nuclear program, such as fuel production and recycling (Tavener 2013).

Angra is about six meters above sea level and is known for its biodiversity and numerous (more than three hundred) offshore islands. The largest, appropriately called Ilha Grande (Big Island), was one I had come to know well, as I had made an extended visit there in the mid-1990s, to the now-defunct prison of the same name, to visit Glória's infamous gang leader son, Pedro Paulo, a few years before the prison was closed. My current research trip emerged from my growing interest in issues in the field of medical anthropology relating to the history of experimentation, science, and genetics, as well as the links between Cold War collaborations and the development of nuclear energy in places such as Brazil. In following and writing about James V. Neel's work among the Yanomamo (Goldstein 2012), I stumbled upon the life and work of Theodosius Dobzhansky, the revered Ukrainian American geneticist and author of *Genetics and the Origin of the Species* (1937), who went to Brazil with support from the Rockefeller Foundation to forward research on population genetics and genetic responses to environmental change. In six extended trips between 1943 and 1960, Dobzhansky, together with his Brazilian colleague Crodowaldo Pavan,

did important work on gene mutations and solidified genetic studies at the University of São Paulo. Although Dobzhansky had originally wanted to work in the Amazon, it is believed that on first seeing the islands of Angra from the air, he began dreaming of the potential in harnessing this multi-island paradise to create a kind of natural population cage for genetic experiments with *Drosophila* (fruit flies). The eventual Angra Project team of 1956 did irradiate fruit flies and set them free on the islands, exploring the effects of radiation in a controlled and isolated natural paradise and comparing them to those in a laboratory. As part of this collaboration, Brazilian students in fields related to genetics were provided with scholarships for study in the United States, and some spent time at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and other key facilities that were part of the Manhattan Project. Their scientific research took form in the larger context of the Cold War and included the development of peaceful uses of nuclear technologies.

This genetics project thus appears to share some important historical landmarks and personnel with the history of nuclear energy in Brazil. Additionally, Angra dos Reis has served dually as one of the country's locations for genetics research and the eventual site of its nuclear power plant. In 1955, Brazil—then under a military dictatorship—entered into a cooperation agreement with the United States that eventually paved the way for the 1970s sale of nuclear reactors to Brazil. Today the complex of two reactors just outside the small city (of approximately 169,000 people) of Angra, in the southern region of the state of Rio de Janeiro, close to the border with São Paulo, supplies about 3 percent of Brazil's energy mix.<sup>2</sup> The visitor center at the nuclear plant is home to a public relations team that has created brochures and films for the public that present nuclear energy as “energy that is in harmony with the environment.” These materials assert that the fish and other wildlife in the area are doing extremely well and that nuclear power is generally less disruptive than the many hydroelectric energy plants that are so common in Brazil.

There is much to say about social relations in the *vilas*, or resident communities, that thrive behind the security gates of the nuclear plant, but here I will just note that Brazilian class relations have been remade inside these communities, which lack favelas but have many familiar aspects that coincide with those of the communities I worked in and that I outline in *Laughter*. And, indeed, there are favelas just beyond the gates. In the walled city of the Angra nuclear plant, though, there are scientists and professional administrators as well as working-class peo-

ple. One theme that ran through my preliminary conversations with workers of different ranks at the nuclear plant was that many contemporary employees have worked for multiple generations of Angra employers, a theme I noted between domestic servants and their bosses in *Laughter*.

During my visit, I hired a private boat for a guided tour around the islands and to see the nuclear plant from the islands' perspective. My guide, a man who had worked at the nuclear plant for more than a decade but then decided that "working behind masks" and "following so many rules" didn't appeal to him, had transitioned to boat operator and was keen on showing me around. He pointed out the painted white numbers on rocks on many of the islands, which he said denoted the testing of water quality and the effects on wildlife being monitored by the plant. Or were these numbers part of Dobzhansky's fruit fly experiments? My guide also took me to a place with many yachts, whose owners were resting or swimming, a spot where the perfectly warmed waters from the nuclear plant reentered the Cove of Kings.

