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## Border Languages: Rumors and (Dis)Placements of (Inter)National Politics

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What happens to politics when the subject cannot be located precisely, in time and space, and thus rationalized and individuated? How might collective and diffuse mechanisms of political voice and engagement contribute to a better understanding of life in the margins of modern geographies? This article advances the argument that rumors might provide us with an important exemplar of discursive imaginaries that at once interrupt and reconfigure politics. Borrowing from the work of Veena Das, it explores “the perlocutionary force of rumors” among displaced communities in urban and rural areas of South America. I argue that rumors are a medium of communication particularly suited for refugees and displaced communities and also a fundamental mechanism for coping with social trauma and of reconfiguring the terms of presence/absence under which these groups live. **KEYWORDS:** refugees, displaced communities, rumors, discursive imaginaries

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In a 1988 essay, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak posed the question, now even more pressing, of whether the subaltern can speak.<sup>1</sup> The negative answer she gave to this question stems from a criticism of forms of representation and of how the colonial legacy, and the Western subject, has molded ways of speaking of and for people and peoples who are considered to be on the margins.

Spivak’s criticism is well founded. It points to important deficiencies in conventional scholarship on marginalized and oppressed groups. However, her answer also seems to foreclose other possibilities for reconsidering the political status of subalternity. Even though

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we must deal with the ethical dimensions of representation and with the inherent violences associated with it, does it necessarily follow that any attempt to interpret narratives arising from subaltern experiences be deemed to be vicious or to reproduce the same inequalities that allow for processes of subalternization in the first place? Spivak's warning is supposed to keep the researcher constantly attentive to the possibilities of infusing subaltern discourses with meanings and searches for origins and authenticity that might counteract their intent. As she notes, "the substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the "concrete" subject that, in fact, compound the appeal."<sup>2</sup>

Here I want to argue that Spivak's question may be misplaced because it poses the problem of political subjectivity in a dichotomous way and still in terms of a centered subject. By arguing that the contemporary problem of political engagement lies in the capacity to speak or not speak, Spivak forecloses the possibility of alternative ways of being political<sup>3</sup> that cannot be subsumed under the rubric of binary representations. As Ashis Nandy aptly remarks, it is not just a matter of allowing the overawed to speak, but to recognize that "these new voices are, to our chagrin, a negation of our voice."<sup>4</sup>

I also want to argue that two moves are necessary for any investigation to avoid the pitfalls presented in Spivak's argument. One has to do with a redefinition of politics, and also of "inter"national politics—with questions about who, where, and how one can intervene in the political dialogue. The other implies a change of grammar, of the locus of voice or a "politics of awareness [whose purpose is] the re-discovery of everyday life and ordinariness as sources of and clues to human potentialities."<sup>5</sup> I resort to the idea of border languages as a metaphor for this double movement: a movement, first, of questioning the traditional time-space zone that political subjectivity is supposed to inhabit; namely, that of a linear connection with the territorial imaginary of the nation-state; and, second, of rethinking the process of subjectification under which a particular strand of voice is deemed as the legitimate conveyor of political ideas and ideals. Speaking from the limits, from the edges of modern political geographies, one is faced with the dilemma of having to look for alternative forms of expression and of making sense of the dire experiences of subalternity. Speaking from the limits involves a need to escape from the legitimization mechanisms of liberal democratic societal forms that tend to reproduce the citizen, the interest group, the social movement leader, and the legislature representative as the exemplary figures of those who give a face to any manifestation that can and might be considered politically relevant.

What happens when an audible political voice loses its face, its grip over who is speaking? What happens to politics when such voices

cannot be traced back to a particular point in time and space and when they speak to the violences and memories experienced by particular groups? What remains of traditional participation mechanisms when anyone and no one takes part in the unfolding interpretations of politically significant events?

In this article, I analyze some of these questions through an exploration of two “rumors that took place in the course of fieldwork conducted with displaced communities of varied status in Brazil (refugees, migrants without status, permanent residents, asylum seekers, and internally displaced communities). The notion of “scenes” used here is conveyed by Etienne Balibar as a way of bringing to light “imaginary” processes that constitute an important aspect of border-scapes.<sup>6</sup> As Balibar remarks, the idea of *scenes* is used to “emphasize the fact that material processes are themselves (over and under) determined by the processes of the imaginary, which have their own very effective materiality and need to be unveiled . . . [the other scene] is the moment where it becomes manifest that politics is not ‘rational’ (but is not irrational either).”<sup>7</sup> Discursive imaginaries are thus central to the forms through which subaltern, in this case displaced groups, have spoken within the political terrain—a terrain that has traditionally and regularly excluded them.

The scenes conveyed here do not aim, in any way, to be representative of a general picture of life in displacement in abject spaces, particularly in South America. Nevertheless, they do speak about how the local is necessarily a site of global connections. They also refer to the mechanisms through which the international, in its multiple moods and spirits, is inherently part of the experiences of life (and death) of displaced communities. I highlight how rumors are a reflection of the ongoing struggles of these historically marginalized groups as well as a form of resistance and of voicing their concerns against exclusionary processes. They illustrate how often narratives arising from the collective imagination can display aspects of political life that have been constantly hidden by the ongoing normalization of sovereign violence.

I thus advance an argument that rumors might provide us with an important exemplar of discursive imaginaries that at once interrupt and reconfigure politics. Through rumors, groups perform disidentifications and reidentifications outside of the scope of authenticity and rationality under which political identities are traditionally cast. Rumors are, in this way, produced by “linguistic acts that are at the same time rational arguments and ‘poetic’ metaphors. [Their] logic of demonstration is inevitably an aesthetic of expression.”<sup>8</sup> Rumors are an expression of this aesthetic, one that aims at making sense of the forms of life shared by the community, while at the same time constructing it. They involve a process that requires “first freeing up the

norms of representation, and second, constituting a kind of community of sense experience that works on the world of assumption, of the as if that includes those who are not included by revealing a mode of existence of sense experience that has eluded the allocation of parties and lots.<sup>9</sup> Rumors do not just reveal: they perform things. “The deployment of rumors is the perlocutionary force of words, their capacity to do something by saying something, through which words come to be transformed from being a medium of communication to becoming bearers of force.”<sup>10</sup>

Rumors are performances of border languages, or an expression of how “the scene of the other” is revealed for the political. This is not to say that rumors will present us with an ultimate resolution for the problem of exclusion or of structural violence that seems to plague our contemporary times. A note of caution is thus necessary: rumors only provide us with the means to work through and understand better such inequalities and modalities of exclusion. They expound a different genre of politics that I believe to be important to present us with a better understanding of what is at stake in the ongoing confusion of politics and police, a confusion that seems inherent in conditions of peripheral modernity. Rumors are thus tenuous and sometimes conflictive readings of events; at other times they vanish just too quickly, as soon as the conventional order of things is resumed and the shadows of normalcy take over again. Their life expectancy is consequently and paradoxically synchronic with that of the time-space leverage that can be mobilized by marginalized groups. This paradox may exist precisely because rumors are intrinsically related to emotions—emotions shared by a collectivity and that inform their understandings of everyday life. In the same way that law and claims to justice are fraught with uncertainty and danger,<sup>11</sup> so too are rumors.

