



A NEW LOOK AT RACE AND HIP-HOP IN BAHIA, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The following work is an introductory look at the hip-hop movement in Brazil, with specific focus on the state of Bahia in the Brazilian Northeast. The pages that follow are the product of thirteen months of study in Salvador, the capital city of the state of Bahia. In these pages I discuss the development of hip-hop culture in Brazil and the Bahian hip-hop movement's ties with other political movements in the region. Part one constitutes a discussion of the musical genres that have influenced the development of Bahian hip-hop. This section introduces the reader to various genres of music in Brazil and analyzes which genres have most significantly contributed to the development of the identity of the Bahian hip-hop movement. Included in this chapter is an overview of *Tropicalismo*, a heavily politicized, artistic movement that spoke out against the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for twenty-one years from 1964-1985. Tropicalismo is viewed here as having a profound influence on the ideological nature of Bahia's regional hip-hop movement.

Part two chronicles the emergence of hip-hop culture in Brazil, documenting its early development out of the Black Soul movements of Brazil's two most populous urban centers, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Also highlighted in part two is an analysis of racial classification in Brazil and the effects of this classification system on Brazil's *Movimento Negro* (the movement to end racial discrimination against Afro-Brazilians).

The final chapter of this work is devoted specifically to the Bahian hip-hop movement. Part three includes a brief history of hip-hop culture in Bahia and profiles of the regions most popular hip-hop groups. Much of the information in this chapter is drawn from the author's personal experiences working within the hip-hop movement in Salvador. The final sub-section of the chapter is a portrait of the Bahian rap group, AfroGueto, intended to provide the reader with a personalized account of the struggles of one of Salvador's most popular rap groups. This work, in its entirety, by no means constitutes a complete study of the Movimento Negro or the development of hip-hop in Bahia and Brazil. Rather, it is designed to offer the reader an introductory look into the world of hip-hop in Brazil with specific focus on the political aspirations of the nation's hip-hop movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Some of my most vivid memories from childhood are of afternoons spent exploring my father's record collection. His vast assortment of vinyl and audiocassettes, organized in alphabetical order along a shelf in our living room, featured a variety of musical genres ranging from bluegrass rarities to jazz classics. The collection also included a number of Brazilian samba and bossa nova albums, many of which my father had brought back from Brazil during the years he'd spent living there in the 1960s. Though I did not understand any of the lyrics at the time, I easily became enthralled with the syncopated, Brazilian percussion sections and the powerful choral arrangements that often accompanied them. There was a spirit found in that Brazilian sound that surpassed anything I'd heard from American recording artists.

In 2003, with these childhood memories still lingering in my mind, I decided that it was high time to go to Brazil carrying hopes of personally witnessing the live performance of the music that had, for so long, captivated my ears. I chose the city of Salvador, the capital of the northeastern state of Bahia, as my destination because of its rich live music scene, hoping that the city would provide me with ample opportunities to catch performances from a variety of Brazilian musical genres. What I encountered upon my arrival in Bahia was beyond what any music lover could ask for.

The booming musical landscape of Salvador makes it almost impossible for one to avoid live musical performances. From spontaneous percussive jams in the back of city buses to street corner samba, Salvador and its residents thrive on the notion that music serves as one of life's central threads. One product of the public's enthusiasm for live music is intense competition among musical acts to garner support and listeners within the crowded, city music scene. With regional genres such as axé, pagode, forró and brega joining samba and bossa nova at the forefront of the competition, little room is left for various other alternative styles of music that struggle to be heard.

I arrived in Salvador with the intention of studying the staples of Brazilian music, namely bossa nova and samba as well as the avant-garde, artistic movement of the 1960s known as Tropicalismo. Tropicalismo, a musical movement born out of the traditions of samba and bossa nova, which challenged the rigid policies of the military dictatorship, fascinated me. I had been

searching for a music that could not only make people dance, but also make them question the status quo ideologically. Tropicalismo effectively combined the two. While I was able to follow through on my intentions and discovered a wealth of information regarding all three genres, I also quickly discovered that I would have to make room for yet another realm of music: Bahian hip-hop.

I met Osório, MC of the Bahian rap group AfroGueto, during my first week in Brazil. A friend of a friend, Osório had made his way onto the small ferry boat leaving for Itaparica, the largest of several islands in the Bay of All Saints, where a group of my friends and I had decided to spend the weekend. During those two days on the island, Osório pleasantly surprised me with a crash course in Brazilian and Bahian hip-hop. He had brought several of his favorite albums with him as well as his acoustic guitar. We spent the next few days listening to his collection and writing new songs on the guitar. That weekend, Osório spoke of the hip-hop movement in Bahia as a serious political mobilizing agent for the state's Afro-Brazilian youth. Growing up listening to hip-hop music in the United States, I found that hip-hop was a shared interest upon which the two of us could connect. Osório had numerous questions about the American hip-hop scene that I could answer and our discussions soon evolved into cultural exchanges of information. We both sat on the northern coast of Itaparica discussing the potential power of hip-hop music in our respective countries.

The island of Itaparica boasts a uniquely calming, slow-paced life style. It is home to many artists who wish to escape the commotion of life in Salvador. From the island's North coast beaches, one has a brilliant view of city across the bay. Observing the city in the distance, it is easy to feel its energy. You can still hear the honking horns of city traffic emanating from crowded city streets. Our conversations that weekend about hip-hop in Salvador and view of the city across the bay on the horizon, inspired me to prepare for further research; the bustling city would serve as my subject. Upon my return to the mainland, my mind was set on learning more about the emerging hip-hop movement in Bahia.

Over the course of the year that followed, I spent much of my time speaking to people involved in Bahia's hip-hop movement. With Osório as my initial contact, I was able to meet folks involved at all levels of the movement, ranging from MCs, DJs and b-boys to the movement's older organizers and leadership. I frequented shows around the city and attended organizational meetings, while simultaneously attempting to document, as frequently as possible,

the day's events. What I discovered through my research was a new developing music scene that, in many ways, resembled the political traditions of Tropicalismo. The hip-hop movement in Bahia and Brazil, in contrast with the current movement in the United States, operates with much closer ties to a defined political agenda. Acting on strong alliances with the movimento negro, or the movement to end racial discrimination against Afro-Brazilians, Bahia's hip-hop movement serves as one of the strongest political organizing tools for the region's Afro-Brazilian youth in their quest to end racial prejudice and increase the level of black consciousness among the Afro-Brazilian population.

The pages that follow, by no means, constitute a complete study of the hip-hop movement in Bahia or an in-depth, comparative analysis of Bahian hip-hop artists with their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Rather, this essay is intended to provide the reader with an introduction to hip-hop in Brazil, using the Bahian hip-hop movement to highlight Brazilian hip-hop's political aspirations. In part one, I discuss the extensive list of musical genres that have all influenced Brazilian hip-hop music. Here, my focus is on the Tropicalismo movement and its political similarities to Brazil's contemporary hip-hop movement. Part two chronicles the story of the emergence of hip-hop music in Brazil, specifically in São Paulo, as it is born out of the Black Power movement in the United States. Also discussed in this section is the Black Soul movement, a Brazilian incarnation of Black Power which led to the popularization of American soul and funk music in Brazil's urban centers and is often viewed as the foundation for the eventual rise of hip-hop culture in Brazil. In the third and final chapter I discuss the hip-hop movement in Bahia. The chapter explains where and how hip-hop finds space in Salvador's already crowded music scene. It also highlights and profiles of the state's most popular rap groups, including my own personal experiences with Osório's group, AfroGueto, and evaluates the on going struggle that these groups face as they continue to compete with other musical genres for listeners. Additionally, the final chapter examines the Bahian hip-hop movement's relationship with the local movimento negro and alliances forged between the two movements.

Just as Osório and I have exchanged ideas regarding Brazilian and American hip-hop, it is my hope that the hip-hop scene in the United States will look to places like Brazil for renewed guidance and inspiration. It is through this circulation of cultural currents that hip-hop will reach its next incarnation.

PART ONE :

Bahian Identity In Soteropolitano¹ Hip-Hop

As the sun slowly descends over the island of Itaparica in the Bay of All Saints, its intense rays pierce through alleyways and side streets bursting onto the crowded hustle and bustle of Salvador's central commercial district, Avenida Sete de Setembro. Passersby cut and weave through the crowds in attempts to avoid long periods of direct sunlight as they make their way down the avenue's mosaic, Spanish sidewalks. The movement of people and traffic is slow in this part of town on a weekday afternoon. Pedestrians spill onto the street as the narrow sidewalks are filled with Soteropolitanos making their way home after another workday. Traffic on the sidewalk hits standstills at street corners where lines form to purchase local snacks, acarajé, vatapá, and caruru from vending Baianas², their simmering pots of dendê³ oil filling the air with the aromas of typical Bahian cuisine. Conversations buzz through the crowd as friends discuss weekend plans and solicitors hand out fliers noting upcoming musical performances around town. It is here, in the street, that Salvador's musicians have always found their most efficient tool for advertising. The word of mouth, spontaneous spread of information that is so common in Bahia has nurtured both the city's hip-hop movement as well as its musical predecessors.

It is often through this grassroots form of soliciting of fliers and word of mouth that musicians are able to draw substantial crowds to their shows in Salvador. Even with the development of newspapers, television and the Internet, interpersonal dialogue has persisted, through centuries of changing musical scenes, as the primary force behind the organization and public exhibition of Bahian music. The inherent beauty that is a result of this societal trait is that it allows marginalized musical forms to survive and exist within the city's musical landscape, regardless of the music's funding or economic vitality. The unique friendliness that the city offers

¹ *Soteropolitano* is the term used to identify a resident of the city of Salvador, Bahia.

² *Baiana* can refer to a female resident of the state of Bahia, however, it is commonly used to refer to women in Bahia who vend traditional Bahian cuisine while wearing customary Bahian hoop dresses.

³ *Dendê* oil is heavy, palm oil commonly used in traditional Bahian cuisine.

independent musicians coupled with a plethora of venues and accessible public performance spaces has allowed Bahian music to remain on the cutting edge of global music development and creation.

In order to fully understand the complexities of the Bahian hip-hop movement, one must first examine the rich musical history that has laid the foundation for the current, young generation of Bahian musicians. The diversity of musical forms found in and around Salvador is so grand that it is nearly impossible to cover them all. This chapter is designed to highlight the genres that have had the most profound influences on the region's hip-hop scene.

It is important to note, in this examination, that the city's roles as the first capital of independent Brazil and the largest slave port in the Americas have had a lasting effect on the development of music in the region. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the current Afro-Brazilian population of Salvador is approximately 81%, the highest of any city in Brazil.⁴ It is not surprising then that the vast majority of music that has developed in Bahia has been either purely West African, as found in the rhythms of Candomblé⁵, or a syncretism of African and Portuguese musical forms. A prime example of the latter, which has surely influenced Bahian hip-hop, is samba.

While the exact geographical origin of samba has been disputed (either Salvador or Rio de Janeiro depending on whether you ask a Baiano⁶ or Carioca⁷), historians believe that it was developed at some point during the second half of the 18th century. Samba's creation was a reflection of socio-economic housing trends that began to appear in Brazil's largest cities during the 18th century. At this point in time, as a result of the concentration of wealth derived from sugar and cacao plantations among Brazil's aristocracy, one begins to see an expansion of a lower-middle class of Portuguese-Brazilians into predominantly Afro-Brazilian neighborhoods. It is here on the doorsteps of these districts that samba is born.⁸

⁴ This statistic can be found on the internet website: www.igbe.com.br.