On the day scheduled for my entry inside the plant, where I would interview the director of Angra II, I tried not to think about the possibility of an accident or the need for evacuation. I was suited up lightly with a hard hat, foot coverings, and earplugs; soon after I entered the building, a deafening alarm went off. As I had never been to a plant before, I couldn't tell whether this was an emergency or simply a test. My hosts quickly reassured me that it was just part of the regular ten o'clock safety test and that I should not worry. I had received authorization to see the control room and also to visit the inner sanctum of the plant—the turbines. These giant cylinders of steel were behind dozens of locking doors that my escort ushered me through, each time swiping our badges as we went deeper and deeper into areas that contained fewer and fewer personnel. When I made it through the final door, I could feel the awesome power of the technology and stood alone with my guide in the vast turbine room. I did not feel like lingering there, and after about a minute we headed back. I found it hard to reconcile the different frames of modernity that were so close in space and time: the treacherous road from Cunha on which I had arrived, and alternatively, the humming nuclear turbines in the inner sanctum. During my one minute in Angra II's turbine room, I could not help but think about the road that had led me there, the many people living close to the plant, both inside its securitized gates and beyond, and what the protocol would be in case of an accident. I had a clear memory of Fukushima.



Brazil has played a small but constant role in the development of nuclear energy in the global South, with two reactors in operation on site in Angra dos Reis and now a third under construction at the same location. The area was and still is a favorite tourist destination, known and appreciated for its beautiful beaches and islands, as well as “warm waters, nicely heated by the nuclear power stations.”<sup>3</sup> Beyond the gates of the nuclear plant, the tourist economy is in plain sight, as are the more modest communities in Angra. From our guesthouse on the city’s outskirts, my family and I were able to see the army of cleaners, gardeners, domestic servants, and boat maintenance workers getting yachts ready for sail and homes in order for the occasional visit from an absent owner. Also lodging in our guesthouse was the helicopter pilot who had brought one of those owners to a vacation home from a residence in Rio. On my boat tour, I had been shown mansions and private islands owned at some point by Ayrton Senna, Xuxa, and Ivo Pitanguy. News sources predict that Angra III may be ready to begin operations by December 2015, just in time for the 2016 Olympics.

#### MILLENNIAL POVERTY

Any kind of black-and-white assessment of Brazil’s present and future is difficult to proffer, as every Brazilian will tell you. For the most part, I find my friends in Brazil and those who write about Brazil to be generously optimistic. Clearly, income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient has declined in Brazil by an average of 1.2 percent per year over the past twenty years. “Focus: Brazil,” a 2011 *Economist* online article, lays out the statistical details of the country’s economic achievements: Brazil recently overcame Britain to become the sixth-largest economy in the world, growing at an average annual rate of 1.7 percent since 1990. It is slated to achieve its Millennium Development Goal of the reduction of poverty ten years earlier than expected: that is, by 2015. Rio de Janeiro’s unemployment rate hovers at only 5.1 percent, which is half of what it was in 2003 and, in comparison with similar measures in European cities, quite good. In 2013, Brazil raised its monthly minimum wage to 674.96 *reais* (\$343 U.S.).<sup>4</sup> According to a 2011 survey carried out by Data Popular and commissioned by the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of Brazil (SAE), Brazil’s middle class (C Class) held more than 46 percent of the country’s purchasing power in 2009 and “experienced an increase of more than 40% in household income” between 2003 and 2009. The survey also reported

that “68% of C Class youths have more schooling than their parents,” “19% of the C Class population (18.1 million) plans to buy property in the coming 5 years,” and “strong social mobility in Brazil is causing profound changes in the profile of young C Class workers.”<sup>5</sup> Yet even with these advances, as *The Economist* notes, approximately 8.5 percent of Brazilians live on less than seventy *reais* per month, which translates to about \$1.70 per day.

These rapid changes, signifying growth in middle-class membership, are indeed astounding and have altered how people think about Brazil and how Brazilians think about themselves. After hearing such optimistic reports, we might ask: What about the domestic workers and the Glórias who animate *Laughter*? Are their boats also rising? We would have to offer a very hesitant yes here, for as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would have it, we must also consider the new hierarchies and distinctions that are emerging from this economic tidal wave.