The first section of the article discusses some of the theoretical implications of reading politics from the standpoint of rumors. The second and third sections explore these ideas through a reading of two scenes of life in displacement, one in urban Rio de Janeiro and the other in the Amazon border between Peru, Colombia, and Brazil. I conclude with some reflections on how this type of approach might contribute to a different form of scholarship and ethical engagement with difference.

### **Rumors and the Aesthetics of Subaltern Communication**

Most established forms of research on rumors usually associate them with inaccurate information and polluted noise.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the

main goal of analysis tends to focus on developing controlling mechanisms to prevent the deleterious effects of rumors on group cohesion and discipline. But, as Kapferer notes, “rumors do not take off from the truth, but rather seek out truth.”<sup>13</sup> Only recently have rumors become a focus of theoretical analysis—notably, in the fields of sociology and of investigations that look for alternative modes of political expression.<sup>14</sup> In analyses of international relations, recent interventions have attempted to reconstitute a prominent analytical role for mechanisms of sense experience that are central to the intersubjective constitution of political realities. Contemporary studies on everyday practices, for example, highlight microsocio interactions and the impact of localized experiences in the shaping of global connections.<sup>15</sup> Although not necessarily referring to rumors, this research shares a fundamental interest in social imaginaries and in the political effects of ordinary understandings of life as lived by subjects usually disregarded by the discipline.

Tamotsu Shibutani defines rumors as a “form of communication through which men [sic] caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources.”<sup>16</sup> First, rumors arise from ambiguous situations. They come to life as people try to understand events, facts, or perceptions that are unclear, unsaid, uncertain in the face of weak information. For those involved, rumors become a way to fill in the gaps and to suggest particular understandings of events within a community. Therefore, rumors tell us more about social perception than about notions of truth or validity. As Kapferer rightfully points out, “once false information has penetrated into the social body, it circulates just like true information. One forgets all too easily that a piece of information’s truth-value is above all a product of convention and delegation.”<sup>17</sup> Rumors speak to the forms of life and collective imaginaries in which events and stories are embedded. Rumors promote a “mode of laying claims over the real [that] gets its affective force from the sense of uncertainty created through political events that pry open ideas of a settled social life.”<sup>18</sup> Secondly, rumors involve a process of collective interpretation. They are a mechanism of social communication in which those who have no part can take a part.

We might understand rumors better if we look at novel forms of subaltern subjectivity construction. Jacques Rancière speaks about modes of subjectification that produce a “surplus subject.” Such a subject comes to life by a set of operations that have more to do with a “capacity of enunciation” than with a particular body and presence whose voice can be appropriately located within the political scene.<sup>19</sup> Veena Das speaks of a form of “brokered subjectivity” that allows for

the subversion of the subject as a singular presence.<sup>20</sup> They both point to a reframing of the political subject, focusing on multiscale relationships and on a collective realization and actualization of discourse. Rumors allow for a genre of political interruption that happens “wherever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone’s intervention, to crop up.”<sup>21</sup> These types of subjectification are particularly suited for subaltern groups. Rumors assure a speaking position from a zone of indeterminacy, while enabling the emergence of subaltern collective mechanisms of interpretation and communication. As Das notes, rumors lack signature.<sup>22</sup> The form of subjectivity produced through rumors challenges the notion of an individual political subject, identifiable, recognizable, and precisely located. As such, rumors allow individuals to engage in conversations and to articulate understandings that interfere in the political debate without necessarily turning them into hostages of conventional forms of representation.

Rumors are mediums of politics useful to subaltern groups because they escape and contest traditional modes of governance. “A rumor is a spontaneous way for the right to speak . . . for subalterns, they become a way for a questioning of authorities, of who has the right to speak about what.”<sup>23</sup> The information they convey is a compound of multiple relationships and operations that are in constant movement and thus constantly changing. They are troubling, and thus political, because they give rise to disagreement between subaltern groups and those who control the means of “legitimate” political participation. Rumors blossom from assumed unofficial means: “They are the suspicion of the occult, the silenced desire of the governed, the claiming for more complete information, the distrust of official information that throws itself in the face of a government who is under a legitimacy crisis.”<sup>24</sup> Usually, rumors reflect a particular encounter with past experiences, reinterpretations of foreseen events, and speculations about future occurrences. Rumors allow for an “actualization of time” in which past experiences are embodied into an imminent present that disrupts the linear order of events and of experienced trauma.<sup>25</sup> The trauma, or the forms of life in which rumors are embedded, is no longer located in a simply recognizable memory of the past, but is constantly always and already there.

The unsigned authorship of rumors attests to the reformulation of modes of subjectification that disallow claims of visibility and rationality as necessary traits for the birth of a “legitimate” participant of the political community. “The dynamics of rumors is thus something independent from the problem of their authenticity . . . in rumors lie, definitely, a form of expression of society . . . without any assurance that they are an authentic and accurate expression of what

is going on in reality or within a particular time and place.”<sup>26</sup> Rumors can be summed up as a mode of expression that is primarily concerned with unsettling the locus of authority and with questioning what constitutes valuable or relevant information. In this sense, rather than noise, rumors should be read as political manifestos, as important sites for the expression of subalternity and of disagreement.

### Scene One: Are We All Refugees?

A major Brazilian evening news program was showing the arrival of resettled Palestinian refugees in Sao Paulo’s airport. The opening line was: “First World Brazil—country welcomes Palestinian refugees.” Ninety-eight Palestinians came from a refugee camp in Jordan and were accepted within the Brazilian Resettlement Program in 2007. The TV images showed the Palestinians holding their documents and expressing gratitude to their hosts. They also pointed to the fact that the refugees would be receiving housing, a monthly stipend for two years, as well as access to public services like health, education, and professional training programs. An interview with government and international officials highlighted the Brazilian tradition of asylum reception and the increasing importance of the country in current humanitarian policies. The refugees were sent to an undisclosed location in the state of Sao Paulo.