⁵ *Candomblé* is the West African religion that was brought to Brazil through the process of slavery. It is most prominently practiced by Afro-Bahians.

⁶ *Baiano* is the term used to describe a resident of the state of Bahia.

⁷ *Carioca* is the term used to describe a resident of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

⁸ Tinhorão 155.

According to Bahian percussionist and sambista Itamar Gonçalves Lima, the origin of the word samba comes from the West African rhythm Semba, meaning, “invoke the spirit of the ancestors.” It is the marriage of the syncopated Semba rhythm with classical Portuguese guitar that forms the foundation of samba. By the early 20th century samba had come to stand alone as Brazil’s popular music. A traditional roda de samba or samba circle is composed of a rhythm section usually containing a surdo (large deep bass drum), a pandeiro (a shallow hand drum with a skin cap) and one or more tambourims (small hand drums with plastic caps played with a single drum stick). Additional percussion instruments are often included in the rhythm section but are not necessary to create the basic samba rhythm or batucada. Accompanying the rhythm section are the cavaquinho (a miniature, four-stringed rhythm guitar similar to the ukele) and an acoustic guitar. All of the above mentioned instruments have been used in sets of Bahian hip-hop, most notably by Testemunhaz (Testimonies), Salvador’s most prestigious, live hip-hop band. Elements of samba, as well as afoxé⁹ are present in the large group’s live shows which include three MCs, several hand percussionists, a set drummer, guitars, bass, and horn section.

Due to Samba’s pervasive popularity across Brazil, themes found in the music are of a wide variety ranging from love to heartbreak to malandragem¹⁰. Typically, although not exclusively, samba is not a politicized music. Rather, it exudes more of a gospel feel, not in a religious sense but through its celebration of community. It is the music of the people, heard at back yard cookouts, on street corners, in nightclubs and all over radio and television. Its popularity spans generations as Brazilians of all ages, races, and economic backgrounds enjoy a good partido alto¹¹. Samba’s influence on Brazilian hip-hop is inevitable as it is the most widely listened to music in the country. Remnants of the base syncopated rhythm in samba are found in a majority of Brazilian musical genres, ranging from axé to baião. Recently, Carioca rapper Marcelo D2 won critical acclaim for his samba-infused LP *A Procura da Batida Perfeita* (The Search for the Perfect Beat). The album, produced by Beastie Boy, Mario Caldato, explicitly laces each track with varying samba rhythms. With this album, Marcelo D2 was able to use

⁹ *Afoxé* is commonly recognized as the percussive music of the Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé*.

¹⁰ *Malandragem* is a term that is commonly used by Brazilians, usually meaning street hustle or thievery.

¹¹ *Partido Alto* is a standard form of the samba rhythm.

samba as a way to crossover to reach audiences that were traditionally not interested in hip-hop music. The album was revolutionary in that, for many of its listeners, it was their first experience with hip-hop.

While Samba continues to remain a staple of the Brazilian musical diet, it has also given birth to related genres of Brazilian popular music. One such musical movement, which developed out of Brazilian artists' unique ability to use cultural cannibalism¹² and subsequent reincarnation in the creative process, is bossa nova. The undisputed father of bossa nova is Bahia's João Gilberto. While many Americans and Brazilians alike associate the cool sound of bossa nova with the cosmopolitan scene of Rio de Janeiro, it is important to note that the undisputed father of the genre is João Gilberto. Gilberto, a master guitarist and supreme perfectionist, drew attention to the new reincarnation of samba, with his 1959 classic, "Desafinado," (Out of Tune). To Gilberto and other Brazilian musicians of his generation, explains singer/songwriter Caetano Veloso in his book, *Verdade Tropical*, bossa nova was a development resulting from a need to reinvent Brazilian music without relying solely on American musical imperialism¹³. Bossa Nova combined the sound of 1950s cool jazz with the base rhythm of samba in a subtle fashion. The mere creation of the genre itself was significant because it quickly became an outlet for all Brazilian musicians who had been searching for a new identity. For musicians such as João Gilberto and Antônio Carlos Jobim, bossa nova created new musical space with which to reflect on the Brazilian reality. As mentioned above, Gilberto's distinct utilization of cultural cannibalism, a markedly Brazilian process, breathed new life into the Brazilian music scene.

Bossa Nova's influence was enormous in Bahia. In 1960, now legendary music professor, Edgar Santos founded the schools of Music, Dance and Theater at the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). Santos provided the youth of Salvador with a much-needed academic space where the serious study of music was possible. Santos quickly incorporated bossa nova standards into the curriculum at UFBA where an energetic group of musicians began to hone

¹² *Cultural Cannibalism* refers to the common Brazilian phenomenon of absorbing and recreating cultural entities.

¹³ Veloso 22

their skills. Among these young students were, now famous Brazilian musicians, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso.

As the vibrant group of student musicians were practicing and performing bossa nova standards at UFBA and the Teatro Vila Velha, major changes were occurring within the Brazilian government that would quickly have a profound effect on their lives. During the early 1960s Brazil's national debt had soared and the national economy was experiencing large scale inflation. As a reactionary measure, in 1964 a group of military generals seeking to bring economic stability back to the country took over control of the federal government, imposing on the nation what would turn out to be 21 years of military dictatorship. Under the new dictatorship, all forms of mass media were government censored. No information was released in newspapers, on radio or television without the approval the dictatorship. The right wing dictatorship silenced any one who dared to speak out against its policies. The public was ripe for an explosion.

However, rather than a physical revolution of sorts, the revolution arrived via a group of courageous artists, willing to sacrifice their own personal safety to make political statements through their art. This movement would later come to be known as Tropicalismo, whose namesake is derived from the 1967 art exhibit at the Rio Museum of Modern Art by Hélio Oiticica. Tropicalismo combined numerous artistic genres including songwriting, painting, poetry and the avant-garde film movement Cinema Novo¹⁴. In a two-pronged attempt to speak out against the agenda of the right-wing military dictatorship and simultaneously dispel the internationally exported image of Brazil as merely Carioca (beach, bossa nova, soccer and Carnival), the movement of young artists mounted consistent attacks on the government and encouraged other artists to bravely confront the dictatorship on its human rights violations and suppression of civil liberties.

The musical component of Tropicalismo came largely from Bahia. Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, assumed leadership roles among the Bahian contingent, encouraging other musicians in Bahia and the rest of nation to make their music politically charged so as to educate the public about the truths behind the facade of the dictatorship. From a musical

¹⁴ *Cinema Novo* was a highly political movement in Brazilian film that began in the late 1950s. Its leader, director Glauber Rocha, is credited with altering Brazilian cinema by creating films that questioned the status quo and critique Brazilian society.

perspective Tropicalismo was extremely avant-garde. Its musical influences drew upon, samba and bossa nova, but also incorporated American rock, as well as indigenous music from Brazil. Gil and Veloso, along with Tom Zé, Chico Buarque, Gal Costa, Os Mutantes and handful of others involved in the musical side of the movement, collaborated on, essentially, what was the first album of pure Tropicalismo, *Tropicália ou Panis et Circensis*. The name, which was originally written by a Roman poet, means bread and diversion, referring to the blind followers who made up the general public and were only concerned with consuming and entertainment. The album reached millions of listeners around the nation and was instrumental in helping the Brazilian public wake up to the reality of their lives under the military regime. As a counter-action, the government in 1968, created Institutional Act Number Five, deeming illegal and prosecutable, any public speech against government policy. Clearly, the military dictatorship had identified the power of Tropicalismo and created the act to intimidate other courageous Brazilians from instigating uprisings.

Tropicalismo provides the current hip-hop movement in Bahia with an inspirational example of the possibilities of political action through music. Similar to Tropicalismo, drawing on its explicitly political agenda, is the Rastafarian movement in Bahia. Through local reggae venues such as the Rocinha (a small hillside village in the center of city which raises money for the local community by putting on weekly reggae concerts), city reggae groups promote black consciousness through their music, to a predominantly young black audience. Os Bem Aventurados, a local favorite on the Salvador reggae circuit, has often invited local hip-hop groups to open for them, citing that the two musical forms are on the same plane ideologically. Nelson Maca, professor of Literature at Universidade Católica do Salvador (UCSAL), a chief organizer in Bahia's hip-hop movement agrees, noting that it is absolutely necessary for the hip-hop movement and the Rastafarian movement in Salvador to make strong alliances. Maca cites that the two movements are working toward similar goals: equal opportunity for all Brazilians regardless of race and an elevated level of black consciousness among the Afro-Brazilian population.

During my time spent in Salvador in 2003 and 2004, I was fortunate enough to attend the República do Reggae, a 40,000-person reggae concert located on the coast just north of Salvador. The concert featured local reggae legend, Edson Gomes, along with a huge cast of reggae groups from both Brazil and abroad. The show began at eight o'clock in the evening and

continued through the night, wrapping up around eight the following morning. As the sun rose over the sea, Edson Gomes rallied the huge crowd. His performance was not merely musical; it was a political sermon. As Gomes pumped his fist in the air, he urged the predominantly Afro-Brazilian audience to organize in a greater effort to achieve better housing, health care and education for the youth of Bahia. The crowd roared in response to each demand Gomes made of the Bahian state government to increase funding to various social programs. As the concert continued, a young man near the front of the stage requested a chance to speak to the crowd. To his surprise, he was invited up onto the stage and given ten minutes to free style rap over a reggae-infused beat played by the live band. The crowd roared in approval of his rhymes, as he spoke of the harsh realities of life in the Bahian ghetto. This moment was extremely telling in that it showed a substantial unity between the two worlds of reggae and hip-hop. It was clear that this crowd of 40,000, who had come to see twelve hours of reggae, was overwhelmingly in favor of a brief hip-hop interlude.

Similar to the political agenda of reggae, although slightly less politicized, is the music and martial art form known as capoeira. The Brazilian martial art brought to Brazil by Angolan slaves, is practiced across the country, however, its epicenter lies in Bahia. In a *roda de capoeira*, a circle is formed by the capoeira school or club. Several musicians play syncopated rhythms around the edge of the circle on the *berimbau* (long, singled-stringed percussion instrument) and *pandeiros*. Two participants enter the circle and compete in a simulated fight that is closer to a choreographed dance. No contact is made between the two participants. Many capoeira organizations in Bahia have established close ties with *movimento negro*¹⁵ and support an agenda of increased black consciousness. They also provide participants with educational opportunities to learn more about their African heritage. The *berimbau*, the signature instrument played in capoeira, has in recent years, become a staple in the regional hip-hop scene. The unique, twangy sound is attractive to hip-hop producers and samples of the *berimbau* are frequently used in Bahian-produced hip-hop tracks. The *berimbau*, for Bahian hip-hop artists, is often used as a way to display the Northeastern Brazilian identity. Its use is symbolic of Northeastern, and more specifically, Bahian pride.

¹⁵ *Movimento Negro* is the movement to garner equal rights for Afro-Brazilians and bring an end to racial discrimination in Brazil.