Over the years, my friends and colleagues who exchange all things Brazilian have continually sent me a broad range of articles that I would say represent a genre of popular literature about domestic work in Brazil—published as news in venues such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and more recently *Forbes*. These articles speak about the changing terms of employment and the notably better wages of domestic workers in Brazil, so much so that some include dirges by middle-class informants who lament having to live “cheek by jowl” in a world that offers fewer opportunities to find and take advantage of cheap domestic service. In a recent sarcastically humorous article in *Forbes*, the journalist Kenneth Rapoza (2013) argues that the poor have more opportunities than ever before and that in the past eight years domestic workers earned approximately 56 percent more on average than they did in the past (citing IBGE, the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics). The author cites a report that says domestic servants nationwide earn an average salary of the equivalent of \$360 U.S. per month, but that in large cities such as Rio and São Paulo, it can be double or triple that amount. He notes new legislation that has been passed to protect informal and domestic workers, who are now included in programs for retirement, health care, the “thirteenth” salary, and workers’ compensation. These new benefits, he claims, must now figure into any individual employer’s understanding of an employment contract. The *Forbes* author therefore predicts that many Brazilians and visiting foreigners, including himself, will no longer be able to afford the domestic help they once enjoyed and that the decline in cheap domestic

service will continue as Brazil moves forward. What this means for the A and B (upper) Class Brazilians and the expatriates in Brazil who he imagines constitute the readership of *Forbes* is that their convenience and standard of living will decline and they will no longer benefit from the many pleasures that come with cheap, widely available domestic service.

I like to think that *Laughter Out of Place* captures something tragic and also darkly humorous about the conditions of people—mostly dark-skinned women, but also their broader communities of friends and family—living in marginal and impoverished circumstances in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s. My hope was to formulate a sense of their lives and struggles through processes of contextualization—historical and other—familiar to anthropologists interested in thick descriptions and in a critique of the institutions and habits that form subjectivities born amid brutal inequalities, daily humiliations, and everyday drug-gang and police violence. As I also argue, the people I came to know in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro in this time frame offered multiple, even if subtle, forms of resistance to these degradations. But since the early 1990s, Brazil has transformed—whether it is now a giant I cannot say—into a firm and stable economic powerhouse, one that is forecast to remain on the list of the top ten economies for the foreseeable future. What we have witnessed in the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries is Brazil unlocking the potential to enact powerful economic and political reforms that may forever improve the conditions of its citizens, relieving the sorts of racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities that *Laughter* highlights. If this fresh Brazilian future means that the poverty depicted in *Laughter* is near death, so be it. Over the years I have received different kinds of feedback about the book; one that sticks with me and causes me some angst was from a reader who called *Laughter* “the saddest book I ever read.” So if it proves to be an ethnographic artifact of the past, of the distant, tortured times that once existed for the impoverished of Rio de Janeiro, I will be quite happy to welcome in the new. *Tchau*, poverty! *Tchau*, inequality! I won’t miss you!

#### OLYMPIC PACIFICATIONS

When I returned to Brazil in 2012, I had meaningful interactions and numerous conversations with people who reminded me that the humor I had characterized as something recognizably Brazilian in the early 1990s was still very much alive and well. I also recognized that in spite

of all of the positive economic changes, the climb into middle-class lives for many of the people I had known would still be a steep one. While in São Paulo, I often traveled by public bus and metro. One rainy morning I headed for the University of São Paulo, where I hoped to access the extensive archives of the Genetics Department's library and speak with researchers who knew about the history of international collaborations among scientists during the Cold War and the era of nuclear energy development in Brazil. On the bus ride, I found myself sitting next to an upper-middle-class woman from Jardins (an elite neighborhood in the center of São Paulo), who began to chat, addressing me and a few other unsuspecting passengers. She relished having an audience to whom to tell the story of how she had recently received a phone call from a person claiming to have kidnapped her husband—who was napping, even snoring, peacefully on the couch, in full view, during this conversation with his alleged kidnappers. Her story was funny, and it inspired others on the bus to tell their own, many of which were frighteningly similar. One woman who was heading to her domestic service job had received a call on her cell phone from someone who claimed to have her son in captivity and demanded that she deposit money in a bank account so that he would not have to kill the boy. As this woman did not have a son, she stridently gave this criminal a piece of her mind, telling him, "*Mata, mata ele mesmo,*" meaning "Go ahead and kill him, kill him good," and she laughed out loud as she told us that her only child is a daughter. This made for an entertaining bus ride and many smiling passengers.