The news came at a time when I was conducting visits in several shantytowns in Rio de Janeiro in order to interview and share the living experiences of refugees and migrant communities in the city. I was also working with the assistance team of AST, UNHCR’s implementing partner in the city. Most of the migrants with different status as well as asylum seekers and refugees I visited lived in Complexo do Alemão<sup>27</sup> (the German Complex) and its surroundings. The area comprises a group of twelve slums and poor communities in Rio de Janeiro. The name comes from the 1920s, when a Polish man bought the land, and because of his looks and accent, locals started to call it the German Hill. In Brazil, white men usually, though not necessarily, of foreign origin are commonly named Alemão (German), denoting the physical and racial attributes of those to whom the term refers. *Alemão*, in the context of the favelas, might also mean *enemy*, usually referring to warring parties in the drug conflict that has taken over such territories. The squatter name, however, is at odds with the current racial profile of its inhabitants (though not necessarily with the view that *favelados* are an enemy to public order and security).

In the case of displaced groups, most of the inhabitants are blacks of African origin, notably Angolans and Congolese. My visit began with

what was supposed to be a brief stop at a refugee-owned hair salon in one of the slums, but the event ended up taking a whole day as people came and went. As migrants joined in the interview took the form of a large group conversation, with different interlocutors intervening at different points. In the end, the picture presented no longer belonged to a particular individual but reflected a collective understanding of the reality and problems they faced.

The salon was run by a group of people, mostly refugees and migrants living in the area, who stopped by to work for a couple of hours in order to help out and earn some money. Most of the clients, too, were migrants, of various status levels, and Afro-Brazilians. My guide was a refugee who told me most of the people there were also refugees. But soon it became clear that many were undocumented, some were denied-asylum cases, others had just arrived, and several were applying for permanent-resident status. However, most also spoke about being, and as if they were all, refugees: because they shared the same conditions, they were all entitled to the prerogatives of “refugeeness.” All of them somewhat shared and conveyed similar perceptions regarding the assistance they received from public authorities and from local agencies.

The first widespread rumor was about racial discrimination. African refugees and asylum seekers all mentioned that “people” say that there is one day in which blacks are not allowed inside AST, the UNHCR implementing agency. That day, which some said was Tuesday and others Thursday, was reserved for the “white” applicants. There was also a rumor that the monthly stipend and help given to the “whites” was higher and better. That would help explain for them why other refugees have managed to get jobs and make a better life for themselves. It also explained for them why most white refugees did not live in the squatter area or share the same living space as African refugees.

The news about the Palestinian resettlement enhanced that perception in the following days, giving weight to the rumors that racial discrimination was endemic when it came to Africans in Brazil. As one of the group participants stated:

People say we do not want to work, but they never lived with us, never visited us, never saw our daily life. I have been receiving phone calls since yesterday from other refugees and African migrants and they want to know, One: How many UNHCRs are there? Two: How many United Nations are there? Why is it that the Colombians, Cubans, Chileans, all those from South America can get a job and are faring better than we Africans? Everyone knows there is a special day for receiving them, a day when black Africans are not welcomed. There is one day in which Africans are not allowed at AST.



I have never noticed, but now I know and I am sure of it. You watch on TV that Palestinians, Lebanese, and Iraqi refugees that just arrived will get house, help, and money for two years. It is revolting, frustrating. We ask that this man who claims to be a UNHCR representative would stop speaking as our representative because we have been recognized for a long time and we never get something even remotely like the tenderness and compassion they are affording them. This has a name, it is called discrimination.<sup>28</sup>

Another participant reinforced the rumors:

The “white” refugees are given houses by AST, their monthly stipend is higher. They are treated differently even though we all have the same status. We Africans get arrested all the time: the police come and put drugs in our pockets, so they can arrest us. No one visits. There are several Congolese in jail, for trying to leave the country. We have sometimes to resort to illegal means to get out, because the bureaucracy will not help us or give us our rights. And then some get caught. This guy was arrested and shot in jail. He has been there for four years accused of international drug trafficking. He is a refugee. Brazilians do not know what a refugee is; they associate it with banditism [the word *refugee* in Portuguese resembles *fugitive*], they think we are criminals, or even worse that we are miserable, so poor, so suffering, to be pitied. We are discriminated against twice: because we are black and because we are African refugees.<sup>29</sup>

Since early 2007, military invasions in the slum complex have become routine. Some are calling Complexo do Alemão “the Brazilian Gaza Strip”—a reference to the ongoing conflicts between drug warlords, criminals, and the police. The area is now responsible for 40 percent of all reported violent crimes of the city.<sup>30</sup> Almost one hundred thousand people live in the area.

It was already 3 PM, and I was alerted to leave before 4 PM as that was the time when drug dealers and armed men would take control of the streets. Many of the refugees said that the military and the police harassed them. “Our community has become a ‘police house’; they do not need a reason to invade. We tolerate it once or twice, but we are reaching our breaking point. Sometimes we fiercely argue with them.”<sup>31</sup> It is also common to watch on the news the stories of police intervention in the slum complexes and the violence that accompanies it. These media images resonate with the daily experiences of the displaced community at the Alemão and help to reinforce and spread rumors about imprisonment, mistreatment, persecution, and lack of protection. At the end of our conversation, one question was left hanging in the air: After all, are we all refugees? And if so, why are we treated in such a way?

The rumors among the displaced community in Rio de Janeiro speak not only to the anxieties brought by conditions of social and legal marginalization but also to the inabilities of traditional labels and accounts of sovereignty to tackle the dynamics and restrictions over mobility for border dwellers. One of the most important issues raised by such narratives lies in the meanings attached to ideas of *refugeeness*. Although rumors highlight the importance of regularization and documentation, their use of the legal label is made outside of its conventional scope. They contest both the securitization portrayed in a discourse of refugees as criminals or outlaws, a reading enabled by issues of language and translation, and the victimization that is relentlessly attached to them as the helpless *misérables* produced by conditions of structural violence. The attachment to ideas of refugeeness shows a great sense of ambiguity. On the one hand, rumors highlight the fact that to be a refugee is to submit oneself to other means of social exclusion. Refugeeness becomes a reinforcement of subalternity: one that begins with a racial component and that culminates with a sense of alienation and strangeness.