As hip-hop grows in popularity among the youth of Salvador, the movement will require leadership and increased organization. One of the newest musical genres to gain popularity in Salvador, hip-hop is poised to grow. However, along the process of this growth, the future of the movement must look back to its predecessors for insight, advice, and experience. Bahia's musical history has set the stage for a new incarnation in musical development. Bahian hip-hop stands to be the next reinvention as the youth of Salvador draw on both foreign and local influences in the creation of their new sound. And while hip-hop was born in the Bronx, its new form growing in Bahia is once again an originally Soteropolitano groove.

PART TWO:

The Emergence of Hip-Hop in Brazil and the New Voice of the Movimento Negro

Over the last two decades, the human race has made revolutionary advancements in the field of communications technology. With the advent of the Internet, once distant nations and cultures are now able to communicate with one another swiftly, without delay or high costs. This facilitation in communication has provided for a sharp increase in the exchange of cultural mediums, ideas and information, making the world, at once, a smaller place. In the case of hip-hop, these technological developments have allowed for the expansive spread of hip-hop culture around the globe. From Ghana to Japan, to the Balkans and back to the United States, hip-hop is a musical form that has been embraced on a global level. As Tony Mitchell points out in his book on international hip-hop, *Global Noise*, “Hip-hop and rap cannot be viewed simply as an expression of African-American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world.”¹⁶ Mitchell’s statement is true, as hip-hop has been embraced throughout the world, including cultures outside of the African diasporas. However in many of these cases, hip-hop has developed or been popularized by a force most commonly recognized as American commercial imperialism. The combination of the unrestrained commercial exportation of American popular culture (most notably hip-hop, as the most popular music among urban, American youth) with the technological boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, allowed for the birth of numerous hip-hop movements abroad. These movements in countries such as Italy, Japan and Bulgaria¹⁷ were products of extensive exposure via television, radio and movies, to the exploding American hip-hop scene of the 1980s and 1990s. The circumstances of the development of hip-hop in Brazil, however, while also being undoubtedly susceptible to American cultural imperialism, are rooted in a much older, musical

¹⁶ Mitchell 1.

¹⁷ See *Global Noise*, edited by Tony Mitchell for more on international hip-hop in the aforementioned countries.

and political appreciation, by Afro-Brazilians, of African-American music, most notably, funk and soul of the 1960s and 1970s.

In attempting to fully understand the context from which the Brazilian hip-hop movement emerged, one must begin in the United States with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the subsequent development of Black Power accompanied by the popularization of Soul and Funk music. During the 1960s, Brazilians watched as African-Americans in the United States launched a broad-based effort to garner equal rights and bring an end to racial discrimination. Initially, the Civil Rights Movement, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), functioned using a strategy of non-violent civil disobedience. Dr. King built the movement through alliances with the black church. Deep in the land of Dixie, the historical home of America's most brutal racial injustices, haunted with the ghosts of old slave plantations, grew a voice to be reckoned with. This voice came from the thousands of Southern blacks who, under the thundering rhetoric of Dr. King's sermons, came to realize their collective power. Capitalizing on the force of the Southern movement, Dr. King successfully combated the powerful Dixiecrats¹⁸ across the South, beginning with a hard fought victory in the Montgomery bus boycott.

Using the proven success of the movement in Montgomery, King's SCLC, through its gospel rhetoric and powerful imagery of a new and better day for blacks on the horizon, was able to draw large numbers of supporters towards their cause. It is important to emphasize that King and the SCLC specifically used the southern, black church as its political base. It is upon the will of God to see justice and equality prevail, that the SCLC established its license and power. The organization found success in this method as the church already served as an organizational center for most black communities in the South. In addition to King's speeches it is important to mention the presence of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Jackson, who frequently accompanied King to his public speaking engagements, would often perform before or after the speech given by King. Jackson's booming voice and fervent popularity among both blacks and whites provided a much-needed musical back-up for Dr. King and the SCLC. Riding on the gospel power of Mahalia Jackson and Dr. King and with the organizational blueprint already in

¹⁸ *Dixiecrat* is the term used to describe the white supremacist political party of the South that dominated American politics for the better part of the 20th century.

place courtesy of the black church, the SCLC and Dr. King continued forward in their fight against the Southern, Dixiecrat political establishment.

The movement in the South soon spread onto southern, black college campuses where black students began organizing the now infamous lunch counter sit-ins that contributed significantly to desegregation efforts in the South. The images of large numbers of black students occupying what, until then, America had known as “whites- only” space, appeared on televisions and in newspapers across the nation. Quickly the movement won the attention of affluent, northern liberals, particularly the northern peers of the students involved in the sit-ins. The creation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) gave the young, politically and socially conscious generation of Americans a voice in the movement. SNCC joined the already established alliance of organizations spearheading the movement that included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the SCLC, the Urban League and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) among others. With a large political coalition, the Civil Rights Movement appeared destined to make dramatic advances in the struggle for equality among all races.

However, by the late 1960s, these advances had not been truly realized. After significant political events such as SNCC’s Freedom Summer¹⁹ which made great gains in organizing the black vote in Mississippi and restructuring the state’s political landscape, and the March on Washington which gave the Civil Rights Movement its highest point of media attention, many civil rights advocates were still left with an empty feeling in their stomachs. With their leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. slain in April of 1968, and much of their political hope buried with the assassination of Robert Kennedy in June of the same year, proponents of non-violent direct action, began looking in new directions.

Just two years before the assassinations of Dr. King and Robert Kennedy, seeds of a new strategy to garner civil rights were already being planted within African-American communities. In October of 1966, two young Oakland City College students, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Newton and Seale’s vision for the party was one that made important connections with lower and working class blacks. They were especially concerned with bringing young blacks from urban ghettos into the political sphere and

¹⁹ *Freedom Summer* refers to the highly publicized campaign run by SNCC to register African-Americans to vote in the Deep South during the summer of 1964.

giving them a voice that would truly express the concerns of individuals belonging to the black, urban community. Newton and Seale outlined the goals of their newly formed party in a ten-point manifesto titled, “Black Panther Party Platform and Program: What We Want, What We Believe.” Highlighted in the manifesto were the demands of full employment for all black people, freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails, significant education reform and the exemption of all black men from military service. The ten-point program specifically viewed the black community as victims of white colonization. Newton and Seale believed that the black community lacked control of their own destiny. They argued that blacks had little or no say in politics that affected their own communities. They stated that as a powerless group of people policed by white supremacists, the black community needed a revolution similar to that of the American Revolution against the British. The emotion of the period is captured in a statement made, just before the official launch of the Black Panther Party when Newton proclaimed, “Let’s organize the brothers and put this together. Let’s arm them for defense of the black community, and it will be like walking up to the White House and saying, ‘Stick ‘em up, motherfucker. We want what’s ours.’”²⁰

As the Black Panther Party grew in membership, its rhetoric invigorated African-American communities around the nation with greater sense of pride in African culture and history. Across the country, signs of the growing Black Power movement were evident. In 1966, civil rights activist James Meredith was shot in Mississippi while on a one-man “March Against Fear,” an event that only reinforced the very purpose of his march. At Howard University, students elected a homecoming queen who ran on the Black Power platform and wore an Afro in solidarity with the Black Power Movement.²¹ The rising publicity levels of occurrences like the aforementioned events added to the growing atmosphere of emboldened and outspoken public criticism of racial problems present in the United States.

These social currents were also showing up in the African-American soul music scene of the late 1960s. In 1969 James Brown released his now infamous anthem, “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud)” in an affirmation of black beauty. While the song’s meaning is not lost, it is interesting to note that the anthem of young voices singing, “I’m black and I’m proud,” actually

²⁰ Jeffries 5.

²¹ Jeffries 9.

belongs to a group of Chinese-American youths. No black children were readily available when the song was recorded.²² According to Brown, “The word soul . . . meant a lot of things—in music and out. It was about the roots of black music, and it was kind of a pride thing, too, being proud of yourself and your people. Soul music and the civil rights movement went hand in hand, sort of grew up together.”²³ Brown’s devotion to the black community was prominent, as he remained loyal to predominantly black venues where proponents of the Black Power movement filled his shows. Perhaps even Brown himself, however, did not anticipate the lengthy reach of his Black Power infused funk and soul.

While Brown’s music boomed with popularity in the United States, the polyrhythmic grooves of his tight knit rhythm section, The J.B.s, found a listening audience beyond the haunts of America’s urban centers. Follow the map South, beyond the Mississippi Delta until you arrive in another black, urban center of the Americas, Rio de Janeiro. It is in Rio that Brazilians first came in contact with North America Soul and Funk music. According to social anthropologist Michael George Hanchard, “There is no official date for the start of the Black Soul movement, but its emergence was precipitated by the nascent popularity of U.S. ‘soul music’ in Brazil. A white Brazilian disc jockey known as Big Boy is credited with first playing ‘soul’ music on commercial public radio in 1967, on a show called O Baile da Pesada, which first attracted the attention of black Brazilians from Rio de Janeiro’s Zona Norte.”²⁴

The sound of soul music, especially that of James Brown, took hold with Brazilian listeners in Rio’s working class North side (Zona Norte) neighborhoods. Ironically, the emergence of soul and funk music imported from the U.S. coincided with the Brazilian military dictatorship’s²⁵ most severe period of government-sponsored censorship (1969-1975) during which any dissemination of material inferring racial discord was prohibited.²⁶ The government,

²² From lecture at University of Wisconsin-Madison with Craig Werner, professor of African-American studies.

--Also see *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* by Craig Werner.

²³ Werner 72.

²⁴ Hanchard 112.

²⁵ Brazil’s government in 1964, experiencing a national economic crisis and ballooning foreign debt, was take over by a military coup which remained in power until 1985.

²⁶ Hanchard 113.

during this period, continued to distribute its ideological propaganda labeling Brazilian society a “racial democracy” and painting a utopian illusion of a nation unaffected by the racial prejudice or race-based discrimination which plagues other multi-racial societies like the United States. The consistent methodology of the government to prevent race-related uprisings by promoting the idea of racial democracy hindered attempts by Afro-Brazilian activists to effectively organize movements aimed at raising awareness of racial injustice.

The growing popularity of African-American soul music in Rio and São Paulo, eventually spawned a new dance phenomena in working-class, predominantly black neighborhoods called Black Soul. The Rio scene, referred to by its followers as Black Rio, involved weekend dances, often held in the rehearsal spaces of Rio’s samba schools, where thousands of young Cariocas would dance to the sounds of imported North American soul and funk music. Attendees of these dances were predominantly black and often dressed in a style reminiscent of young North American blacks of the same period: high-heeled platform shoes, bellbottom pants and Afro hairdos. The widespread celebration of black identity proliferated by the Black Rio movement showed signs that Afro-Brazilian youth were beginning to identify with the plight of North-American blacks and stand in solidarity with the calls for equal rights articulated by organizations involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In their book, *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity and Social Mobilization*, Larry Cook and Randal Johnson elaborate on this idea stating, “Black Soul espoused no specific political ideology, but its very existence challenged conventional views of race by asserting a unique black identity within Brazilian society. By rejecting such traditional Afro-Brazilian practices as samba, which was held to have been corrupted by commercialism and white cultural dominance, and by adopting instead cultural forms frequently associated with the angry militancy of the Black Power movement in the United States, Black Soul’s participants aligned themselves with a transnational assertion of black identity.”²⁷ The idea of identifying, as an Afro-Brazilian, with the universal plight of black people was new to Brazil and stood in stark contrast to the myth of racial harmony promoted by the government which encouraged Afro-Brazilians to identify as Brazilian, using a purely patriotic ideology, instead of segregating themselves from the general population.