When I made my last extended field research visit to the favelas of Rio in the late 1990s, I saw how friends of mine living in Felicidade Eterna had been in the wrong place at the wrong time and had suffered the consequences. This was a violent period in the favela. I carried out my last official interviews in 1998 in a seedy hotel room in the Zona Sul, as I knew quite well that Felicidade Eterna, in the embattled Zona Norte, was at war. I also knew that many of my friends who lived there had fled, at least for a time. This sort of temporary dislocation of favela residents was common: whenever there was a violent flare-up in a community, people would leave until things settled down so that they wouldn't be caught in the crossfire. The violence was not only in the favelas, however. A middle-class friend of mine had been kidnapped from the center of São Paulo as she entered her car and was driven to the outskirts of the city and then released; her car was taken, but she was left unharmed. She was emotionally shaken. I had been robbed at gunpoint in Copacabana and had a sliver of glass put to my face by a

hungry-looking child at a light in Ipanema. I started to feel that I needed a break from Rio and from some of the difficult aspects of my research.

As the millennium turned, I imagined—quite wrongly—that I might have been one of the last researchers to live and work in a Brazilian favela and that the drug-gang violence that Rio's impoverished neighborhoods harbored would intensify and be forever entrenched. I thought that changes in general safety and security for residents would be slow. I held on to a small glimmer of hope as I watched from afar as Brazil attempted to usher in the first-of-its-kind-in-the-world gun ban through a 2005 nationwide referendum, only to see that referendum fail miserably, not only nationwide but decisively in every state. There were many reasons for this failure, but I would argue that the National Rifle Association (NRA), which saw the Brazilian referendum as an important item on its international agenda, supported much of the negative publicity (see Goldstein 2007a). Everyone remains well armed in Brazil, and the number of deaths of young Afro-Brazilian men in gang-related violence that involves guns remains high (Goldstein 2000).

The violence of the Rio favelas of the early 1990s that I describe in *Laughter* continued and continues, albeit in different, updated forms. Governmental and nongovernmental sources have made many well-intentioned attempts to address this issue. But the problem seems at times to be beyond the grasp of the policies that are actively creating broader middle-class categories. Solving issues associated with urban violence and criminality will continue to be challenging, as they are embedded in generations of inequality. The gangs are now institutions that serve a range of desires, some of which supersede simple economic needs; they seem to embody specific historical lineages and appear both ineffable and persistent. For example, the violence in Rio during the past two decades looks cyclical in some ways, yet it is hard to know which events ought to be seen as linked and iconic. In May 2003, drug dealers sprayed a group of university students with gunfire at a coffee shop in a poor neighborhood in Rio in retaliation for the slaying by police of a local drug trafficker. In 2005, four men in a white car killed some thirty people in two working-class neighborhoods in Rio; gunfire hit random victims. Some of the dead were shot as they stood outside a car wash, while others were killed in front of a bar at a plaza called Bible Square. It is believed that the perpetrators of this violence against civilians were military police protesting the crackdown on police brutality at that time.

In 1992, prior to moving to Rio de Janeiro, I was living in São Paulo when the Carandiru prison massacre took place, an incident that began

with a prisoners' revolt but ended with the deaths of 111 prisoners at the hands of the military police of the state of São Paulo. Survivors claimed that police shot at inmates who had already surrendered; many recall the incident as an important signal of the decrepit state of human rights and prison conditions in Brazil. It also seems to have led to the formation of a criminal gang called the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC, or First Command of the Capital), which has been able to bring São Paulo to its knees—attacking police stations, banks, buses, and businesses since 2006.<sup>6</sup> Recently the attacks by the gang have focused on members of the military police, particularly when they are off duty.

When Luís Inácio Lula da Silva took office as president in 2003, he appointed a well-known public intellectual—a cultural anthropologist named Luis Eduardo Soares—to head up the federal Office of Public Security, a man who had begun addressing urban violence and marginalization issues while leading the state of Rio de Janeiro's Department of Public Security. At the federal level, Soares overhauled police institutions and addressed police corruption and human rights abuses, all of which had been taboo topics for the left and the right of the political spectrum for many years. Many citizens predict and hope that the World Cup and Olympics bids have given a renewed impetus to tackling public security and human rights problems. It is hard to know where to start analyzing the recent set of policies that are meant to partially address these issues, including the program that has received the glowing attention of global news media and is known in Rio as the Pacification Program.