This move is most clearly reflected in the recent efforts to edit the term *refugee* from official documentation issued by Brazilian authorities since 2007. Since then, identity cards no longer use the word *refugee* in order to avoid the double exclusion referred to in the rumors. This denial is also accompanied by a reidentification process: engaging in the construction of rumors involves assuming the position of *speaking as a refugee*. Whereas being a refugee is perceived as a social deficiency, it is also reconstructed as an important element of social cohesion and of a reclaiming of political participation within the framework of protection and assistance. To present and voice concerns *as a refugee* is to create an opportunity to interfere and interrupt the politics of normalization. Such politics not only define who can claim to be a refugee but also delimit the locus these groups are supposed to inhabit—both in relation to the zones in which they actually reside and in relation to other forms of alienation. The question “Are we all refugees?” emphasizes the differentiations and hierarchies enabled by current policies of humanitarian protection. It shows how these topologies of difference are reinterpreted in relation to the memories of trauma and to ongoing struggles over recognition within the black community in Brazil. These readings are expressed, for example, around ideas of race.

Race, as Randolph Persaud remarks,<sup>32</sup> is a relational and overdetermined concept. Processes of racialization are contextual and constitutive of particular understandings of identity. In the rumor among black African refugees, race has an ambiguous function. It enables a transnational insertion of the African refugee community in relation

to other refugees within the same environment and to other blacks of non-African origin (as in the case of the Afro-Brazilian community). African refugees perceive themselves as a subordinate category in relation to what they perceive constitutes refugees' *whiteness*, specifically encompassing groups of South American and Middle Eastern origin. In this case, they mistakenly homogenize under the strict binary of "whiteness" other displaced groups that are themselves members of racial and indigenous minorities. This reactionary aspect reflects, in part, the importance of the racial component in the determination of African refugeeness, as many of the recognized "refugees" have received the status based on racial persecution. Even those who were not "legally authorized" to be refugees also associate their notions of belonging to some form of racial exclusion that is part of their personal history and memory. Hence, there is an important paradox in the ways in which these two ideas, of refugeeness and race, come together. Conventionally, and particularly from the standpoint of African asylum seekers, race performs a fundamental criterion for inclusion in the humanitarian protective umbrella. Nevertheless, while providing a solution for the initial difficulties of displacement, race transforms itself into an enduring condition that allows that displacement to be almost permanent.

Rumors also place African refugees in a subordinate position in relation to other black groups who share their living space. When asked to explain why it is that African refugees are perceived as unable to be accommodated in the Brazilian job market, the answer is always regarded in terms of how even black Brazilians cannot get a "proper" job—that is, a formal job. The conjunction of alienation and blackness adds up to an even more restricted access to socioeconomic opportunities. The association of race and discrimination situates refugees closer to the Afro-Brazilian community's cause: it contests the myth of "racial democracy" and of the "beautiful interbreeding" that is conveyed in much of the public discourse over Brazilian national identity. As such, African refugees position themselves within the debate over the slavery-colonial legacy of a national project that has deferred the resolution of the connection between race and politics.<sup>33</sup> Yet, being a "black" refugee allows for a distancing from the Afro-Brazilian community as well because they see their "blackness" as more problematic as it is associated with a refugee identity whose primary source is race itself.

Conversely, rumors enable a more positive source of identification. African refugees use the legal label as a means to promote and privilege a certain attachment to the "international" discourse of mobility. This attachment permits African refugees to be interlocutors in a local politics increasingly affected by global decisions. It is identity

in race and origin, despite the long-standing differences between groups of African nonstatus migrants and refugees, that allows them to speak as a community and to participate and to recognize as their own the ideas and claims conveyed through these rumors. It is this unique conjunction of exclusion based on alienation and racialization that permits the black African community to assert their subalternity and to speak as such. Refugeeness provides de-identifications, through a subordination to different topologies of subalternity, but also re-identifications, through the sharing of similar living conditions and through the enactment of modes of communication, of border languages, within a context in which facile attachments to citizenship are largely discredited. This is particularly relevant in the context of the favela, as a zone at the edge of the state and under multiple, overlapping, and, more usually than not, conflictive sovereignties. Rumors allow for community building while also working to ambivalently question and reinforce perceptions about the authority mechanisms that police and discipline refugees' modes of existence.

The issue of race and foreignness in relation to law enforcement provides a good example of how refugee communities ambiguously question the normalization of violence characteristic of life in displacement. The rumors present the African community in the favelas as being particularly targeted and mistreated. The fact that squats such as Complexo do Alemão have become militarized zones is reinforced by the ongoing confrontations between refugees and police and by the warlike daily routine of those living in these zones of urban exclusion. Though a common trait of the everyday life of favelados, restrictions on liberties and rights seem to be even more salient for the African refugee community. As one of the refugees highlighted, "We have been kidnapped here in Brazil." Issues regarding mobility are prominent for refugees since they need an authorization from the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) to leave, even if temporarily. In order to get the authorization and a temporary Brazilian passport (usually valid just for the duration of the trip that is being authorized, and then retained by the federal police in the port of entry), refugees must prove that they have enough funds, indicate where they will be staying, for how long, and for what purposes. For many of them, these requisites are difficult to fulfill, and the issue is added to a long list of grievances with governmental and international authorities.

The relationship between African refugees and the assistance network, represented by both civil-society organizations, UNHCR and CONARE, is also fraught with uncertainties. The lack of dialogue between different institutions and the refugee community leaves AST as the only "identifiable" source for both the solution and the cause of

problems lived by the displaced community. This has created an atmosphere of distrust and a sense of rebellion that is then translated in terms of the alleged refusal of receiving “black” refugees on particular days of the week.<sup>34</sup> But, as rumors go, it matters little whether it is true or not that “black” refugees will not be received: rumors create their own consensually based notion of truth. One might also see this particular interpretation as a metaphor for the “forms of life” refugees usually encounter in the urban space—forms that exclude and that speak to a memory of ostracism and violence always read in relation to race. This sense of ostracism is additionally reproduced in the rumors about imprisonment and ill treatment in which the black-refugee community conveys the idea that “no one knows” or “no one visits us” and, therefore, no one really understands what it means and feels like to be a “black refugee.” This impossibility of translating the forms of life (and death) associated with their identity reinforces the difficulties of communication with both governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Nonetheless, refugees also resort to these same institutions for help and support, in applying for economic projects, in receiving medication, for the issuing of documents, and for food. Even those who speak *as if* they were refugees but who cannot resort to these institutions because they are not “recognized” somehow share the access to their services. In one of the houses I visited, twelve people shared a three-bedroom apartment. The food was given monthly by AST to two of the house members who were asylum seekers and it had to serve them all. There is a clash between the individually based mechanism of refugee determination and protection and the fact that much of refugee/displaced life is set on a collective basis, especially with regard to the African refugee community in the squats of Rio de Janeiro. Rumors help reinforce community ties in such circumstances, making it possible for the “recognized” to share with those officially “unrecognized,” and, at times it makes this distinction highly problematic.