²⁷ Cook and Johnson 6.

Proponents of the movimento found an ally in Black Soul. As Hanchard states in his book, *Orpheus and Power*, which includes one of the most detailed historical accounts of Black Soul, "... several activists of the mid-1970s mentioned during interviews however, that unlike the Funk and Charme parties of the 1980s, Black Soul events were fertile occasions for pamphleteering and dissemination of information regarding marches, discussions, and other events pertaining to the movimento negro."²⁸ Up until the 1970s, the movimento negro in Brazil can be characterized as lacking central organization or being too fragmented to garner widespread, national support. While social movements centered on organizing Afro-Brazilian communities have been documented as early as the 1930s²⁹, it wasn't until the seventies that black consciousness or negritude emerged as a dominant force in Afro-Brazilian society.

For one to fully understand why negritude did not appear as a central part of the ideology of Afro-Brazilian social movements until the 1970s, one must observe certain traits inherent to Brazilian society. To articulate these traits I will juxtapose them against the African-American experience in the United States. First, in comparison to legal, racial segregation imposed on blacks in the United States, Afro-Brazilians were subject to de facto discriminatory practices and segregation. Living under the umbrella of legal race based discrimination and segregation during Jim Crow, African-Americans were able to develop a language and style distinctly separate from white American society. This separation enabled African-Americans to effectively organize in their communities and with racial discrimination written into American law, a clear target for change could be identified and targeted by American civil rights leaders. In Brazil, the de facto discrimination that continues to oppress the Afro-Brazilian population is invisible. There are no clear targets or enemies, thus it is much more difficult for Afro-Brazilian social movements to garner wide spread support.

Above all other differentiations between the Brazil and the United States, however, racial identification plays perhaps the most important role in shaping the aforementioned movements. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was in part successful due to the "one-drop" rule of racial classification, referring to the common system of considering anyone with any amount of African heritage, black or African-American. This system of inclusiveness allowed the

²⁸ Hanchard 117.

²⁹ Hanchard 9.

Civil Rights Movement to encompass a greater portion of the population and grow stronger while in comparison, the Brazilian system of racial classification is much more complicated. Under the classification system of the latter, race is defined in less rigid terms. In Brazil race is normally referred to using the word *cor* or, translated into English, color. This definition of race as one's color is particularly telling of the methodology used in Brazilian racial classification. Brazilian's popular use of color to define race, instead of the American method of defining race by one's ancestry, permits an extremely broad range of racial identities. In one study of racial classification in Brazil conducted in 1976, over one hundred different terms for the racial identity of participants were recorded.³⁰ Terms ranging from *café com leite* or coffee with milk, to *chocolate escuro* or dark chocolate are examples of such specific racial identification. While a broad spectrum of racial categories are used by the Brazilian population, the vast majority of Brazilians use a much smaller set of vocabulary. The most commonly used racial labels are, in order from lightest to darkest, *branco(a)*, *moreno(a)*, *mullato(a)* and *preto(a)*. To begin to define these terms is nearly impossible as their definitions differ depending on the respondent in question. Also pertinent to racial classification in Brazil aside from one's skin color, are facial traits and hair that almost always factor into the racial identification process.

Keeping the complexity of Brazil's racial classification system in mind, Afro-Brazilian social movements have struggled to gain broad based support due to the lack of use of all-encompassing classification for anyone with any amount of African blood, as is common in the American system. The term *negro* or black, serves this very purpose in Brazil, however, the use of *negro* as a racial classification was not formally adopted by the Brazilian government until relatively recently in 1996. One of the central goals of the *movimento negro* is to expand the base of Brazilians identifying themselves as *negro*. By inviting anyone of any amount of African descent, *movimento negro* in Brazil hopes to greatly augment their political power. The Black Soul movement that began in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo at the end of the sixties served as a catalyst for the propagation of the *negro* or black identity among Afro-Brazilians, who, perhaps prior to their exposure to North American soul, funk and Black Power, identified themselves under the divisive multitude of racial terms noted above.

³⁰ Telles 82.

As the Black Soul movement grew in popularity in Rio and São Paulo, eventually spreading to other Brazilian capitals such as Belo Horizonte and Salvador, the phenomena received criticism from various cross-sections of Brazilian society. Many Afro-Brazilians involved in the production of samba music accused the Black Soul movement of lacking authenticity and denying the brilliance of “true” Afro-Brazilian culture. The ruling, elite, white class of Brazil also criticized the movement, most likely out of fear that it would spread ideas of Black Power and instigate uprisings among the Afro-Brazilian working class. Hanchard, in his commentary of Black Soul explains, “These critiques were arguably only a pretext for the more significant anxiety of white elites, both civil and military, that Black Soul was the harbinger of a protest movement by Afro-Brazilians. For such a movement to occur, Afro-Brazilians would have to develop forms of critical consciousness and organization that were specific to them, and therefore not national, inasmuch as national signified the repression of racial identities and race-specific claims. To allow such a process to occur would be to admit, nationally, to both racial discrimination and racial identification.”³¹ Clearly, the ruling class of Brazil feared the possibilities of such a politically powerful cultural medium.

Black Soul continued its streak of popularity among Afro-Brazilian youth into the late-1970s, however, by the end of the decade, as the Black Soul scene evolved, the large dance party format remained while the sounds emanating from the speakers dramatically changed. By 1980 a new incarnation of Black Soul had arrived in Brazil’s largest cities. Funk music, different from the American definition of the genre, was a new sound characterized by a simple, electronically produced, classic hip-hop beat, accompanied by a throbbing Miami base and usually one or two vocalists. The lyrical content of most Funk songs has, according to scholar, Lívio Sansone, “ . . . become increasingly sexually explicit (as in ragamuffin), but never condone(s) sexual violence against women, which to generalize, sets funk apart from much of mainstream ghetto-celebrating hip-hop in the United States.”³² While Sansone’s comparison of Brazilian funk lyrics to mainstream, contemporary, American hip-hop does carry some validity he fails to explain his articulation of “mainstream ghetto-celebrating” hip-hop’s connection with the

³¹ Hanchard 115.

³² Sansone 117.

practice of condoning sexual violence against women. Regardless of this gross generalization, it is important to recognize the role of funk music in the development of hip-hop in Brazil.

As described by Sansone in his book, *Blackness Without Ethnicity*, the funk scene that eventually developed out of Black Soul, includes a multitude of organized dance teams that participate in funk dances occurring on the weekends. In describing these dance teams Sansone writes, “The members of a number of organized dance groups rehearse and dance together. . . . They rehearse dance choreographies together and show up at dances in groups of 15-25 members every single Sunday.”³³ Found among the development of these funk dance teams were the first break dance crews of Brazil.

Through my research, I have determined that the four central elements of hip-hop, the b-boy, graffiti, the MC and the DJ, did not arrive in Brazil simultaneously. A careful evaluation of the flow of cultural currents entering the country demonstrates that in fact break-dance was the first element of hip-hop culture to arrive in Brazil. Most Brazilian hip-hop historians credit Nelson Triunfo with first popularizing break-dance in Brazil. Triunfo and his fellow breakers, including the break crew Funk Cia, during the early years of the 1980s, would gather on the street 24 de Maio in São Paulo’s city center with their radios to practice and fine-tune their newly acquired break-dance moves. 24 de Maio remained the center of hip-hop culture in São Paulo for several years until 1984 when the break crews moved their location to Largo São Bento or São Bento Square. Here in São Bento square, former members of Black Soul dance groups from São Paulo such as Chic Show, Kaskatas, Zimbabwe, Black Mad, Transa Negra, and Soul Hamnitê, began developing new dance moves learned from American b-boy movies such as 1982’s *Wildstyle*, featuring the notorious Rock Steady break crew.³⁴ With physical maneuvers extremely similar to the Brazilian martial art, capoeira (derived from West African slaves), break-dancing grew rapidly in popularity. The shared qualities of capoeira and break-dance, most likely can be traced back to the same origin in Angola, one of the primary suppliers of African slaves to Brazil. With the arrival of break-dance in Brazil and inversely, the popularization of capoeira among American youth, we witness traditional African traditions splitting and once again reuniting on the American continent.

³³ Sansone 125.

³⁴ Nunes de Andrade, (Azevedo and Jovino da Silva) 76.

As the popularity of break-dance grew in São Paulo, other elements of hip-hop music quickly began to appear in the city. Similar to their North American counterparts, early Paulista³⁵ DJs were known for sampling many of the American funk and soul records that had been popularized during the Black Soul movement. Brazilian DJs also were known for cutting up and remixing the work of Brazilian soul artists, namely Tim Maia, Cassiano, Banda Black Rio and Hyldon. According to the São Paulo, hip-hop radio station 105 FM, of the early Paulista DJs, DJ Hum (Humberto) is considered the first DJ to rise to a level of national fame. DJ Hum along with his MC counterpart Thaíde and other early hip-hop groups such as Racionais MC's are commonly credited with popularizing hip-hop in Brazil during the late 1980s.³⁶

Amazingly, Racionais MC's, remains as one of the nation's most popular rap groups today. The group, with members from São Paulo's North and South sides, comprised of MCs Mano Brown, Ice Blue, Edi Rock and Dj Kijay released their first recorded songs on the 1988 hip-hop compilation disc *Consciência Black* or *Black Consciousness*. The album, released on Zimbabwe records, including hit songs, "Pânico na Zona Sul" or "Panic on the South side" and "Tempos Difíceis" or "Hard Times," was distributed independently (aside from the help of the tiny Zimbabwe label), without the promotional backing of Brazil's principal studios. The themes included on the album centered around the struggle of growing up poor and black in Brazil and the denunciation of the capitalist economic system as an oppressive force, inherently responsible for the proliferation of crime and violence.

In 1990, Racionais MC's released their first full LP, *Holocausto Urbano* or *Urban Holocaust*, again on the Zimbabwe label. The album's production side features heavy sampling of American funk and soul music, such as James Brown and Barry White and reflects strong influence in lyrical style and content of the American rap group Public Enemy. During the years following the release of their first full album, Racionais MC's spent much time attending conferences in working class areas of São Paulo, discussing the rampant problems of police violence, racism and drug-trafficking that plagued and continues to plague the city's poor. This dedication to social reform and political activism not only spawned broad admiration and support of Racionais MC's, it also set a standard for other Brazilian hip-hop groups to also

³⁵ *Paulista* is the term used to refer to someone who is a resident of the state of São Paulo.

