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## Photographing Favela Funk

By DAVID GONZALEZ

Vincent Rosenblatt could feel the music. We're not talking in his heart, but in his house in Rio de Janeiro. The walls and windows rattled from the funk pumping through the speakers rocking a street party in a nearby favela.



"I could hear this incredible bass, the pulse of this music from the hills of the favela," said Mr. Rosenblatt, [a photographer](#) and Parisian transplant who has lived in Brazil for the last decade. "It made the foundations of my house shake. Then I started to buy their CDs on the street, to hear and understand the lyrics, and they informed me. The life, the behavior, the rules of the favela were all there."

And now they are in his pictures. Over the last several years, he has gone to countless funk parties, where a Brazilian hybrid of hip hop and regional styles moved throngs of young people. Like its American counterpart, its beats have inspired dances and styles, while its lyrics comment on local life. And just like its American counterpart at times, the scene has also drawn the ire of the police and the authorities, who say it celebrates criminals and violence.

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The scene has been under attack: the police have banned or controlled it in favelas, or slums, that are being pacified. And in a sinister twist, several M.C.'s have been shot to death in crimes that have gone unsolved (but which some people attribute to vigilantes protected by the authorities). Yet something tied to a global youth culture can't stop, won't stop.

"It's not easy to be a funkeiro, and you can really risk your life," Mr. Rosenblatt said. "But the fact is this youth culture exists independently of the drug dealers, the police or the paramilitaries. It is like blood in the veins of the youth of Rio. You have kids from 13 to 25 who need a place to exchange their information, their values and what is in the air."

Mr. Rosenblatt moved to Rio 10 years ago, where he started an association that taught young people how to document favela life. He thought that because there was a market for those images — with a distinct point of view that differed from stereotyped media portrayals — why not let young residents photograph and earn some money from it? He exhibited and sold their pictures, with the majority of the profits going to them. Later, he sold their work through an agency he founded.



Vincent Rosenblatt/Agência OlharesColorful, coordinated hairdos at the baile at Club Eden, Belford Roxo, Rio de Janeiro.

Yet when he first suggested to the young people in his association that they photograph the funk scene, they shrugged it off.

"They were like, 'come on,' " he said. "This culture is so in front of their noses, no one would bring me the images. And at the same time, it was held in contempt by the elites, many times because of the lyrics that were sexual, warrior-like, provocative and political."

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After crashing his first party, Mr. Rosenblatt got to be known on the scene, as D.J.'s and others invited him to other dances. It involved negotiating relationships with some of the unofficial powers in some neighborhoods, as his newfound friends vouched for him. In time, he would bring boxes of photos to distribute or become part of the party by projecting slide shows. "This capital of trust is something fragile," he said.

Though the funk scene has roots in Miami bass music and — no surprise — James Brown, it has been transformed and influenced by Brazilian and region styles. Mr. Rosenblatt has been especially attracted to how that transformation also shows itself in the body language and dance steps.

He considers it a privilege to be invited to these parties, especially since his photographs may be the only proof they ever existed in some favelas. In recent years the authorities have cracked down, severely limiting the parties or banning them outright. There have also been an alarming number of murders that remain unsolved.

"In the so-called pacified favelas, you have no more funk," Mr. Rosenblatt said. "The police forbade it, instead of just letting it happen in peace. They transformed the favelas into silenced dormitories: sleeping cities where the poor stay quiet and not sing about anything that would hurt the sensibilities of the elite."

Yet they persist.

"The songs of the moment, that tell of the brave actions of drug dealers or the war with the police, you can't hear it in the favelea or the party because it would be invaded by the police," he said. "But if you go 20 kilometers to the nightclubs of the rich in Ipanema, the youth who never go to the favelas are all dancing to the forbidden songs."