Most sources point to Dona Marta in 2008 as the first time of many that a favela received the Pacification Program, created and implemented by the state public security secretary of great fame José Mariano Beltrame, with the backing of Rio governor Sérgio Cabral, who in 2013 is serving his second term (2011–14). The goal of Rio's state government is to install forty Pacifying Police Units (UPPs, using the Portuguese initials) by 2014. The idea behind the UPP has always been to combine law enforcement and social service delivery, with the hope of winning the hearts and minds of *moradores* (favela residents) through good deeds; that is, to turn police presence from something violent, negative, and oppressive into something positive that will help bring these communities back into the fold of the state. But the Pacifying Police Units have produced many unintended consequences. The October 2012 issue of *National Geographic* begins with the following, by Antonio Regalado: “‘We are guinea pigs,’ declares Fabio do Amaral, a drug-

gang killer turned evangelical minister. Brother Fabio preaches at a church in Santa Marta, one of Rio de Janeiro's favelas. What he means is that the citizenry of Santa Marta is part of a plan to clean up the hillside slums for the 2016 Olympics." What pacification will mean over the long term is difficult to know, but the violence of liberal utopia and neoliberalism's differential treatment of distinct kinds of citizens will surely be on display.

The Pacifying Police Units are assigned to favelas that criminal gangs have traditionally controlled. The first order of business is then to send in the BOPEs (Batalhões de Operações Policiais Especiais, or Special Police Operations Battalions) to clear out the drug-trafficking gangs, together with their caches of heavy weaponry. This paves the way for an UPP to enter the community, create links with its residents, and prevent the return of the traffickers. But what has become clear is that criminals who are swept out of one area must go somewhere, and it is believed that they have migrated to areas in the Zona Norte—where Felicidade Eterna is located—the Baixada Fluminense, and also Niterói, just across the bay. Most Cariocas are wondering whether this migration will be a temporary or a permanent one. What will happen when the World Cup and the Olympic games are over? Will these criminals return? And what will happen to the communities occupied by UPPs in the meantime?

After the initial police invasion in November of 2011, both Rocinha and its neighbor Vidigal had Pacification Programs installed. I had visited Vidigal many times in the 1990s, accompanying Glória and her children, all of whom had strong links there, as well as in Rocinha. Glória had grown up in these now-infamous communities, but because of her son's connections to drug trafficking, she had been forced to leave by the time I met her. But her roots were still strong in these favelas, and I understood that her childhood connection to this part of Rio was meaningful. Still, she had made the decision to move and felt it was safer to live in an unknown, peripheral favela where the gang activity was less intense. But even when I lived with Glória and her family in Felicidade Eterna, we all witnessed the shifting and sometimes unpredictable dynamics of gang activity and its effects on residents.

Jason B. Scott, an anthropology graduate student working with me, arrived in Vidigal in July 2011 and stayed a year. He was one of many other—by that time—middle-class Brazilians and foreign visitors who had fallen in love with the community and taken up residence there. Arriving just in time to witness first invasion, then pacification, and finally a kind of incipient gentrification process, Jason described what happened to Vidigal that year from a newcomer anthropologist's per-

spective.<sup>7</sup> What he witnessed is still very much in process, and we cannot know with certainty where it will lead. As he describes it, a BOPE came in, the gangs left, and the value of properties began to rise, as did interest from wealthy outsiders.