³⁶ <http://www.radio105fm.com.br/RAPLER2.htm>.

participate in similar forms of community activism. In an interview with Spensy Pimentel, advisor at the department of Journalism at the University of São Paulo, Mano Brown, lead MC of Racionais MC's explained the drive behind his music stating, "Eu sou um cara guerreiro. o rap para mim não é jogo, é guerra e nessa guerra eu tenho que conviver com as minhas dores sabendo que tem mais gente que sofre no mundo e que pelo menos através do rap pode se aliviar. O rap vai diretamente até os que mais sofrem." (I am a warrior. For me, rap is not a game, it is war and in that war I have to live with my pain, knowing that there are more people out in the world who suffer and that at least through rap one can relieve oneself. Rap goes directly to those that suffer the most).³⁷

Since their 1990 release, Racionais MC's has released six other albums including the 1998 classic, *Sobrevivendo No Inferno* or *Surviving in Hell*. Their latest LP was a double album from 2002 titled, *Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outro Dia* or *Nothing Like One Day After The Other Day*, which included the hit "Vida Loka Pt I" or "Crazy Life Part I." With the success of this album, Racionais MC's solidified themselves as the most dominant force in Brazilian hip-hop. Not only are they pioneers of the genre in Brazil, but they continue to dominate the commercial market without signing to a major record label.

Accompanying Racionais MC's in Brazilian hip-hop's upper echelons is Carioca rapper, MV Bill (The initials MV stand for *Mensageiro da Verdade* or *Messenger of Truth*). With only three recorded albums, MV Bill stands as one of the new dominant figures of Brazilian hip-hop. From the now famous Rio neighborhood, *City of God*, the towering MC, rose to the top of the Brazilian hip-hop charts with his 2003 release, *Declaração de Guerra* or *Declaration of War*. The album follows suit of Racionais MC's with its political edge and truth seeking lyrics. MV Bill's rapid-fire lyrical delivery and high-end musical production have elevated him to the top of the Brazilian hip-hop market. The opening track on the album, "Soldado Morto" or "Dead Soldier," chronicles a young black man's struggle to survive in a violent world that offers few escapes. The song combines emotionally charged lyrics with commentary of the inequalities faced by the majority of young, Afro-Brazilians in Rio. The following lyrical rhyme displays, accurately, MV Bill's critical understanding of the world around him. In "Soldado Morto" he sings:

³⁷ Interview online from the magazine, *Teoria e Debate*, #46. website: http://www.fpa.org.br/td/td46/td46_cultura.htm.

*Pra destruição o cenário perfeito
Drogas, armas na mira de um jovem preto
Sem respeito, sem dinheiro, sem Ciclone
Sem Nike, sem vida, sem fé, sem nome
Nota dez pra falta de atitude
Nota zero pro futuro da juventude*

*(For destruction the scenario is perfect
Drugs, arms in the sight of a black youth
Without respect, without money, without Ciclone (a popular clothing brand among urban youth)
Without Nike, without life, without faith, without a name
A grade of ten for lack of attitude
A grade of zero for the future of the youth)*

MV Bill's ability to poetically articulate the hardships faced by the urban poor is matched by his dedication to the advancement of the agenda of the movimento negro. Among the circles of movimento negro's leadership and among his young fan base, MV Bill is known as a philanthropic artist who has consistently showed his allegiance to the struggle for racial equality by offering to perform for free in poor areas, both urban and rural, around the country. He is often present at movimento negro organizational conferences and has provided the movement with much needed support by promoting the movement's political agenda among Afro-Brazilian youth. Along with his sister and fellow MC, Nega Gizza, MV Bill stands as a symbol of hope for the movimento negro; a person who young folks can relate to and admire. Instilled with a strong sense of purpose, MV Bill's music follows in the tradition of James Brown, Public Enemy and Racionais MC's as a political catalyst for social and political change.

While MV Bill and Racionais MC's dominate the Brazilian hip-hop charts with heavily politicized music, they are also accompanied at the top by other MCs and groups who tend to shy away from political commentary. One such MC is Marcelo D2. The carioca rapper was showered with awards for his 2003 album *A Procura da Batida Perfeita* or *The Search for the Perfect Beat*. D2's appeal among a broader cross-section of Brazilian listeners stemmed from

his ability to skillfully fuse samba with hip-hop. The album, D2's second as a solo artist, is filled with ear-catching hip-hop batucadas and lyrics that are dominated by lighthearted word play as opposed to any sort of political agenda. D2's second album, produced by experienced commercial hip-hopper, Mario Caldato Jr. of the Beastie Boys, used unusually high-end production, to become a national hit among listeners. The album is revolutionary in that it is the first hip-hop album to fuse samba with hip-hop across the board on every track. Ask most rap aficionados in Brazil and they will denounce Marcelo D2 as a money hungry sell-out, while at the same time admitting that they enjoy the ear-candy catchiness of his beats. Regardless of his apolitical approach to Brazilian rap, D2 has expanded hip-hop's audience in ways that will benefit the Brazilian hip-hop movement for years to come.

While the aforementioned hip-hop artists discussed above dominate the national Brazilian hip-hop scene, the hip-hop movement in Brazil is diverse in that it also includes various sub-movements from different regions of the country. Styles in production and lyrical flow differ from region to region and often draw on different musical influences. The majority of my research in Brazil focuses on the hip-hop movement in the northeastern state of Bahia. Bahian hip-hop follows a discourse that is uniquely northeastern and reflects the specific experiences and hardships of the region's lower class both urban and rural. The following chapter details the characteristics of the Bahian hip-hop movement and its connection with the state movimento negro, exploring how the relationship between music and political movements plays out in the Brazilian Northeast.

PART THREE :

From Cabral to São Caetano: Rhymes, Race and Hip-Hop in Bahia

By the time hip-hop in Brazil's Southern cultural centers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo solidified itself as a staple of the alternative, youth music scene at the end of the 1990s, the infectious musical movement had already begun to spread to the far reaches of the country. Proliferated by increased airtime on community radio stations in Brazilian cities, hip-hop's empowering message to black youth struck a chord with young Afro-Brazilians looking for new outlets to express their frustrations over racial inequalities and prejudice inflicting the country. Like a disease consuming a human body, hip-hop extended its reach to the remainder of the vast Brazilian nation to cities like Brasília, Fortaleza, Recife, Salvador and São Luis de Maranhão. As the music reached new areas of the country it transformed itself and adapted to regional musical tastes and styles. In the Northeastern state of Bahia, hip-hop found fertile ground. Long considered the capital of Afro-Brazilian culture, Bahia would soon develop its own hip-hop scene. The development, growth and popularization of hip-hop in Bahia, however, did not evolve as easily as some would expect given Bahia's historical role as a center for Afro-Brazilian music and organized black resistance. On the contrary, hip-hop in Bahia has faced many challenges as it competes with numerous other popular, musical genres for listeners, musicians and public support. In the chapter that follows I examine the emergence and growth of the hip-hop movement in Bahia as it attempts to find its own space and identity within an already crowded and flourishing music scene. In doing so, I look at hip-hop's relationship with movimento negro and its contributions to black consciousness among Bahian youth. Through this analysis I hope to highlight the specific qualities unique to Bahian hip-hop and their functions within the musical and political landscape of the region.

In order to examine hip-hop's development in Bahia one must first understand the state's colonial history. The initial section of this chapter provides the reader with highlights from Bahian history that are crucial to understanding hip-hop's development in the region. Without such basic background, the story of the growth of hip-hop in the state lacks context. Bahia, geographically about the size of France, lies approximately 30 hours by bus, north of Rio

de Janeiro. It was the first region of Brazil to be discovered by the Portuguese explorer, Pedro Álvares Cabral, who in 1500, spotted the mountain peak Monte Pascoal near what is now the small, Southern Bahia town of Itamarajú. Under the treaty of Tordesillas, the South American continent was split in two with the western half left under the control the Spanish monarchy and Cabral's eastern seaboard, and what is today known as Brazil, in the hands of the Portuguese. The eastern territory was divided up by the Portuguese crown into several captaincies or territories. Soon after Cabral's discovery, the port city of Salvador, resting on the northern peninsula of the Bay of All Saints, was founded as the first capital of the Portugal's new American colony. Salvador would remain the Brazilian colony's capital until 1763 when it was moved south to the city of Rio de Janeiro. During its first three and a half centuries of development, Salvador served as the primary port for the African slave trade to South America. Although few accurate estimates of Bahia's slave population are documented, one estimate made in 1808 counted 140,000 slaves, almost one-third of the state's total population.³⁸

With such a high number of slaves entering the region, plantation owners, both Dutch and Portuguese, were often greatly outnumbered by their slaves. Naturally, unrest and rebelliousness occurred among the slave population resulting in violent revolts and occasional escapes from bondage. Often cited as a national symbol of black resistance, the quilombo (or fugitive slave community) of Palmares, functioned for nearly a century as a safe haven for escaped slaves. Located north of Bahia in the interior of the state of Pernambuco, Palmares was governed under both democratic and socialist ideals. According to R. K. Kent, in his article "Palmares: An African State in Brazil,"³⁹ the foundation of Palmares took place around 1605. Kent maintains that at its peak, Palmares was made up of ten separate enclaves each with elected leaders. The total population is believed to have reached 30,000 at its height.

The quilombo of Palmares, according to most historical accounts, remained intact throughout the majority of the 17th century. While primarily functioning as a destination for run away slaves, the community also remained open to people from other marginalized social demographics. Notable for its democratically elected "kings," the governing structure of Palmares, when juxtaposed against the European monarchies and colonies of the period was

³⁸ Kraay 8.

³⁹ Kent 175.

remarkably egalitarian. In her book, *To Be a Slave in Brazil: 1550-1888*, Katia M. De Queirós Mattoso writes, regarding Palmares, “Each king governed from his own village, which became the capital of the quilombo. They were assisted by a council of elders, chosen from among the heads of other villages.”⁴⁰ Mattoso’s description of the government of Palmares bares a striking resemblance to the basic structure of American democracy with governors, a president and a congress (or governing council). Also noteworthy is that Palmares achieved the aforementioned organization with an extremely culturally diverse group of inhabitants boasting a population mix of both foreign born African slaves from various West African nations, most commonly Angola, and Afro-Brazilians who identified themselves as primarily South American. Although it is difficult to accurately recreate the true identity of Palmares (the majority of the historical sources pertaining to Palmares are from the point of view of its political opponents), it appears as though Palmares did represent one of South America’s earliest, non-indigenous, democratic communities. Legendary, Brazilian Cinema director, Carlos Diegues who directed the 1984 film, *Quilombo*, which chronicles the rise and fall of Palmares, even went as far as to say that Palmares is, “the first democratic society we know of in the Western Hemisphere.”⁴¹

Not surprisingly, the Portuguese monarchy was hostile towards Palmares and viewed the group of villages as a threat to the stability of the slave labor-based economy. Over the period of Palmares’ existence, many armed expeditions were dispatched by the monarchy. While Palmares eventually fell in 1694 to state sponsored forces, it took 18 expeditions and the lives of many men in to finally destroy the quilombo. Of the documented leaders of Palmares, Ganga Zumba and the now infamous Zumbi are certainly the most heralded. Zumbi in particular, who died as king trying to protect Palmares from government-sanctioned forces, remains today a symbol of black resistance and Afro-Brazilian pride. Zumbi’s legendary status has made him a common lyrical reference among Brazilian rap artists who use him as a literary symbol for black power. In the hit single “Emiví,” off of his 2003 album *Declaração de Guerra*, Carioca MC MV Bill sings:

⁴⁰ Mattoso 139.

⁴¹ Diegues 1.

