

Celebrities of the *Passinho*¹: Media, visibility and recognition of youngsters from poor neighbourhoods

Cláudia Pereira, Aline Maia and Marcella Azevedo

Abstract

In 2004, a new dance craze emerged from the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. *Passinho*, as it was dubbed, is a combination of funk and hip hop with traditional Brazilian styles such as *frevo* and *samba*. The dance has gained mainstream worldwide attention, is endlessly displayed on TV shows, and became the subject of documentaries and plays. Two of its celebrities are Cebolinha and Lellêzinha, who have risen to fame and have consolidated themselves as important references for other youngsters in the quest for recognition. If before they were invisible to the media (with cases of visibility only by means of crime and violence), nowadays they are represented as people who can stand out as a result of their music, dance and fashion sense. They appear on TV shows and they are featured in documentaries and advertising campaigns due to their unique style. This article proposes a reflection on the construction of these personalities, celebrities from shantytowns, based on discussions about media visibility and invisibility.

1. Let's go to *passinho*

The style was born and spread from the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro: a mixture of funk and hip hop with traditional Brazilian styles such as *frevo* and *samba*. *Passinho*, rhythm originated in 2004, arouses youthful creativity of shantytowns in order to promote a different perspective on its subjects. In addition to been practiced on *lajes* (concrete slabs) and during 'battles'² that take place at *bailes* (funk balls) within the communities, over the past few years the movement has increased in popularity. It has gained space on TV shows, it has been the subject of documentaries and plays, it received sponsorship from large companies, and it became the motto used in video clips that were widely successful. A peculiar

¹ This chapter – with adaptations - results from a paper presented at the Communication and Urban Cultures RG, XIV Meeting of Research Groups in Communication at the XXXVII Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences in 2015. It is also published, in Portuguese, as a chapter in the book *Cultura Pop* (see Pereira, Maia & Azevedo, 2015). This chapter results from researches carried out at Communication and Consumption Studies Program (PECC) in Rio de Janeiro sponsored by Infoglobo/PUC-Rio Academy.

² The 'battles' of *passinho* are dance competitions. It is a dispute between two contestants at a time. The winner of each dispute goes to another stage until the contest has a final winner.

art form born in the *favela* through which its artists, the youngsters, discovered an opportunity to gain visibility.

In this context, we perceive the rising of an individual who longs to be recognized for his or hers artistic and cultural abilities: A young body bearer of messages of mobilization and resistance to stereotypes commonly widespread in the mainstream media when relating the subject of *favela* to crime and banditry. The emergence of *passinho* also brings to light personalities who greatly stand out from within the movement. Boys who take on the important role of implementing new leisure practices and establishing what is consumed and communicated within their communities, thus presenting themselves as references (see Pereira, Maia & Azevedo, 2015).

This chapter introduces a reflection on the construction of these personalities, celebrities from shantytowns, based on discussions about media visibility and invisibility. If on the one hand we perceive the mainstream media's only interest on aspects related to violence and crime, mainly in news coverage (Alvim & Paim, 2000), on the other hand it is instigating to evaluate the rise of new idols and models of behaviour in these poor neighbourhoods. For this study, we make use of a methodology that combines literature review and documentary research along with analysis of social representations in the media—journalistic and entertainment—that makes reference to the *passinho* and its dancers. Distinctively, we turn our attention to materials that provides us with insight on the origins of the movement and the path taken by two youngsters in particular: Jefferson Chaves, known as Cebolinha, and Alessandra Ayres, Lellêzinha. Both got famous on YouTube, attracted attention in the 'battles' carried out in the *favelas* of Rio, became a reference to other young *passistas*³ and starred on TV shows and commercials. The girl was even cast to be part of a soap opera in one of Brazil's major TV networks due to the *passinho*. As for Cebolinha, he travels around the world showing his dance.