Rumor also attests to a paradoxical view of the state and of international actors as both the solution and the cause of refugees’ problems. These issues are reflected, for instance, in the inherent ambiguity with which the community relates to the legal label. As Das points out,

The law (*whilst being the language of sovereignty*) is a sign of a distant but overwhelming power that is brought into the framework of everyday life by the representation and performance of its rules. . . . [But the refugee community] also looked to the law as a resource for seeking justice, although they knew that its use is fraught with uncertainty and danger.<sup>35</sup>

It is considered to be important and thus necessary for those who wish to stay, but at the same time it might foreclose more opportunities than it opens. For example, in relation to UNHCR policies on protection, rumors highlight the contradictory and unequal treatment granted to “spontaneous” refugees and resettled refugees. On the one hand, African refugees interrogate the nature of the dual policy on the basis of a temporal relationship with displacement. Because many African refugees are considered to be in “protracted situations,” they feel that they are entitled to more “rights” than the resettled Palestinians. In that sense, rumors attempt to reclaim a certain privileged position for long-term refugees within the traditional structures of refugee protection—one that is translated in terms of a questioning of the current degree of “authority” held by the UNHCR to speak on behalf of the refugee community. One might say that African refugees, through rumors, attempt to displace (inter)national politics, first by casting doubt on the decision-making processes about who gets what from whom, and second by trying to reposition themselves into the hierarchies of the local and global discourse on refugee assistance.

Given this brief analysis, one might conclude that the African refugee community inhabits what Boaventura de Sousa Santos<sup>36</sup> calls “transnational third worlds.” Especially in the context of South-South displacement, it seems that there is very little change in terms of the ongoing dynamics of social exclusion for those living on the margins of the global economy. The transnationalization of mobility between zones of exclusion, contrary to what the international refugee–mobility regime would presume, does not necessarily lead to notions of security and stability in the daily lives of those it affects. Displaced groups, especially those living in such marginal zones, are then faced with other “repertoires of authority”<sup>37</sup> that usually include informal sovereign powers (e.g., drug dealers and militias) that control and provide the framework of morality and order within the community. But this does not preclude them from articulating different understandings and from questioning the current structures of authority and authorization that attempt to discipline their lives. The refugee community has to negotiate the modes of being of sovereign authorities that are, more often than not, in direct conflict, while trying to assert their own presence and voice in these contexts. Their livelihood and survival within the space of the slum depends on these political negotiations, sometimes in ways that place them within the framework of “official” criminality but that also allow the creation of different mechanisms of participation and communication. And this is a trait that is part and parcel of the political dynamics of life as a favelado.

In that sense, the reality and politics of refugees in this context are very similar to the ongoing struggles of the overall community. But it is felt in a heightened sense because they are or present themselves as refugees, as both slum and border dwellers. The rumors expose the difficult compromises these individuals have to make between the drive toward being a refugee and escaping a socioeconomic condition that comes along with it. In a sense, they elucidate how conditions of expulsion and trauma are, in important respects, replicated in the hosting community. Rumors are then mechanisms not only of fostering—or of creating—a different refugee politics but also of searching for refuge from refugeeness or for rethinking what it means to live as a refugee, especially in the context of the favelas.

### Scene Two: Barbarian Invasions

The Amazonas River connects the three cities of Tabatinga, in Brazil, Leticia, in Colombia, and Santa Rosa, in Peru. Located in the western portion of the rain forest, Tabatinga and Leticia are about one thousand and six hundred kilometers away from the provincial capital of Amazonas, Manaus, a journey that can take up to five days by boat. About one hundred thousand people live in the area. Leticia alone has seen a fourfold increase in its population in the past ten years—from ten to forty thousand people—due, some argue, to the Colombian so-called War on Drugs and the displacement of civilians caused by paramilitary action.

The main connection between the cities is provided by Friendship Avenue. The avenue presents a façade of civilization. It is one of the few streets with asphalt, albeit a surface that is poorly conserved. It has a long central line with gardens and trees and dense motorcycle traffic, the main means of transportation in the region. The cities are well known for the number of motorcycles, locals boasting that they have won a world record for the longest motorcycle consecutive line, stretching more than 20 kilometers from Tabatinga to Leticia's airports. But one also sees open sewage ditches, the red dust that comes from the roads due to the lack of rain in recent days, mostly poor houses made of unfinished bricks or wood, and children playing on the streets. The indigenous component of the population is at odds with the social division of labor of the towns. The Tikunas, the largest urban indigenous group there, live in a specific neighborhood, the Umariacu. Impoverished groups live in disputed borderlands and are now facing eviction threats and resettlement projects from both municipalities. Despite the vastness and exuberance of the region, land is a scarce and expensive resource in this part of the

world. Most of the unoccupied space is now protected under national conservation laws. Population growth and lack of socioeconomic opportunities has forced many to resort to irregular settlements and provisional housing.

As described in local stories, unemployment and informal economic activities are common. Many displaced families used to live alongside the only road that connected Leticia to its surroundings. Now many have had to leave or have once again been forced out of their precarious tents with muddy floors and no running water. Living in the city can be extremely expensive for these groups. Rent for a single bedroom can be around 300 thousand pesos, or something like 150 dollars.

The border outpost exerts more of a symbolic function than anything else. The two flags and a marker indicate the geodesic line that divides the countries. Six cones placed on the streets force drivers and cyclists to reduce speed. On the Colombian side, two military recruits are seated under a white tent in plastic chairs, supposedly patrolling the circulation of people and goods. On the Brazilian side, a military police officer sits beside a street vendor who rents motorcycle helmets for those crossing. Gas, food, and even Brazilian products are cheaper on the Colombian side. Borders, it seems, are well known in South America for fostering commercial tourism. Most of the inhabitants of Tabatinga buy their things in Colombia and so some local traders see the border as a problem. Others see it as an opportunity.