Vidigal was invaded on November 13, 2011. The police had announced about two weeks earlier that they were coming in. Most of the gringos left, and the longer-term Pacification Plan made many male residents nervous, as they would become targets of suspicion. The traffickers threw one last all-night rap and *baile funk* (funk dance) party shortly before leaving, and they used the microphones for a last round of commentary, shouting, “*Vou matar todos*” (I will kill everyone) and “*Vamos ficar aqui*” (We are staying here). In the next few days they put their equipment into plastic bags and then into fifty-gallon drums, taped them up, transported them out, and then left. The police arrived on Sunday morning and brought more than one hundred armed Choque (similar to BOPE) forces, two tanks, two helicopters, and a gaggle of journalists. They searched several hundred homes in Vidigal but did not arrest anyone at first. Later in the month, many men were arrested for alleged associations with drug dealers. The Choque unit was quite intimidating, especially in its approach of constant searches. By January 2012, the UPP came in with horses, Tasers, and friendly smiles for the residents. The UPP chief in Vidigal was a native of the community, which seemed to smooth out some of the awkward relations. In contrast, in Rocinha next door, violence returned quickly, and it is not clear if the pacification process there is permanent or temporary. Jason reports that drugs were never completely gone from Vidigal but that postpacification, there were fewer people carrying guns.

What happened too was that Vidigal was made safe, it seems, for a new round of gentrification, which had started much earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the construction and habitation of middle-class high-rise apartment buildings that had been built at the favela’s entry point. In the months after pacification, all property values rose enormously—the Associated Press noted a 50 percent increase<sup>8</sup>—and this meant that residents were getting real estate offers that tempted them to leave. The anticipated gentrification could potentially change the community forever, pricing residents out of their own homes and forcing them to live farther away, in the city’s growing peripheral neighborhoods. And while the prices paid for property in Vidigal would be a temporary boon to these individuals, there is no guarantee that any such one-time deal would ensure economic stability. As has happened with other museumifying (mummifying) processes in other places, Vidi-



gal may be very capable of becoming a historical favela without *favelados*, similar to other cities, such as Rome (Herzfeld 2009), where the social arena is suffering the effects of neoliberal policies—and the violence of liberal utopias—and the traditional left has become incapable of authentically aligning itself with residents. Rio shares some of these intangible qualities with Rome. The full impact of pacification in Rio remains to be seen, but it looks like the effects will be felt far beyond the city. Some observers have suggested that the police murders that occurred late in 2012 in São Paulo and were attributed to that city's PCC may instead be a result of the pacification process in Rio.

My early fieldwork in Brazil coincided with the tail end of the democratic opening and the elections that brought Fernando Collor de Mello to the presidency. It was a time of great disappointment in and animosity toward an administration marked by a strong neoliberal turn and numerous corruption scandals, ending in Collor's impeachment. There were moments that had in fact offered some insight into what was in the future. The curfew imposed in Rio de Janeiro during Eco-Rio 1992 was memorable: the city was presented as safe to its foreign visitors while residents of its favelas were treated as criminals. It had the veneer of security, but at the expense of human rights and civility. Many people declare that Rio today has a good vibe, and I would like to embrace that thought, but I wonder what things will be like when the stadiums are completed, the games have been played, and the city returns to its new normal.

#### STILL MARVELOUS

Shortly after *Laughter* was published, I became a mother and felt a great deal more vulnerable about the kinds of experiences I encountered in Rio. For the most part, Rio remains a magical city, the marvelous city, full of energy, friendliness, and optimism. But during the last few weeks of a two-year stay in Brazil, I was robbed by gun in broad daylight in Copacabana and began to experience burnout. I had it in my mind that my guardian angel must have been on strike, so I decided to take a break from my work in Brazil. I allowed myself to wander both intellectually and geographically and found myself engaged in fieldwork on pharmaceutical politics in Argentina and Mexico. I turned to the exploration of research questions that were different from what I had focused on in *Laughter* and that kept me elsewhere in Latin America with the sense that I would eventually return to Brazil, perhaps with new eyes and new perspectives on its luminous presence in the region.

Having now spent significant time outside Brazil but still in that region, I find that my appreciation of Brazil is that much greater and that my extended Latin American experiences have helped me to appreciate it with a renewed comparative perspective. Certainly, when one is working in Argentina, and even in Mexico, Brazil's presence as an economic and cultural force is not imaginary. It was interesting to find Brazil to be the object of Argentine and Mexican admiration on a number of fronts, for instance its success in overcoming the patent lock of large pharmaceutical companies based in the United States and Europe to produce cheaper and more widely accessible generic HIV/AIDS medicines, a feat that neither its neighbors nor any other countries in the region have matched (Goldstein 2007b). I can only imagine that Brazil's hosting of both the World Cup and the Olympic Games will generate envy in other countries in the region and the world. Having been in Brazil while its team was playing in two World Cup games and witnessing its well-known soccer fever, I have memories of the long and tense silences in the streets during these games, interrupted by the loud shouts that accompany a significant play or *GOL!*