2. Social representations, media (in)visibility and the quest for recognition

At present, the media are a powerful propagator of representations in the social world, materializing instruments of the contemporary imagination in a way that

³ Portuguese name for the dancers of *Passinho*.

affects social practices of individuals and groups, such as the youngsters. According to Serge Moscovici (2001), social representations are a phenomenon, not only a concept, in which the interaction between the individuals and the negotiation of a common sense base the communication itself, essential to strengthen ties and connections, elaborating at last the construction of the reality symbolically lived and understood. For Moscovici (2001), given that we receive information all the time, we become dependent on models, parameters that help us understand and process that information.

In light of this necessity, social representations act with two functions. The first one is to give shape and sense to objects, people, events, to eliminate characteristics which are particular to individuals or observed situations, and to emerge a more familiar and general shape. The second function is the prescriptive character of representations that ultimately impose itself as an irresistible force upon society, incorporating itself into daily life, in a way that "are shared by many, enter into and influence the mind of each they are not thought by them; rather, to be more precise, they are re-thought, re-cited and re-presented." (Moscovici, 2001: 24).

Representations are collective, dynamic creations shared by the members of a group or society and strengthened by the tradition of the same group or society. Therefore, they emerge from human interactions:

Representations, obviously, are not created by individuals in isolation. Once created, however, they lead a life of their own, circulate, merge, attract and repel each other, and give birth to new representations, while old ones die out. (...) Being shared by all and strengthened by tradition, it constitutes a social reality *sui generis*. (...) In creating representations we are like the artist, who bows down before the statue he has sculpted and worships it as a god. (Moscovici, 2001: 27).

Under this perspective, Moscovici also states that social representations are closely connected to communication, for it is a product of this and of interaction. At the same time that they are spread out by communicative practices, they are also mechanisms that enable communication, since they aim at making the unfamiliar familiar, operating on the logic of recurrence to a past, to a pre-existing experience. Moscovici (2001) makes it clear that social representations may be the product of communication, but without representations there would be no communication. In summary, the representations founded by communication would constitute the realities of our lives and would serve as

primary means to establish the associations with which we interact with one another.

It is in this context that the role of the media in the configuration and conformation of social representations emerges: The media accelerate the changes representations must go through in order to penetrate into our daily life and become part of common reality. At the same time as it collaborates on the propagation of representations, the media also strengthen and legitimize such representations. Hence, the media are of essential importance in supporting representations and speeches. Mass communication disseminates ways of thinking, acting and being in the daily avalanche of information, advertising messages, films, soap operas, news, talk shows, reality shows, animations, amongst other products, creating symbolic structures where people, ideas and situations are, at all times, categorized, framed, associated to paradigms in the interest of establishing positive or negative relations with the public, and with one other.

Within this context, we present our discussion pertaining to the way in which youngsters from the *favelas* become visible or invisible in media speech. After all, for researchers such as Alvim and Paim (2000), journalism recurrently focuses on inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods under the perspectives of violence and crime. In analysing the construction of the 'gangs' in journalistic narrative, the two authors have concluded that the citizens of the poor neighbourhoods, observed in their real environment, present problems as delinquency, idleness and irresponsibility. For them, these youngsters from lower classes are recurrently portrayed in the pages of newspapers and they "attract attention not because of their daily life, but rather for the 'dangerous life style' they supposedly have" (Alvim & Paim, 2000: 15).

The idea of youth itself in modern western societies has its origin linked to delinquency (Groppa, 2000). In the 1950s post-war era, the gangs gathered on North American and British streets to encourage disorder, rebelliousness, and transgression. For the field of Social Sciences, youth became object of interest and study thereafter, and it has gotten media attention exclusively for crime-related stories. This perspective seems to have changed in comparison to the present moment when, apparently, other representations of poor youngsters from the *favela* are at display, as this paper intends to demonstrate.