Every year, the three municipalities commemorate the Festival de la Confraternidad, a cultural event to celebrate the diversity of the region and the sisterhood that is supposed to orient the lives of these communities. Dancing, food, musical presentations, political discourses, and a beauty pageant take over the towns for three consecutive nights. The festival was scheduled to begin the Sunday evening I arrived, which was coincidentally a day for another important event on the Brazilian side: the final soccer match of the America's Cup between Brazil and Argentina. The match began at 4 PM, and soon the Brazilian team scored a goal. A noise heard thereafter was assumed by many to be rejoicing for unexpected victory over the Argentineans. As soon as the match ended (three goals to zero in Brazil's favor) many people celebrated outside, in bars and on the streets. I was walking toward the borderline after the game and, upon arriving at Friendship Avenue, a chaotic scene abruptly surprised everyone: people running from Leticia toward the Brazilian side, some with their bare feet on the hot asphalt, carrying children in homely Sunday clothes. Their faces showed their desperation and incomprehension. Brazilians, still exhilarated by their recent victory, watched the startling scene without fully comprehending its meaning. Some invited



acquainted Colombians to share a beer and join in the celebration. Others were just too busy to even bother.

Rumors soon started to spread. The most common and shared rumor explained the disquieting events as an imminent takeover of the region by Colombian guerrillas. The noise that had been heard earlier was that of an explosion. Guerrillas had occupied a military headquarters and would soon assume control over the town. The information was further reinforced by some from Santa Rosa who claimed they had seen a huge “mushroom cloud” from the explosion on the other side of the river. Others on the riverbanks mentioned they could see the debris of the explosion now encrusted in the muddy terrain of the shores. But many testified seeing and hearing Colombian soldiers, who regularly stay in the border post, yelling and asking peasants to find “refuge” on the Brazilian side.

Not long after, news started to circulate that the festival would be cancelled. It was impossible to hold the celebration when the town of Leticia had suddenly been taken over by the noise of sirens and an atmosphere of fear and apprehension. It was being said that there were casualties: some spoke of hundreds of deaths caused by the attacks. No one knew what could happen from there. Later that night, information started to circulate from official sources that the explosion happened in the military weaponry facility. Causes of the fire and subsequent explosion were unconfirmed, but preliminary investigations pointed to a short circuit that could have ignited it. It happened in a location close to the city’s airport, some three miles from downtown. People were advised to return to their homes. No one had died; only a couple of soldiers suffered minor injuries. The festival would resume on Monday. And so the fragile peacefulness of a region consumed by drug gangs, poverty, lack of infrastructure, isolation, and a multiethnic composition, would resume.

The wild rumors show how ambiguity and anxiety, brought up by events that one cannot fully comprehend but that can certainly be remembered, might bring to the surface the social and political mores of towns marked by violence, trauma, and “distant proximities.”<sup>38</sup> Rumors make the basis of community less opaque, especially in contexts of heightened uncertainty and anxiety. The sudden explosion made visible the invisible—made heard what was once simple noise and nuisance: these communities are embedded in the context of civil war and also on a major crossroads of international drug trafficking. They highlighted the extent to which violent displacement is a deep-seated, though barely spoken, trait of such communities. Many families have felt and lived through the effects of violent displacement. Others have shared the dislocating impacts of such experiences on their neighborhoods, friends, and relatives. Others have followed the

prolonged coverage of years of social and political unrest caused by the forceful expulsion of millions from mostly rural communities. Times dominated by imminent threat of invasion and loss of control over one's life and death, both in memory and in everyday life, mark the politics of such communities. They represent a form of normalization of a necropolitics; that is, "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations."<sup>39</sup> It was such memories of necropolitics that allowed the Leticia explosion to be interpreted in terms of enactment of the expected: violence will happen again; or in Veena Das's words, "Violence becomes so embedded into the fabric of the social that it becomes indistinguishable from the social."<sup>40</sup>

Leticia is usually portrayed as being isolated from the context of generalized violence that characterizes some regions of Colombia, especially because to get to the town one needs to cross several rivers, walk treacherous paths, or pay for a flight from the national capital—a fare most displaced families cannot afford. Such an understanding of the town's situation conceals the proximity of violence to the social fabric of the community, which is due either to the presence of a large number of displaced families or to the growing presence of indigenous minorities that have been systematically targeted both by paramilitaries and guerrillas. It also hides the interpenetration of political violence with practices of drug and human trafficking that pervade the border's everyday life. It is common knowledge that the border cities have been taken over as the battleground for control of trafficking routes and that every day targeted individuals are murdered in these cities.

One of my acquaintances was straightforward: "Almost every family here has had some contact with drug warlords offering money or posing threats."<sup>41</sup> The increasing financial reliance of warring parties on drug money and the suspected relationship between government officials and nonstate militias makes the violence even more salient in the everyday realities of such communities. It creates a double distrust in which both state and nonstate "authorities," the competing forms of sovereignties that articulate the necropolitics of internal displacement, are treated as unreliable and unreadable to the population, especially those who have been displaced. In the rumor, people note that the military was actually advising border dwellers to cross to the Brazilian side to seek "refuge" there. The frailty of the power apparatus of state structures, combined with the illegibility of criminal activities and widespread impunity, tends to place the population in a permanent state of apprehension. Therefore they have to negotiate with multiple forms of authority, but without the assurance that they can count on either of them for protection, security, or even survival.

In a sense, the rumors portray the collapse of two interrelated discourses of protection. Firstly, the discourse of citizenship as a site for the realization of justice within the “national” sphere is doubly undermined: one, by the initial displacement, and two, by the increasing difficulties of displaced families to be included in social programs<sup>42</sup> and adapt to the sites of socioeconomic marginality in the new environment. Secondly, the protective refugee/humanitarian international discourse, in which the displaced are supposed to find sanctuary in the neighboring town, is disrupted by the illegibility of this trauma to the Brazilian population and by the fact that, for many, refuge is but a secondary and distant option. In the past few years, UNHCR and other international organizations have built an increasing presence in the area. UNHCR has established a partnership with local organizations for the reception of refugees who arrive at the border. UNHCR has also provided training and assistance to both social workers and governmental officials. The UN refugee commission estimated that around twenty thousand Colombians lived in the area, displaced by the violence, but few had applied for refugee status.<sup>43</sup>

In many of my conversations, two major justifications were provided for that lack of search for “international” protection. The first was the dismissal of refugeeness as a solution. Many did not see a direct relationship between attaining refugee status in Brazil and acquiring a better sense of security, both in terms of physical integrity and of material survival.<sup>44</sup> In a sense, to become a refugee was to reinforce the displaced nature of their everyday experience, a trait that should be minimized not enhanced. In addition, the restrictions on mobility that go along with refugee status (for example, a prohibition of returning to Colombian territory) form another barrier for those who still keep a close and daily connection with their communities of original residence. It was also pointed out that the distance and cost of transportation were limitations to “dislocating.” Some people mentioned that they were afraid of encountering persecution in areas of Brazil where Colombians live. One interviewee, for example, said she knew of a case in which a Colombian displaced person moved to the provincial capital, Manaus, and was killed by drug dealers supposedly of Colombian origin.