*No meio de uma guerra
Foi onde eu nasci
O berço da exclusão foi onde eu cresci
Não me intimidei
Foi preciso resistir
Faço parte do quilombo comandado por Zumbi
De lá pra cá ou daqui pra lá
Enquanto você chora quem controla o poder sorri*

*(In the middle of a war
Was where I was born
The cradle of exclusion was where I grew up
It didn't intimidate me
I needed to resist
I am part of the quilombo led by Zumbi
From there to here or from here to there
While you cry, those who control the power smile)*

By acknowledging that he is “part of the quilombo led by Zumbi,” Bill is embracing the historic struggle of the people of Palmares as a ceaseless struggle continued today by Afro-Brazilians who face much of the same discrimination and racist ideologies.

Regardless of fugitive slave communities like Palmares, the slave labor market of the Brazilian Northeast continued to provide cheap labor to plantation owners well into the 19th century. With a high influx of slave labor, the Bahian agricultural economy flourished. The Recôncavo (or agriculturally rich region surrounding the Bay of All Saints) served as a mass producer of the state’s primary export crop, sugar. With an excess of cheap labor, the wealth and power generated by the agricultural boom remained in the hands of the few. Often given huge plots of land by the Portuguese crown, the plantation owners, descendants of elite Portuguese families, controlled the local economy and more importantly, state politics. The sugar cane plantations that generated the majority of the region’s wealth, however, struggled through a period of economic decline beginning in the 1820s and continuing into the early 20th

century as Bahian sugar cane crops fell to heightened competition with Caribbean sugar cane and European beet sugar. Relieving some of the economic burden from the sugar cane collapse was an increase in cacao production on the lush Southern Bahian coastal plains. The growth of the cacao plantations coupled with an increase of cotton production in the interior of Bahia allowed for consistent population growth throughout the 19th century, during which the city of Salvador grew from a population of 50,000 to approximately 200,000.⁴²

In the interior of the state Coronéis, the wealthy landowners, dominated the livestock and leather goods economy of the arid Sertão or Great Desert, mirroring the power structure of the agriculture-based economy of the coast. The powerless lower class, free laborers and slaves had little control over their livelihood and future. Occasional slave revolts on the coast and rebel activity of the Cangaceiros or desert bandits hostile to the rigid power structure of the interior, highlight the oppressive working conditions and bold inequalities born out of the Portuguese colony.

Perhaps the most notorious of the cangaceiros was Lampião. A man whose reputation preceded him wherever he journeyed, Lampião symbolized the rebellious desperation of the uneducated poor of the Brazilian northeastern backlands as he and his gang of fellow bandits roamed the Sertão, looting rich farm owners and striking fear into the hearts of local politicians. As a common practice, these cangaceiros acted as hired guns for politicians and wealthy landowners carrying out assassinations against their political foes. Often working the land of a wealthy proprietor, many sertanejos, or dwellers of the Sertão, found themselves in situations not unlike the common life of the North American sharecropper, trapped and indebted to the owners of the land upon which they worked. For many sertanejos the life of banditry offered a better chance at survival than braving the region's frequent, devastating droughts as ranchers or farmers.

Shortly before the onset of the 20th century, the Sertão, Bahia and the Brazilian colony as whole began experiencing drastic political change. In 1888 slavery was abolished in Brazil making it the last country in all of Latin America to finalize abolition. The abolition of slavery, that drastically affected the Brazilian agricultural economy, was followed by the Brazil's independence from Portugal and the rise of the Brazilian republic. The early years of new

⁴² Kraay 4.

republic politics were dominated by the coffee oligarchy of Southern Brazil who focused on expanding the coffee trade but ignored many of Brazil's other economic and social issues. On October 24, 1930 a coup d'état occurred that ousted President Washington Luís and named Getúlio Vargas the "provisional president." Once in power, Vargas preached equality for all Brazilians and advanced his political agenda on a wave of nationalist propaganda. In doing so, Vargas liberally censored those who dared to oppose him.

Following the Vargas presidency, Bahia saw a huge migration south to the newly industrialized centers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The post-World War II boom in economic growth in the Brazilian Southeast gave a sliver of hope to unemployed Northeasterners. Migration from the Northeast to the Southeast was so grand that it has become a common joke among Paulistas that everyone in São Paulo has at least some Bahian ancestry. The shift of economic power from the Northeast to the South during industrialization has left a permanent imprint on Bahia. Missing out on the golden years of economic growth in Brazil, Bahia is plagued, today, one of the nation's highest rates of unemployment. In 2004, the city of Salvador had an unemployment rate that reached nearly 25%. This percentage does not mean, however, that one quarter of Bahians don't work. On the contrary, the majority of those who do not have official salaries, work the streets, hustling for money, selling whatever service or product they can provide potential consumers. The result of the high unemployment rate is not only rampant poverty but also one of the best street service economies the world has ever seen, where one can buy anything they need, be it food, clothes or other day to day necessities.

The amiable social atmosphere of the city that thrives on vibrant street life is perhaps the city's most powerful tool. It is not uncommon for strangers to converse in the street or on the bus and socializing or casually chatting with acquaintances almost always trumps being punctual. Even local linguistics reflects the warm social attitudes of the Bahian public. It is common for young folks to refer to elders as *tio/a* (uncle/aunt) and for elders to call those younger than them *meu filho/a* (my son/daughter). Some Bahians say that the friendly atmosphere found in Bahia can be attributed to the *axé* found within every individual. In *candomblé*, the West African religion still practiced today by a large cross-section of Bahia's population, *axé* or *àse* (as it is spelled in Yorùbá) can be understood as the "innate generative

force possessed by everything—gods, ancestors, spirits, humans, animals, plants ...”⁴³ According to Henry John Drewal, author of the essay, *Art History, Agency, and Identity: Yorùbá Transcultural Currents in the Making of Black Brazil*, “Àse is performative power, the power to make things happen, to bring something into existence, to get something done.”⁴⁴ Axé, however, to many Brazilians, is simply the name of a genre of music popular in Bahia. Axé music, a fusion of several Northeastern Brazilian musical styles, accompanies hip-hop among the numerous genres found in the area’s expansive music scene.

Certainly one of the greatest challenges that the relatively young hip-hop scene has faced in Salvador has been finding its own space within the area’s musical landscape. With a plurality of popular musical styles already attracting listeners, hip-hop has weathered serious competition in its quest to garner public support. Aside from samba, which has long been considered Brazil’s official national music and remains almost univervally popular across all age groups and demographics of Brazilian society, several other musical forms crowd the market. Among hip-hop’s biggest competitors is Bahian pagode. Although most Paulistas will define pagode as nearly synonymous with samba, in Bahia, pagode is an entirely different musical genre. While Bahian pagode’s rhythmic foundation is derived from the samba batucada or syncopated rhythm and includes most of the traditional percussive instruments associated with samba, Bahian pagode groups also usually include a horn section, electric guitar and bass, cavaquinho and occasionally added set drummers. The instrumental sound is loud, fast and most certainly more pop-inflected than a traditional samba outfit.

Beyond the instrumental identity of Bahian pagode, its lyrical content is boldly different from traditional samba. Currently the most popular music among Bahian youth, Bahian pagode’s lyrics often articulate dance steps choreographed specifically for each respective song. Often these dance steps are fused with sexual innuendo, which gives the music its adolescent appeal. For example, 2004’s most popular pagode song in Bahia was Psirico’s, “Se Você Quer Tome.” The lyrics to the song’s refrain are as follows:

⁴³ Crook and Johnson 152.

⁴⁴ Crook and Johnson 152.

*Se você quer tome
Você quer, quer tome tome tome
E tome
E tome
E tome tome tome
E tome
E tome
E tome tome tome . . . etc.*

*(If you want it, take it
You want it, want it? Take it, take it, take it
And take it
And take it
And take it, take it, take it
And take it
And take it
And take it, take it, take it . . . etc.)*

As any lay person will recognize, the lyrics are straight forward and almost purely sexual. Although Bahian pagode's most loyal consumer base comes from poor, Afro-Bahian youth, the music is widely popular among middle and upper class youth of all races. The commercial FM radio dial in Salvador is crowded with Bahian pagode, while hip-hop, aside from an occasional American hip-hop single, remains nowhere to be found. On any given Sunday, if one goes to the beach in Salvador, the most likely sound in the air will be the boom of Bahian pagode blaring from the open back door of a hatch back car stereo. The music is energetic, light hearted and most importantly, danceable.

While, Bahian pagode continues its commercial success among Salvador's youth, the music does not exist without its critics. Many people, particularly from the hip-hop community, argue that the music lacks any political agenda and more importantly that it promotes degradation and disrespect of women through its lyrical content. Some MCs have criticized pagodeiros/as (the term used for either a pagode musician or one who enjoys listening to and/

or dancing pagode) for not making racism an issue in their music, while they hold such widespread attention from Afro-Bahian youth. Hip-hop and Bahian pagode share similar social demographics, regarding their respective listener bases. However, where pagode lacks political consciousness, hip-hop picks up the slack.

Another genre of song native to Bahia that claims a significant share of the market is axé music. Axé or samba-reggae as it is also commonly called, emerged during the mid- 1970s but was not popularized until the 1980s. The music's primary origins can be traced back to Bahia's Afro-blocos or Afro-centric Carnival groups⁴⁵. In 1974 the Afro-bloco Ilê Aiyê was founded in one of Salvador's most heavily populated black neighborhoods, Curuzu, in Liberdade. The formation of the exclusively black bloco can be partially attributed to the extensive racial discrimination faced by blacks who wanted to join other predominantly white blocos. At the time of Ilê Aiyê's foundation, many of Salvador's Carnival blocos required applications with pictures to be submitted by those who wanted to parade with the bloco in question. Frequently, blacks were systematically excluded from such blocos and thus Ilê Aiyê was formed as a response to discriminatory practices by racist whites who sought to maintain racial segregation during Carnival.

The musical style of Ilê Aiyê is a mix of samba duro or up-tempo samba, with religious rhythms of West African candomblé. Played usually in a large drum section, the thundering sound of Ilê Aiyê has, since its inception, been a rallying point for the Afro-Brazilian community of Salvador. In his essay on axé music, Goli Guerreiro notes that Ilê Aiyê was the first Afro-bloco to heavily promote the ideas of black beauty and negritude, two themes that also are mainstays in Bahian hip-hop lyrics.⁴⁶

The founding of Ilê Aiyê, opened the doors for numerous other Afro-blocos who began appearing in the Salvador music scene in the early 1980s. While Ilê Aiyê remains today the ideological leader of such groups, others such as the world famous, Olodum, have taken their sound in a more commercially viable direction, recording with megastars such as Paul Simon and Michael Jackson. Since Olodum's inception in 1979, the group has grown to be one of Salvador's

⁴⁵ The term *bloco* refers to a *Carnaval* group, usually composed of a large musical ensemble and dancers who parade through the city during *Carnaval*.

⁴⁶ Sansone and Teles dos Santos 101.

largest tourist attractions. Unlike Ilê Aiyê, who continues to promote a strict agenda of ideologies, most notably black consciousness and negritude, Olodum has promoted racial integration and consistently generates its capital from the pockets of mostly white tourists. While some Bahians have criticized Olodum for sacrificing their political agenda for the enticements of commercial success, the group continues to run several local community programs which promote health care, gay rights, and safe sanitation in needy neighborhoods.