In this context, we pay special attention to the youth from poor neighbourhoods who claim a place in society, often through artistic-cultural manifestations. We observe that according to Herschman, "the culture of poor

neighbourhoods has managed to, with some regularity, produce not only a counter discourse, but also trace new sociocultural borders (and space) that oscillate between the exclusion and the integration" (Herschman, 2005: 158) in the media representation. The dance and music produced in the *favelas* is recorded on video, transformed into video clips and made available on the Internet, offering the world the youngsters' real perspective on the place they live. In fact, the Internet was the environment in which *passinho* seems to have echoed, initially only inside the *favelas* of Rio. According to testimonials in the documentary *A batalha do Passinho – o filme* (Domingos, 2013), recording a video to register their dance and post it on sharing websites was the way these youngsters found to promote their style and also to present, rethink, recite and represent themselves (Moscovici, 2001).

Hence, a practice of communication as well as of representation that is very clear in the speeches chained in the documentary was born: "I watched the video and I thought I could do better than that"; "I started to dance watching videos of the other *moleque*⁴ on YouTube. I began to stare at my shadow at the wall and improve my moves gradually"; "Internet played a crucial role. There was no way for the boys to leave their communities, their *favelas*, in order to promote their work and go anywhere" (Domingos, 2013).

By using corporal expression as a means of representation, these youngsters were in search of a particular visibility, not one that would place them within the geographic centre of the cities, but one that would guarantee their inclusion, acceptance and recognition from other means of manifestation. *Passinho* insured the media visibility and consequent recognition they sought: "My dream is to be recognized, but not only in the world of funk. I want to be recognized abroad", confesses a young boy who participated in the documentary (see Domingos, 2013). We notice in his speech the alarming consequences modern society inflicts on 'invisible' children and teenagers: If they are not seen, they are not recognized; thus, they do not have a place in the world. "When socially invisible, the biggest hunger of mankind is the hunger for acceptance, affection and recognition" (Soares, Bill & Athayde, 2005: 285). It is pertinent to highlight the mechanisms in the construction of representations as possibilities of also recreating reality. The experiences of the young, their practices of consumption and communication expressed in Domingos' documentary reminds us exactly of the process described by Moscovici (2001)

⁴ In this context 'moleque' means mischievous boy; lad.

about the moment in which the representations that describe ideas can compose or decompose an object from a change of perspective.

3. Fame and media construction of celebrities

The youngsters from poor neighbourhoods' quest for recognition and visibility in the attempt of claiming their place in the world and the importance of media in this context can also be related to a complex and characteristic phenomenon of modern societies: fame. Contemporary authors point out that fame is connected to traditional values such as honour and glory and it is understood as something noble. For Coelho (1999), this concept constitutes ways to construct one's individual identity, which would necessarily occur through the interaction with another person. In summary, this notion is a means to find the singularity that, due to fame in contemporary times, assumes a more ephemeral nature, when in fact honour and glory traditionally reflected a desire of singularity for posterity, in opposition to the future of common people, fated to anonymity and oblivion.

Therefore, Braudy (2006) states that 'Alexander the Great' must be considered the first famous person ever registered. Despite all the recognition that his lineage assured him, the nobleman and warrior longed to be remembered for his own merit. He spared no efforts to ensure that his achievements were disseminated, which resulted in him becoming known far beyond the borders of his magnificent Empire. His death was overcome by the perpetuation of his accomplishments which remain cemented for posterity. Thus, public acclamation would be intrinsically connected to the need of being recognized which is peculiar of human condition, states Rojek (2008) and Coelho (1999). For Rojek (2008: 104), "the acclamation brings the sensual pleasure of being recognized as an object of desire and approval". Along these lines, Coelho (1999: 32) talks about a "supposed singularity that the public exposure of one's image would cultivate". In addition to this direct link with singularity, part of the seduction fame arouses is connected to the possibility of obtaining the most diverse privileges:

Thus, fame seems to perform double duty. Initially, it removes the individual from his or hers anonymous condition, making him or her singular in regard to ordinary people. This possibility to be distinguished, however, does not end in itself, allowing, if well managed, the acquisition of privileges that, in a

society marked by a relational and hierarchal ideology as the Brazilian, as DaMatta (1979) points out, are reserved to the people. (Coelho, 1999: 101).