Secondly, some interviewees highlighted that there was an important gap between the realities of two different places, and that gap could make it harder for Colombians to adapt to Brazil. Language and cultural difference, the disparity between the rural life they were used to and the chaos they saw as characteristic of Brazilian city life, as well as fear of the “unknown,” were cited as hindering search for “inter”national modes of protection. Living on a border was considered a better strategy for an eventual return; or, should violence take

over, they would be better placed to again dislocate for yet another new territory of estrangement, both legally and geographically. The border, therefore, was not perceived as a crossing or checkpoint but as a zone where normal life should be resumed.

The rumors also attest to a paradoxical disconnection between the cultural portrayal of a supposed harmony of life between the towns in different countries, expressed by ideas of friendship and confraternity, and the relative divide that forecloses the possibility of refuge and solidarity between such sites, especially in the interpretations and articulations of displaced families' views. This paradox is conveyed in the idea of distant proximities: the rumors and the events that followed show a "disruption of the functional and geographical immediacy of two cities."<sup>45</sup> The proximity reflected in the festival and the ethnic composition of towns is suddenly disrupted by the influx of an inchoate "mass of people," fleeing from fear and from events they can only try to explain. Friendship Avenue becomes the landscape for the display of such distances, showing that "borders not only join what is different but also divide what is similar."<sup>46</sup>

In the same way that such distant proximities engender de-identifications, thus separations, between border realities and performance, they also create moments for reidentifications or for the reenactment of "scales almost lost." These are "pre-border webs of relations that have weakened under the onslaught of state formation but have not quite vanished."<sup>47</sup> These "scales" are evident in the reidentification made possible by displacement between indigenous groups within the local space of the border. Many Colombians, but also Peruvians, who decide to reside on the Brazilian side do so in the indigenous neighborhood of Umariãçu. The bilingual indigenous schools in Umariãçu have a higher rate of foreign children enrolled, mostly with indigenous background, than any other public school in Tabatinga.<sup>48</sup> Some indigenous families relocate to Brazil in order to have access to public services, like health and education, and, in the case of the indigenous displaced, to regain a sense of community and safety. Displacement is then an opportunity to strengthen community ties that have been systematically severed after years of colonial imposition and economic disruption due to intense changes in the exploitation of natural resources and land occupation.

The language of rumors reflects also a trait connected to the particular nature of the Colombian conflict. Many cases of both community and individual persecution involve personal denunciation of an "informant" figure. As Uribe aptly remarks,<sup>49</sup> "Rural inhabitants are murdered because they are perceived as direct or indirect support for the opposition [in this case, either guerrilla or paramilitary units]. To do business with, chat with, show hospitality to, or sell any

goods or services to the other group is reason enough to be considered an enemy collaborator (*auxiliador*). In some cases, paramilitary and military intelligence agents seek to convert, by force if necessary, local peasants into a pointer (a traitor to one's own group) or a collaborator (an ally of the opposition)—contradictory roles known by the same term *sapo*.<sup>50</sup> The *sapo* is both an insider, a member of the community, and an outsider, one that can always disrupt the supposed sense of cohesion of the community. Being this ambivalent figure, the informant can be everyone and no one, creating a sense of overall suspicion and distrust. Therefore, even though everyone has had some connection with the violence, or has been directly affected by it, no one openly speaks about it for fear that their voice can be identified and brutally silenced. Rumor becomes then one of the few mechanisms of communication for displaced communities, one of the means through which people can worm through memories and share interpretations of events.

Rumors are a medium of communication, but also a performance of moments of crisis. They are ambivalent in their sudden rise. They disrupt while connecting. They allow for associations with old and new kinships while reproducing and merging past and present insecurities. In the same way in which the border is produced as bridge and barrier, rumors present us with a heterogeneous picture that contextualizes the experience of displacement as “life in movement.”<sup>51</sup> Rumors attest to the fact that such borders are not just lines of passage, or cultural regions, or zones of abnormality and accident, but are always and constantly instrumentally appropriated as permanent intervals of life itself.

### Conclusions as Beginnings

When I first met with a military commander at an informal gathering on the border between Brazil and Colombia, he asked me whether “it could possibly be true that twenty thousand refugee-like Colombians were living in the Brazilian Amazon region.” For him, the data seemed not only outrageous, but also invalid. It was perceived as a move by international institutions to increase their participation in the management of these regions and to “fabricate” a problem that did not, in reality, exist. I could not answer that question, not from the standpoint from which it was posed: that for numbers to be valid they need to be proven; that facts have to be confronted with a supposedly prior and objective reality, and that information has to be controlled and diffused from appropriate sites of authority. More than that, the question seemed to distance these numbers from the everyday realities of

violence, trauma, and displacement that constitute life in and as a border.

This was no easy question, for it requires a rethinking of what constitutes knowledge and what constitutes politics and a legitimate voice. Who can count how many refugees are there? Who can speak from or for these border zones? I have argued that rumors might give us some glimpses of such alternative understandings of community and politics. By denying the rationalization and individuation of political practice, rumors show how the international is itself performed, enacted, contested, and (why not?) reproduced in “a myriad of small and not so small ways, ‘on the ground,’ in everyday local practices that are seemingly far removed from ‘international politics.’”<sup>52</sup> Through rumors, those who cannot be counted participate in the social construction of reality, outside the conventional realms of democratic politics. These groups present their own understandings of conditions of marginality and subalternity and how they relate to contexts of political violence and sovereign power. These are always tenuous, ambivalent, and paradoxical performances of social practices. They do not aim at providing a definitive resolution for the problems displaced groups face in contexts of peripheral modernity. But they do point, I believe, to different mechanisms of making sense of life, affected simultaneously by local, transnational, and international processes, and of responding to the (dis)articulations produced by these processes.