Hip-hop's connection with these groups is important as the hip-hop movement in Bahia shares a political agenda, based around the rise of black consciousness, with the capital's Afro-blocos. Nelson Maca, professor of literature at Universidade Católica de Salvador and longtime organizer of the Bahian hip-hop movement, reinforced the importance of such groups in a recent interview stating, "Aqui na Bahia há outras experiências musicais (fora do hip-hop) que se aproximam da militância do movimento negro. Por exemplo, as músicas dos blocos afros: Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Muzenza, Malê de Balê. (Here in Bahia there are other musical experiences (outside of hip-hop) that approach the militance of the movimento negro. For example, the music of the Afro-blocos: Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Muzenza, Malê de Balê.)"⁴⁷

While the aforementioned musical genres, samba, pagode and axé make up a large block of mainstream popular music in Bahia, hip-hop remains considered by the Bahian public, "musica alternativa" or alternative music. Along with heavy metal, punk rock, and drum and bass, hip-hop continues to struggle for airplay on the radio and public spaces in which to hold live performances. The ongoing struggle for hip-hop supporters has been aided in part by other, more popular, allied musical groups with ties to movimento negro. It is not uncommon for hip-hop acts to open shows at reggae concerts or Afro-bloco performances. As the beat changes between these musical styles, the message of black power remains consistent.

Currently, the city of Salvador, and more over, the state of Bahia are producing an abundance of hip-hop music. Although there are no hard facts recorded regarding the total number of officially organized hip-hop acts in the state, it is safe to say that hip-hop is not only present in the capital city of Salvador but also in smaller, more remote areas in the interior of the state. During my time in Bahia I came across hip-hop acts from all neighborhoods of Salvador, as well as acts native to more remote cities in the interior of the state such as Vitória

⁴⁷ Excerpt from interview with UCSAL professor of literature and hip-hop movement organizer, Nelson Maca 3/16/05

da Conquista. For the purposes of my study I focused primarily on a handful of the most popular groups in the state. Currently there are five groups, Afrogueto, Testemunhaz, Quilombo Vivo, O Quadro and Elemento X, who are on a relatively level plane regarding their popularity in Bahia. These groups make up the elite class of hip-hop artists in the state and are certainly the most well known in the region.

Whenever a nationally acclaimed hip-hop act, like Racionais MC's, plays a show in Salvador, one of these five groups is usually called upon to open the show. The top five Bahian hip-hop groups are fairly well known around the state, however, their national publicity pales in comparison to hip-hop acts such as Racionais MC's or MV Bill who are considered household names around the country. While hip-hop enthusiasts in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro will admit that they have heard of Bahian groups such as Afrogueto, the majority of the time they have not actually heard their music. With only locally and independently distributed albums being released in Bahia, the Bahian hip-hop sound has not yet reached a broad national audience. Regardless, these five groups have a devoted following in and around Salvador. Of the five most popular groups, Elemento X is the oldest and is often attributed as being one of the first rap groups in the city.

According to Nelson Maca, Elemento X was formed in 1996. The group recorded their first album, *Genocídio* (Genocide), in July of 1999. The trio, made up of one DJ (DJ Edilson) and two MCs (Gomez and Dinho), chose the name Elemento X in honor of the late Malcolm X who they have looked to for inspiration in their own fight to end racial discrimination in Salvador and Brazil. The group's musical influences are attributed to both Brazilian and American hip-hop artists. From Brazil, Paulista MC Thaíde and Racionais MC's also from São Paulo along with GOG from Brasilia and MV Bill from Rio de Janeiro top the list of artists who Elemento X looked up to during the time of their formation. From the United States, the group has taken cues from the smooth lyrical delivery of Cleveland-based Bone Thugs'N'Harmony and ideologically from the hardlined, black power message of New York City's Public Enemy.

Professor Maca cites the record release party of Elemento X in 1999 as one of the most important events in the early development of Salvador's hip-hop scene. He himself was chief organizer of the event which featured DJ KL Jay and MC Edy Rock from Racionais MC's and the group SNJ also from São Paulo, as well as local hip-hop acts Simples Rap' Ortagem, Erê Jitolú, and Black Power and a host of b-boy dance groups and graffiti artists. Perhaps more important

than the party itself was the fact that it received substantial coverage in the local and national media. The Brazilian MTV, hip-hop program *Yo Raps!*, a spinoff of the American program of the same name, played two different video clips recorded live at the event in the weeks following Elemento X's record release. Not only did this media coverage provide hip-hop enthusiasts in other parts of the country with a taste of Bahian hip-hop, but it also allowed young fans of hip-hop in the area a chance to see groups from their city succeeding in the national marketplace.

Joining Elemento X in the most senior circle of rap groups in Bahia are O Quadro, from the Southern Bahian city of Ilhéus, and Testemunhaz from the neighborhood of Boca do Rio in Salvador, both large sized hip-hop acts that feature live instrumentation. Hailing from the same city as legendary Brazilian literary giant, author Jorge Amado, O Quadro was formed also in 1996. The group consists of eight members: Hãs (vocals), Professor Jefferson (vocals), Freeza (vocals), Smokey Robinson (set drummer), Ricardo Barreto Regular (bass), Da Lua (electric guitar), Nado Costa (percussion) and DJ Reneudes on the turntables. The group blends musical influences from the genres of jazz, soul and funk with "old school" Brazilian and American hip-hop. Nado Costa's live hand percussion lends a distinctly Bahian element to the group's sound as he features drums such as the surdo (the deep bass drum used in samba) and the pandeiro, as well as the large, stringed percussion instrument used in capoeira, the berimbau.

Holding the unique position as the only widely popular hip-hop group from outside of Bahia's capital, Salvador, O Quadro is the voice of small-town Bahia. While Ilhéus is by no means an explicitly rural area, the town is a extremely small when compared with the large-scale urbanization found in Salvador. The city, which flourished during the cacao boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is now a quiet town on the Southern Bahian coast. Aside from the occasional tourist who ventures to visit Jorge Amado's house, which is now a historical site, the town remains fairly isolated from foreigners, namely Americans. The members of O Quadro, however, have not allowed this relative isolation, in comparison to groups from Salvador, to shelter them from the world hip-hop scene.

Following a show in Salvador I had the opportunity to sit down with O Quadro's MC Hãs. After witnessing the lyrical genius of the group's MCs I was not surprised to find that Hãs and his bandmates are very much in touch with cutting edge hip-hop being produced in the United States. During our discussion of American hip-hop, Hãs noted Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Dead Prez, and Blackalicious among his favorite North American peers. He explained to me

that although such music is not played on the radio or sold in record stores in Ilhéus, the hip-hop enthusiasts of the area are able keep up with new material from the United States via the internet by frequenting chat rooms on Brazilian hip-hop websites such as www.bocadaforte.com where they are able to converse with DJs from Rio and São Paulo who stay on top of the most recent releases from the global hip-hop scene. After acquiring the names of new artists or songs from the chat rooms, they are then able to download the songs in mp3 format on computers where a fast internet connection has been established, usually in internet cafés. Here we find a classic example of how the internet has helped hip-hop to truly go global.

O Quadro, unlike many groups who enjoy growing popularity, has not, however, forgotten their roots or their underlying mission. The group frequently participates, along with college students from UESC (Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz), in the administration of workshops in secondary schools of poor neighborhoods in the area. During these workshops, the members of the group often perform a few of their songs and then speak to the youth about the different elements of hip-hop (MC, DJ, break dance, graffiti) and about getting involved with movimento hip-hop politically. They figure that by teaching about hip-hop, they can also teach the youth to be more politically conscious of society around them and to be aware of problems occurring in their own cities and towns that directly affect them or their families. At the forefront of the social issues discussed is racism, a topic which has, until recently in Brazil, remained relatively taboo in the nation's public schools.

While O Quadro stands as a shining example of a Bahian hip-hop group involved in the grass roots political struggles of movimento hip-hop and movimento negro, they are not alone. Joining them at the forefront of the struggle are groups such as Testemunhaz. Also formed in 1996, Testemunhaz, formerly known as Testemunhaz da Periferia, (or Testimonies of the Periphery), is Salvador's post popular live hip-hop band. The group thrives on its live instrumentation and big band sound. The large core of musicians consisting of Rangell (bass), Soneca (set drummer), Branxer (electric guitar), Mancha (Trombone), Dimak (vocals), Daganja (vocals), Fal (vocals), and DJ Márcio Índio, blend a mix of reggae, jazz, funk, and heavy metal to create a sound that is very eclectic and always loud and intense. When asked about the group's principal musical influences, Rangell listed among Brazilian acts: rock fusion group, Nação Zumbi, Bahian funk group Zambotronic, and fellow hip-hoppers O Quadro and O Rappa. And from the

United States: hip-hop jazz extraordinaires The Roots, the neo-soul falsetto D'Angelo, California based rap group The Pharcyde and Louis Armstrong.⁴⁸

The group's lyrical content, as one might assume from their name, chronicles the day to day struggles of Bahians living in the periphery or marginalized, lower-class neighborhoods of Salvador. Bassist Rangell has stated in an interview with journalist Biba Limeira that the 'z' at the end of Testemunhaz is a reference to Zumbi, the aforementioned king of the quilombo of Palmares and symbol of black resistance.⁴⁹ When asked about the group's greater purpose, Rangell explains that Testemunhaz is about seeking change from within oneself first and then working for change within one's community. He states, "Despertar dentro do próprio ser humano as respostas para seus anseios, pois ninguém muda o mundo se não mudar a si mesmo. Nós rimos desses discursos revolucionários que não conduzem com a atitude do sujeito. Preferimos tentar diminuir a hipocrisia dentro de nós mesmos, assumindo nossos defeitos e limitações, e não apenas colocando culpa no SISTEMA."⁵⁰

(To awake within oneself the answers to one's desires, since no one changes the world if they don't change themselves. We laugh at these revolutionary discourses that don't match with the attitude of the subject. We prefer to try to reduce the hypocrisy within ourselves, challenging our own defects and limitations and not only placing blame on the SYSTEM.)

Testemunhaz exemplifies the fierce creativity and originality common to Bahian hip-hop. Unlike hip-hop from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the Bahian hip-hop groups have preserved a truly local identity within their music. The themes found in Bahian hip-hop consistently speak to the unique realities of life lived by the Afro-Brazilian communities of Bahia. While hip-hop enthusiasts that I met in São Paulo and Rio seemed to be imitating or copying American hip-hop style that did not reflect local realities, the Bahian hip-hop scene remains rooted in local culture and politics.

During the 13 months I spent in Salvador I was fortunate enough to experience several musical events promoted by the movimento negro, most of which incorporated hip-hop artists into their line-ups. On November 20th, Dia de Consciência Negra (Day of Black Consciousness)

⁴⁸ From interview with Biba Limeira published on www.bocadaforte.com in 1999.

⁴⁹ From interview with Biba Limeira published on www.bocadaforte.com in 1999.