The study carried out by the anthropologist Roberto DaMatta concerning the issue of fame is thoroughly examined in Coelho's work. Coelho states that celebrities approach those people coined by DaMatta as 'medallions' (or VIPs) and also that they possess prestige that grants them a different treatment in the most diverse situations. She says that celebrities are abstained from the search for privileges, once these privileges are consistent with their own condition of celebrities: "The celebrity is a 'superperson', that one who is capable of stating instead of asking: 'do you know who you are talking to'" (Coelho, 1999: 101). Fame is also associated to a number of varied values, seen as positive. Gabler states that the life of known people is seen as:

a secular paradise of money, sex, beauty, glamour, power, respect, affection, as well as all the small comforts of life, such as the best tables in good restaurants or the best places in stadiums, invitations for fancy parties and even titles of honor. (Gabler, 1999: 169).

After listing some of the reasons that explain the attraction fame has on the youngsters from poor neighbourhoods, we have made room to discuss this from the media point of view. We can now pose the question: how did youngsters like Lellêzinha and Cebolinha conquer their space in the mainstream media? Aside from participating on talk shows and giving interviews to the most diverse means of communication, both became well-known beyond the shantytowns. As reported by Rojek, this is a premise to acquiring celebrity status. For the author, "celebrity = impact on public conscience" (Rojek, 2008: 12).

The great impact celebrities have on the public can only be understood if analysed within the mechanisms of cultural consumption. Celebrities act as devices conducted by marketing motivations and they are a result of the cultural industry. Contemporary authors have been stressing the issue: "Celebrities are cultural manufactures" (Rojek, 2008: 12), "the mass culture is commercial culture, which sells cultural products for the audience" (Kellner, 2001: 364), and "the star manufactures itself" (Morin, 1989: 36). About movie stars, Morin states:

Stars are complete items of merchandise: there is not one inch of their body, nor a shred of their soul, nor a memory of their lives that cannot be thrown on the market. This complete merchandise has other virtues: it is the typical merchandise of capitalism on a major scale. The enormous investments, the system's industrial techniques of rationalization and standardization

effectively convert stars into merchandise destined for mass consumption. Stars have all the virtues of a standard product adapted to the market, like chewing gum, refrigerators, soap, razor blades etc. Mass distribution is assured by the greatest diffusers of the modern world: the press, the radio, and of course the movies. Furthermore, star-merchandise never wears out nor it diminishes after consumption. The multiplication of a star's images, far from decreasing, augments the image's worth and makes the star more desirable. (Morin, 1989: 76).

We may assume then that the media space gained by the two dancers analysed in this paper is related to a potential bond they might have established with specific groups of public, initially youngsters from poor neighbourhoods like them. Cebolinha and Lellêzinha started to be portrayed as attractive celebrities, merchandise for a consumer public. Part of the attraction has to do with the construction of an identity the fans can relate to, since celebrities offer roles and models to be followed. Morin (1989, p. 105) states that "the star offers and commercializes a 'knowing how to be', a 'knowing how to love' and a 'knowing how to live'". Inglis (2012: 22) writes that it is about "a way of being in the world". Rojek (2008: 58) points out that "the celebrities offer peculiarly strong affirmations of belonging, recognition and sense before the lives of their public". We have here a paradoxical aspect with regard to the relation between fame/celebrity and the formation of identities. Fame is one of the ways in which the construction of self-image resulting from the recognition of others is possible. For those few, however, who achieve fame, they become unique within the multitude of anonymous people, and they can be consolidated as celebrities who, due to media exposure, act as role models for the public's self-image construction.