The scenes of the “other” presented in the two strands of rumors reflect how such understandings might disrupt the traditional sites in which politics is supposed to happen and how a condition of “inter” might engender different conceptions of subjectivity. The two border zones have enormously different layouts, but they share a striking resemblance. On the one hand, they highlight the proliferation of border practices outside the traditional territorial imaginary and how such practices are increasingly taking place within states and societies. If the border was supposed to clearly delimit inside/outside, as conventional scholarship tells us, it seems we can no longer define where such lines are supposed to be. These bordering practices are the result of global processes, of the “transnationalization of third worlds,” of an exceptionalist mentality, and of the inability of states, notably of developing states, to effectively reproduce a traditional conception of sovereignty, one that divorces citizens and aliens in a dichotomous way. On the other hand, they are also the result of the inabilities and unfulfilled promises of protective international discourses, such as those related to internally displaced and refugee communities. Rather than being solutions, these conditions are appropriated as both mechanisms of reidentification and of contestation, of distancing and proximity with other communities who share the forms of life and death that accompany those who inhabit abject sites.

Rumors allow for a reconceptualization of attachments to race, ethnicity, nationalist rhetoric, subalternity, and ideas of otherness that disrupt the aesthetics of politics as policing that seem to prevail in these sites. For reasons that should now be evident, these reconceptualizations are always partial, uncertain, conflictive, and, more often than not, short-lived. But this should not diminish the important role they play in reconfiguring the politics of these communities and how, to that extent, they necessarily relate to and influence governmental and international politics. After all, traditional authority structures have to constantly and increasingly negotiate with these groups, through mechanisms that attempt to make sense of these different and diachronic forms of social communication.

Whether the subaltern can speak depends also on the ability of others to listen and to recognize, in their difference, the potential for a legitimate and fruitful dialogue. Giving credence to rumors as an important conveyor of political ideas is, perhaps, an incipient and initial step toward a refusal of the “accident” as an abnormal and pathological occurrence. “My terror that whether our words can go on meaning what they do depends upon whether people find it worthwhile to continue to understand me, or that finding a better bargain elsewhere, they might decide that they are not of our world.”<sup>53</sup> The attempt at hearing border languages is, perhaps, an initial strategy, in the hope that current disciplinary structures will strike a different bargain.

## Notes

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1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 292.

3. Engin Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

4. Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2007).

7. Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv.

8. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 56–57.

9. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 58.

10. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 119.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

12. For an example of mainstream approaches, see G. W. Allport and L. Postman, *The Psychology of Rumors* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947).

13. Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, and Images* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1990), p. 31.

14. See G. A. Fine and P. A. Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and J. Sabini and M. Silver, *Moralities of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

15. See John Hobson and Leonard Seabrook, eds., *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roxanne Doty, “Fronteras Compasivas and the Ethics of Unconditional Hospitality,” *Millennium* 35, no. 1 (2006): 53–74; and Willen Van Schendel and Itty Abraham, eds., *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

16. Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumors* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 17.

17. Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 11.

18. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 121.

19. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 58.

20. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 160.

21. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 60.

22. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 132.

23. Kapferer, *Rumors*, p. 14.

24. Javier H. Contreras Orozco, “Rumores: voces que serpentean” [Rumors: Voices that wind through], *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 40 (2001):12. Available at <http://www.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/2001/latina40abr/108contreras.htm>; accessed May 25, 2008, p. 1.

25. Das, *Life and Words*.

26. Orozco, *Rumores*.

27. Many African refugees and migrants also live in another slum complex, Complexo da Maré. Maré comprises sixteen impoverished communities in the northern part of the city and has an estimated population of 130 thousand people.

28. Personal communication, Sept. 2007. Direct quotes and information are based on interviews conducted during fieldwork, personal notes, and exchanges with participants (July to Dec. 2007). Names have been omitted or changed to preserve anonymity.

29. Recorded interview, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

30. OGLOBO online. *Complexo do Alemão, a Faixa de Gaza Carioca* [the German Complex, the Carioca Gaza Strip], Oct. 1, 2007. Available at [http://www.oglobo.globo.com/rio/mat/2008/02/14/complexo\\_do\\_alema\\_o\\_faixa\\_de\\_gaza\\_carioca-425648481.asp](http://www.oglobo.globo.com/rio/mat/2008/02/14/complexo_do_alema_o_faixa_de_gaza_carioca-425648481.asp); accessed Oct. 10, 2008.

31. Recorded interview, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

32. Randolph B. Persaud, “Situating Race in International Relations: The Dialectics of Civilizational Security in American Immigration,” in Geeta Chowdry and Sheila Nair, eds., *Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender, and Class* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 56–81.



33. Data attests to a direct and significant connection between race and social inequality. See, for example, *Atlas Racial Brasileiro* [Brazilian racial atlas], 2005, published by the United Nations Development Programme. Available at [http://www.pnud.org.br/publicacoes/atlas\\_racial/index.php](http://www.pnud.org.br/publicacoes/atlas_racial/index.php).

34. It might be the case that African refugees associated the closure of the office on a particular day with a “racialized” refusal of service. During my stay at AST from Aug. 2004 to July 2005 (and later in Sept. 2007), there was no evidence that any refusal of service was taking place, except on Wednesdays, when the office was closed for administrative work.

35. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 162.

36. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Transnational Third Worlds,” in Jonathan Friedman and Shalini Randeria, eds., *Worlds on the Move: Globalization, Migration, and Cultural Security* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 293–316.

37. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

38. Victor Ortiz, *El Paso: Local Frontiers at a Global Crossroads* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

39. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 14.

40. Das, *Life and Words*, p. 219.

41. Personal notes, July 2007, based on interviews with participants. These interviews were not recorded.

42. Colombia has a national program for the protection of displaced families. Enrollment is required and individuals have to be “recognized” as displaced. The process is fraught with difficulties. One of the families I interviewed waited for six years to get a “legal” displaced status. Corruption and fear of persecution are also among the reasons stated by interviewees for not enrolling in the official programs. These problems have strained the already fragile relationship between governmental agencies and displaced-families associations in ways that resonate with the ongoing struggles over recognition between UNHCR and governmental officials and refugee communities as portrayed in Rio de Janeiro.

43. Data obtained through Social Pastoral in Tabatinga shows that up to 2007, fewer than eighty Colombians had “officially” applied for refugee status through their office.

44. Personal notes, July 2007.

45. Ortiz, *El Paso*, p. xxv.

46. Schendel, *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things*, p. 44.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

48. Personal communication, Oct. 2007.

49. Maria Victoria Uribe, “Dismembering and Expelling: Semantics of Political Terror in Colombia,” *Public Culture* 16, no.1 (2004): 79–95.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

51. Ortiz, *El Paso*.

52. Doty, *Fronteras Compasivas*, p. 73.

53. Das, *Life and Words*, pp. 203–204.