There is a sense that these imminent global events are providing Brazil, and Rio in particular, with an opportunity to create new infrastructure and to repair the old; in short, there is a will to embrace this form of opportunistic modernity, complete with less-regulated neoliberal forms of private investment, and then to hope for the best. This investment in the future may include additional nuclear power plants, possibly two in the northeast and two in the southeast. With the possibility that private industry may take over parts of the nuclear industry, we are left to ask what effects the shift away from government management might have on construction decisions, safety, risk, and responsibility in the case of an accident. On the other hand, with the government taking action on crime in impoverished communities with interventions such as the Pacification Program in Rio, we might also speculate on the effects of militarized government. Whatever happens, we can be sure that Brazil's experiments with differing visions of liberal utopia will produce unpredictable outcomes, not only for the poor but also for the wealthy. We can also be sure that the whole world will bear witness.

Donna M. Goldstein  
May 29, 2013

## POSTSCRIPT

It is now the last week in June of 2013, as the FIFA Confederations Cup Brazil 2013 approaches its conclusion. Across the country, citizens have taken peacefully to the streets to protest the apparent government attention to Olympic and World Cup infrastructure while basic social needs such as investments in health, education, and transportation still remain dismal in many places. Several weeks ago, the government angered physicians with plans to hire up to six thousand Cuban doctors to make up for alleged personnel shortages, without plans to address deeper public health issues. Dr. Ângela Maria Albuquerque, who appeared on national news in this timeframe, expressed the deep collective dissatisfaction quite clearly: "I am a doctor, and I am disgusted. I can't practice in this shithole here. I can't do anything here." Dr. Albuquerque speaks to being overworked in a public hospital lacking space and materials; she is angered that people are dying in the corridors of the hospital while government investments are geared toward infrastructure for soccer matches. People will resolve this matter in the streets, she suggests. While the street protests were meant to be peaceful, in some cities the demonstrations were taken advantage of by individuals who used the crowd to provoke violence and destroy property. The police decision to unleash tear gas, rubber bullets, and excessive force against protestors reveals what is problematic about civilian and police interactions and what may be rotten in the core of pacification. Yet it is significant that Brazilians raised serious political and social questions in the midst of soccer madness. When even soccer is no longer sacred, perhaps Brazilians have gained the wisdom to see clearly into the future.

Donna M. Goldstein  
June 30, 2013

## NOTES

1. In 2011, a Johnny Walker commercial depicted Brazil as an awakening giant, which of course has already been a metaphor for Brazil's economic surge. According to one analyst at *Adweek*, the advertisement went viral and received more than three hundred thousand hits on YouTube in just five days (Gianatasio 2011).

2. More than 80 percent of Brazil's power comes from hydroelectric power stations, 8.5 percent from gas, coal, and oil, and 4 percent from biomass sources (Tavener 2013).

3. Wikipedia, s.v. "Angra dos Reis," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angra\\_dos\\_Reis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angra_dos_Reis) (accessed May 29, 2013). The phrase was not in quotes or used ironically.

4. Byrné (2012).

5. Secretariat for Social Communication (SECOM) of the Federative Republic of Brazil, "Additional Facts on Brazil's Middle Class," [www.brasil.gov.br/para/press/press-releases/august-1/additional-facts-on-brazils-middle-class](http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/press/press-releases/august-1/additional-facts-on-brazils-middle-class) (accessed March 4, 2013).

6. See Biondi (2010) for a gripping ethnography of the PCC.

7. Jason generously shared with me his written fieldnotes regarding Vidigal.

8. Associated Press, "Rio de Janeiro Slums: From 'No-Go' to Must Buy," January 13, 2013, [www.foxnews.com/leisure/2013/01/13/rio-de-janeiro-slums-from-no-go-to-must-buy](http://www.foxnews.com/leisure/2013/01/13/rio-de-janeiro-slums-from-no-go-to-must-buy) (accessed March 4, 2013).