4. The celebrities of *passinho*

On stage, six youngsters. Five boys and one girl performing elaborate moves. The dance routine takes place in a shed, on a street, at *Central do Brasil* or in *Lapa*.⁵ The protagonists—carefully chosen to be part of the *Dream Team do Passinho*—are all black and inhabitants of the *favelas* of Rio. They stage their dance to the rhythmic sound that makes reference to a known commercial soundtrack for a soft drink. The video *Clipe do Passinho – Todo mundo aperta o*

⁵ *Central do Brasil* is a train station. *Lapa* is a neighborhood located in downtown Rio de Janeiro.

*play*⁶ went viral after being posted on YouTube in September 2013 and was viewed 1.6 million times within the space of only two months, not including the number of times it was shared nor viewed on other people's social network profiles. By mid-July 2014, there were more than 5.6 million views. Another big hit, with more than 52 thousand accesses, was *Passinho da Latina*.⁷ "Broadcasting Corporation stand by. Now, you are going to see Coca-Cola change your feelings forever, always Coca-Cola": This voice over is off-shot, and is, followed by a young boy entering the scene, drinking the soft drink, placing the can on the floor and starting to dance the *Passinho*. The well-known soundtrack is mixed with a funk rhythm. Two other youngsters also join the scene and dance around the can.

These two videos have many aspects in common, which are inherent to the discussion that we consider in this chapter: In addition to having young protagonists from the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, both videos make reference to the *Batalhas do Passinho* (Portuguese for Battles of the *Passinho*) in Rio de Janeiro, highlighting some personalities from this cultural scene. In actual fact, the first video clip was launched on the Internet to promote the *Baile do Passinho* (Portuguese for *Passinho* Ball), which took place over four Sundays in October 2013, in the communities of *Santa Marta*, *Macacos*, *Alemão* and *Rocinha*. According to the periodical *O Globo*, "The video clip of the group called *Dream Team* is a clear sample of this new phase of the *Passinho*: With impeccable production, it was filmed in different locations, there was a choreographer and an art director" (Filgueiras, 2013). Amongst the dancers is Lellêzinha, one of the few girls to venture into the rhythm. In the second video clip, the three dancers Iuri, Bolinho and Cebolinha shine through, they are the "celebrity trio" of the *Passinho*. They are the main propagators of the dance, even before the genre drew attention of the mainstream media (see Pereira, Maia & Azevedo, 2015).

Jefferson de Oliveira Chaves, nickname Cebolinha, is 24 years old, and the student Alessandra Aires, nickname Lellêzinha, is 16 years old. In their own way, the subjects of this analysis offer us insight into the stimulating journey that is the establishment of fame. Whilst partisans of the cultural industry's artistic production, they have been legitimized by the media who—not without being based on hard marketing and consumption parameters—have given more and

⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrtFy5C02Pc>.

⁷ Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-hGOMJ4PrU>.

more visibility to these youngsters. The pair stood out in Rio's communities and on social networks (initial platform for disseminating the *Passinho* in Rio de Janeiro). When the movement, still on the web, drew the attention of Rafael Mike and Julio Ludemir, authors of the so called "battles", Cebolinha and Lellêzinha had a new door opened. "Actually, we 'was' already surfing the Web, observing the *moleques*. 'Holy Shit', look at this! Look at that one. 'Holy shit! Bolinho, Cebolinha! Man, what is it? What is happening? All the *moleques de mola*⁸ in Rio de Janeiro were already mobilized. We just stumbled upon that on the Internet", says Rafael Mike in the documentary *A batalha do Passinho – o filme* (Domingos, 2013), produced by Osmosis Films and directed by Emílio Domingos.

Dance competitions also caught the interest of the anthropologist and filmmaker Domingos, who saw the possibility of making history and promoting the dance in the first organized "battles" carried out throughout 2011. Thusly, the documentary released in 2013 was born. Moreover, it has already covered the world,⁹ also disseminating the *Passinho* and the main names behind the movement. Cebolinha and Lellêzinha are amongst the young narrators of Domingos' film. Just like the other participants, they talk about their interest in dance, their desire to make a living out of *Passinho* and their longing for recognition. Cebolinha is featured several times in the documentary: during 'battles', during testimonials on the street, at home, interacting with other dancers, assessing the reviews and the compliments he receives on social media when posting his videos. He is mentioned by other *passistas* as a role model and an inspiration. In an environment where "he who has the power is either a drug dealer or a dancer of *Passinho*", as reported by another participant, the idols are cultivated internally. Lellêzinha, the only girl featured in the documentary, only appears once. She talks about the importance of the Internet in disseminating the movement and to conclude she dances to the sound coming from a mobile telephone, having as her improvised stage a mixture of grass and land. It is interesting to observe that this restricted female presence in the film translates, subtly but emphatically, the still predominantly masculine environment of the

⁸ 'Moleques de mola' are boys who dance with much skillfulness. Their bodies seem elastic because they have much flexibility while they dance.

⁹ Winner of Best Picture at the Rio Festival 2012 (*Mostra Novos Mundos*), and Best Feature Film at the 4th *Festival de Cinema Curta Amazônia*, elected by popular jury. According to Domingos' interview, the documentary *A batalha do Passinho* has been screened in courses of cinema and festivals abroad, in countries such as France, England, the Netherlands and Portugal.

funk world. *Passinho* is still mostly starred by boys, even though the style evokes elaborate moves and sensuality, which are typically feminine. Since girls are practically absent from the 'battles' registered in the documentary, boys are the ones who take the chance to shine. Lellêzinha seems to be the exception.

Domingos' (2013) film narrative makes it possible to understand the moment where these youngsters begin to leave their poor neighbourhoods and gain visibility beyond the *favelas*. The competitions, initially carried out in an improvised way, in the middle of the street, with a speaker and people around them, evolved to have a sports court with bleachers as a scenario. The court is still located inside the community but TV crews and large companies now have access to it. *O Globo* published on October 6th, 2013:

In one of the battles already sponsored by a soft drink brand, the boys (and only few girls, such as Lellêzinha) perform to an audience of thousands. They are stars: making money, signing exclusive deals, giving private dance classes, been encouraged by their families, measuring their popularity not only by the number of views of their YouTube videos, but also by the number of fans who have tattooed their names onto their bodies. (Filgueiras, 2013).

Alongside the news report, there is a photo in which Lellêzinha is given prominence, with the following statement: "My dream is to become a professional dancer. I was only accepted at a dance school after the battles of *Passinho*". When discussing the rhythm from the *favelas*, the article makes reference to Emílio Domingos' film and also to another documentary called *Da cabeça aos pés*, produced by Globonews. Lellêzinha and Cebolinha participate in both productions. The news report refers to him as "the young boy from Cascadura, considered one of the first great dancers of the genre" and portrays Alessandra as a "Beyoncé fan with voluminous, highlighted, curly hair". The article continues:

With the sponsorships from companies, the battles became frequent, and more youngsters showed up. They drew attention of TV programs and some of them were hired as main attractions. They participated in the opening ceremony of the Paralympic games in London, and at Rock in Rio as a parallel attraction. (Filgueiras, 2013)

Programa da Xuxa,¹⁰ *Caldeirão do Huck*¹¹ and *Esquenta*¹² are some of the TV shows that gave way and visibility to the *Passinho* and its protagonists. Lellêzinha and Cebolinha are examples of youngsters who gained worldwide fame beyond the *favela*. After having been chosen for the *Dream Team* of the *Passinho*, Lellêzinha now tours throughout Brazil with her show. The group, that recently signed a contract with Sony Music record label, has recorded a video clip with renowned singer Ricky Martin. They are also expected to launch a CD in 2015. Due to her beauty — even though she is black — and talent, Lellêzinha fell into the good graces of the mainstream media in the country and seems to have been chosen by them to represent this new Brazilian middle class: comprised mostly of young people from shantytowns, according to research.¹³ Lellêzinha in particular has achieved a space of prominence in *Rede Globo*.¹⁴ Between January and June 2014, she participated on three occasions as a guest on the acclaimed TV show *Encontro com Fátima*. Lellêzinha is introduced to the audience as a celebrity and a reference for other girls from the *favela*, according to the words of the show's host, journalist Fátima Bernardes: "We became interested to know Lellêzinha's story, and our crew went to the community where she lives, in Praça Seca, Rio De Janeiro, so that we could show how she influences many girls", and "Lellêzinha, you influence girls not only with your dance, but also with the way in which you dress, don't you?". On stage, five dummies are dressed with looks Lellêzinha came up with. As she talks about the outfits, she teaches the audience how to select the best occasions to wear them and establishes herself as a *fashion* icon for other girls. Lellêzinha herself, throughout her discourse on the show reinforces this role:

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://globo.tv.globo.com/rede-globo/tv-xuxa/t/atracoes/v/fly-fez-o-encontro-do-frevo-com-o-funk/1798347/>.

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://globo.tv.globo.com/rede-globo/caldeirao-do-huck/v/luciano-huck-explica-o-que-e-a-batalha-do-passinho/2582748/>.

¹² Retrieved from <http://globo.tv.globo.com/rede-globo/esquenta/v/dream-team-do-passinho-agita-o-programa-especial/3308512/>.

¹³ According to study organized by the Secretary of Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil, the 'new class C' is predominantly composed of young people and an expressive number of Afro-descendants (retrieved from <http://www.sae.gov.br/assuntos/legado/classe-media/as-45-curiosidades-da-classe-media/>, on November 6, 2015). Survey conducted by Serasa Experian reinforces this scenario: making use of the credit analysis company, Brazilian Census and the National Research of Home Sample, the study revealed that young people from poor neighborhoods represent 31% of Brazilian new middle class (N/A, 2012).

¹⁴ The most famous Brazilian television network.

Passinho comes from the *favela*, and I am very happy to see these children coming up to me on the street to take a picture, to say they love me, it makes me feel emotional, you know, because I wasn't very confident within myself. Now I am the Lellêzinha, I need to have Lellêzinha attitude, I am a reference for these kids.

In a different instance, she states that girls from the *favelas* have for her the same admiration she has for American artist Beyoncé.¹⁵ In *Da cabeça aos pés*, directed by journalist Renée Castello Branco, Lellêzinha visits a very popular commercial area, analyses the clothes that are for sale, and comments on them, stating whether she likes them or not.¹⁶ Recently joining the cast of *Malhação*, a Rede Globo soap opera production for teenagers, Lellêzinha will be part of the cast for one season starting July 2014. When appearing on an almost daily basis as part of the country's largest TV broadcaster schedule, she will likely become even more well-known by the public, raising her fame to another level and becoming a national celebrity. In the plot, by performing the role of a girl who sings and dances, she will be able to show her talent beyond the acting performance in itself.

On the other hand, Cebolinha and his *Bonde do Passinho* participated in the DVD *Músicas para Churrasco – volume I*, from performer Seu Jorge, launched in 2012. They also performed at the opening ceremony of the Paralympic games in London in the same year. The year of 2014 gave the young man international experience: This time, he accompanied the Osmosis Films crew on a trip to New York, where he performed at the Lincoln Centre from the end of July to the beginning of August. According to Cebolinha, the idea was to shoot a video clip abroad, but they also had another project in mind: the beginning of *Passinho's* dance shows in theatres, starting September. The young man who recognizes himself as one of the creators of *Passinho* in the early 2000s explains that up until 2011 there were no real events, just simple competitions amongst the dancers. He confirms that the 'battles' created by Rafael Mike and Julio Ludemir have helped to give the movement and its dancers visibility. So much that he himself, from 2011 onward, started to make a living out of the dance, touring throughout Brazil and even giving classes to students from the appraised State

¹⁵ Retrieved from <http://globoTV.globo.com/rede-globo/encontro-com-fatima-bernardes/v/lelezhinha-mostra-visuais-que-usa-para-os-shows-e-festas/3105276/>.

¹⁶ Retrieved from <http://globoTV.globo.com/globonews/globonews-documentario/v/da-cabeca-aos-pes-acompanha-o-mundo-dos-dancarinos-do-passinho/3171529/>.

School of *Dance Maria Olenewa*, belonging to *Fundação Theatro Municipal* of Rio de Janeiro.

Cebolinha is also in demand for interviews and presentations, although in a much smaller scale than Lellêzinha, and in a different way. Unlike her—who slowly built an individual image for herself apart from the group *Dream Team do Passinho*—, he always insists on linking his image and story to the rhythm he helped create. His biggest concern seems to be the perpetuation of his name and the rhythm together, a huge desire to ‘be remembered’, which can be recurrently observed in many of his interviews:

The film is helping us to become eternalized, isn't it? (...) I believe *Passinho* will last forever, it'll become one of the biggest dances ever created. One hundred years from now when people talk about *Passinho* I know they'll remember us, those featured in the film.¹⁷

In a different interview, also in the documentary *A batalha do Passinho*, he states: “I want one hundred years to go by and have people still remember our work. With the film, our art will be eternalized in images and also in people’s memory”.¹⁸ In the *Mais Você* TV show (*Rede Globo*), Cebolinha performed with the *Bonde do Passinho* and had the opportunity to comment on their fans: “We were exhibiting the film all around the state of Rio de Janeiro. We were in a shopping centre at Angra dos Reis for a show and an exhibit of the film, but we had to leave in secret because the fans wouldn’t let us leave”.¹⁹

5. Final considerations

The emergence of *Passinho*, stimulated by media exposure and the sponsorship of large companies, brings to light personalities who stand out within the movement, who introduce themselves as role models. These youngsters — because of the recognition given to their art form — are constructing their self-image and becoming unique in their interactions with others. Those who catch the media’s attention are the ones who contribute the most for the constitution

¹⁷ Retrieved from <http://globoTV.globo.com/globocom/g1/v/diretor-de-a-batalha-do-passinho-o-filme-conta-detalhes-sobre-o-documentario/2859104/>.

¹⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.pontojovemnet.com.br/noticia/diversao/1033/passinho-vira-filme-e-mostra-expansao-da-cultura-funk-no-rio>.

¹⁹ Retrieved from <http://globoTV.globo.com/rede-globo/mais-voce/v/ana-maria-braga-recebe-o-bonde-do-passinho-no-programa/2881810/>.

of new representations of youngsters from poor neighbourhoods, representations that used to be solely associated to violence and delinquency. Notwithstanding, new representations, now associated to positive values, are being disseminated by the media and becoming references that can be helpful in the process of identity construction of the public. From the contents analysed, we can point out that at first youngsters from poor neighbourhoods gained visibility amid their pairs through the help of social media: they became well-known in the *favelas* and, more specifically, in the dance circuit. At a later stage this visibility was broadened, reaching society in general, when *Passinho* and its main dancers first appeared before the mass media.

We cannot deny the benefits of the impact the media had on changing these youngsters' image (exponents of the new Brazilian middle class). Even though this paper is not geared towards discussing this issue, it is a very important aspect to take into account. Young citizens from the *favela* who got used to seeing their environment being depicted in a negative light by the media are now perceived differently, they have become masters of their own self-image, even if this is still on the consumption market's interest. These youngsters — Lellêzinha in particular — are providing the market with 'the style from the *favela*'. If before they were invisible to the media (with cases of visibility only by means of crime and violence), nowadays they are represented as people who can stand out as a result of their music, dance and fashion sense. They appear on TV shows and they are featured in documentaries and advertising campaigns due to their unique style. To conclude, we believe this reflection does not end here. Instead, it leaves us new issues for the debate on the representation of youngsters from poor neighbourhoods in Brazil, the construction of celebrities and media visibility.

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