⁵⁰ From interview with Biba Limeira published on www.bocadaforte.com in 1999.

is celebrated across Brazil. Marking the date of the death of the king of the quilombo Palmares, Zumbi, the holiday in Salvador is as big a celebration as Carnival. On this day, parades occur throughout the city as musical ensembles perform atop rolling 18-wheeler trucks. The musical sound accompanying the parades ranges from reggae to hip-hop and always includes performances by the city's Afro-blocos. On this day, movimento negro mobilizes in huge numbers to promote black consciousness. Through this annual mass mobilization, movimento negro hopes to promote the idea of negritude among Afro-Brazilians. The movement has adopted strategies used by African-Americans in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement who urged anyone with any African blood, no matter what the quantity, to identify as African-American. Currently in Brazil, many Afro-Brazilians do not identify as Afro-Brasileiro or negro, but instead as moreno, pardo or preto. One of the goals of movimento negro in Brasil is to convince all people who fall into any of those categories to identify themselves as negro. By changing the way that Afro-Brazilians self-identify racially, movimento negro believes that they can absorb the man power necessary to make sweeping social and political reform. According to a 1997 survey conducted by the Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), 20.4% of people from Salvador identify as branco or white, 64.2% identify as pardo or mulatto (mixed race), and 14.5% identify as preto or black.⁵¹ If movimento negro could harness the power of the nearly 80% of the population who identify themselves as having some amount of African ancestry, then they would have a much easier time controlling electoral politics and effecting social policy in the city.

One woman who has realized the political potential of hip-hop music is Suzette Lima. Lima, who has long worked with Movimento de Mulheres Negras do Partido de Trabalhadores (Black Women's Movement of the Worker's Party) first recognized hip-hop's power in 1999 while attending a conference against neoliberalism in the city of Belém in the Northern Brazilian state of Pará. At the conference, Lima met two young MCs representing the rap group Clã Nordeste from the state of Maranhão. Lima immediately became impressed by the outspoken behavior of the two young men who began questioning the conference's own organizers. Lima says that she was inspired by the two MCs as they spent all of their energy at the conference making sure that issues surrounding the suffering of the Northeastern Afro-Brazilian community

⁵¹ Kraay 9.

did not go unnoticed. Upon returning to Rio de Janeiro, Lima raised some money and invited the two MCs to come to Rio to perform and speak at several community organizing events in the neighborhoods of Velota Redonda, Rocinha and Lapa. By the conclusion of the performances, Lima had renewed faith that hip-hop music could be used as a vehicle to push for social change among black youth in Brazil.

After working for two years as a community organizer in a predominantly Afro-Cuban neighborhood in Matanzas Cuba, Lima returned to Brazil to the small city of Vitória da Conquista in the interior of the state of Bahia. There in Vitória da Conquista, an impoverished town with one of the state's highest rates of violence and domestic abuse, Lima set out to organize the youth around movimento hip-hop. As it turned out, Vitória da Conquista was fertile ground for Lima's political movement. Soon she found that many of the black youth in the city identified with the themes common to Brazilian hip-hop and she witnessed a growing consciousness among the city's youth regarding racial discrimination in Brazil. Lima quickly organized weekly meetings for movimento negro in the city and acquired a space in which her followers could practice break dancing, rapping, graffiti art and theater.

In February of 2004, I received an invitation from Lima to attend the Bahian Conference of Women in Hip-Hop, in Vitória da Conquista. She provided me with a place to stay at her home and allowed me to observe the conference from the perspective of journalist. The conference presented an opportunity for young women from all parts of the state to unite in Vitória da Conquista to discuss issues specifically pertaining to young, black women in the hip-hop movement and in the day-to-day of Brazilian life. Many female hip-hop groups from around the state attended the conference which included workshops administered by MCs, DJs and break dancers from Salvador on the four central elements of hip-hop. DJ Leandro, of the group Juri Racional from the neighborhood of Ribeira in Salvador, was able to bring his turn tables and a mixer and gave a class on turn table techniques and DJing, an area of hip-hop that has been traditionally closed to women. Several b. boys from Salvador taught basic break dance steps while graffiti artists painted murals on the walls outside of the cultural center where the workshops were taking place. A local restaurant owner provided rice and beans for all of the conference's participants and everyone spent the night in cots at a local church.

Over the course of the weekend the conference attendees held group discussions about several important themes pertaining to women in hip-hop. On the first day a roundtable

conversation about violence against women in Bahia drew emotional responses from the young women involved who spoke openly about their own personal experiences in violent situations. While the discussion was at times very heavy, it gave the young participants a safe environment to openly discuss with their peers personal issues that many of them face regularly.

Later on in the weekend a roundtable discussion was held regarding the relationship of men and women in hip-hop and the presence of machismo in the Bahian hip-hop scene. This important dialogue gave some of the women a chance to speak directly to their male peers about problems that they feel need to be resolved between the sexes. At the end of the conference, a dance party was held and several women got on the microphone to perform some of their own original lyrics. Following the party, Lima made an inspiring speech that fired up the young women in attendance. She spoke of the possibilities that the future will bring regarding opportunities for young women to use hip-hop to make real social change in their communities. I left the conference with a renewed sense of faith in hip-hop as a political tool. After witnessing the hundreds of young, motivated participants I couldn't help but believe in Suzete Lima's message. Her incredibly strong leadership qualities are inspiring and it is clear that with leaders like Lima, the hip-hop movement in Bahia will continue to grow stronger and more politically powerful.

AfroGueto: Portrait of a Bahian Rap Group

Among all of my experiences with hip-hop in Bahia, none was more informative than my friendship with members of the Bahian rap group, AfroGueto. Without their help, and guidance I would have remained an outsider to the scene. AfroGueto, formed in 2001 by MCs Kiko, Osório, Seda and DJ Márcio, perhaps the most influential rap group, currently performing in the city of Salvador. Their lyrical content is revolutionary in style and consistently addresses the problems faced by Afro-Bahian community. Among their Brazilian influences are Racionais MC's and MV Bill and from the United States Dead Prez, Public Enemy and Mos Def. In May of 2003, roughly two months before I came to know them, AfroGueto recorded their first album, the seven-track *Exijo Respeito* (I Demand Respect). The album is raw and directly comments on various topics pertinent to the Afro-Bahian community, from police brutality to lack of education. The production style borrows several American-produced beats and remixes them

with various Bahian rhythms and instruments, ranging from the Northeastern percussion of Maracatú to the easily indentifiable sound of the berimbau. Amazingly, I became acquainted with Osório during my first week in Bahia. Osório was friends with the host brother of an American friend of mine who was also in Bahia studying at my university. During my time in Salvador I became close friends with Osório and ended up moving into an apartment down the street from his mother's house.

Hanging out with Osório, Kiko, Seda and Márcio allowed me to really gain a better understanding of how independent hip-hop groups survive in Salvador's music scene. Each member of the group is from a different neighborhood including São Caetano, Federação and Pernambues. The geographic diversity brought by the group makes them representative of the city as a whole. They are embraced by fans at all of their shows, and although they have only one album recorded and have been performing for only four years, it seems as though every hip-hop enthusiast in Salvador knows their lyrics by heart. With little money at their dispense to advertise for shows and promote their music, the members of AfroGueto were consistently hustling to further the effort of their band. In Portuguese there exists the word malandragem. Although it doesn't have a direct translation in english one might say that it refers to street smarts, trickery, or hustling. A malandro is one who practices malandragem. While the word has a negative connotation, malandragem can, in fact, be used to achieve positive ends. The members of AfroGueto are examples of how malandragem can be used to achieve a positive goal, in their case, the promotion of quality, politically conscious music.

One of my first experiences with AfroGueto came not at one of their shows, but rather at a Racionais MC's concert. It was late summer and I had only been in Brazil for a few weeks. When I was informed that Racionais were coming to Salvador, I didn't quite understand the magnitude of the event. Regardless, I was convinced by Osório to go with him to the show. On the night of the concert we took the bus to the neighborhood of Fazenda Grande, home of the huge concert venue known simply as the Mega Show. The Mega Show is essentially a large arena lined with informal beer-vending stalls with a large stage at one end. The venue is owned by Ramundão, the most notorious drug czar in the city of Salvador. Ramundão created the Mega Show in his home neighborhood of Fazenda Grande because it is an area where he has virtual mayoral status. He provides health care, loans, and recreational facilities for the community and they in turn protect his drug trafficking business from the police.

The Mega Show sits at the bottom of a hill and is settled in the middle of a very densely populated area of auto-constructed housing that rises up the hill behind the stage. When Osório and I arrived in Fazenda Grande, the Mega Show was packed. There were easily 20,000 hip-hop enthusiasts there to witness the most sought-after show in the realm of Brazilian hip-hop. On his back, Osório carried a sack packed to the top with five by five inch fliers advertising the upcoming AfroGueto concert to be held the following weekend. Fliering is the most common way for Bahian rap groups to advertise. Often this involves attending shows of other hip-hop artists and passing out fliers to a crowd that they know will be receptive. Osório and I snaked through the densely packed crowd handing out fliers to all who would accept one. About an hour and a half later, all of the fliers had been passed out and the show began. When Racionais took the stage at about one o'clock in the morning a roar bellowed from the crowd. As they moved through their routine of songs, the crowd recited every lyric in unison, a remarkable sight, especially for a hip-hop show where lyrical content is often more complicated than other styles of music.

AfroGueto would soon shine in a moment similar to that of the Racionais show, just on a slightly smaller scale. On a Sunday in May of 2004 the group was scheduled to perform two shows, one during the afternoon in the upscale neighborhood of Barra and then a second show later at a community center in Kiko's home neighborhood of São Caetano. The first show in Barra was scheduled for one o'clock at a new bar owned by three young Paulista entrepreneurs. Osório, Kiko, Seda and Márcio had spread word to their friends about the show at the bar the week before and a surprisingly large group of friends and fans showed up to enjoy the show. The owners of the bar explained to the members of the group that they were each allowed to drink two free beers from the bar during the show. Unfortunately, Seda, who has struggled with alcoholism for several years, drank somewhere between seven and eight beers from the bar during the show. The owners were angered and told the group that not only were they not going to be paid for the show, but that they would also be permanently banned from performing at the venue.

The outcome angered the other members of the group who accused Seda of costing them business. This type of argument is common among the members of the AfroGueto. While they are all good friends, the stress of managing a band while struggling financially occasionally takes its toll. The group's members of the group decided that Seda would not perform with

them later that night in São Caetano. After the conflict was resolved, I headed with Kiko, Osório and Márcio to São Caetano to the second of two shows. Upon arriving at the modest community center, the venue for the show, a group of neighborhood kids surrounded AfroGueto, asking for their autographs and singing the lyrics to their hit song “Rolé.” This moment was amazing because it showed that in their own city, these young, relatively unknown musicians were heroes to the local youth. It is this type of following that anchors AfroGueto to their own community and creates a sustained relationship of loyalty between the group and their fans.

Much of their publicity and fan base has been generated through air play of their music on community radio stations. While none of the commercial stations in the city play Brazilian hip-hop, the community-run stations often run local hip-hop programming. On Tuesday nights, Osório himself runs a radio show out of the studio at Primavera FM, a community station in a working-class section of the neighborhood of Ondina. I was fortunate enough to accompany Osório to his show regularly on Tuesday nights. Being a former college radio DJ myself, I was interested in witnessing community radio in action in Salvador. The station sits in a booth at the top of the neighborhood, overlooking the auto-constructed housing that runs down the hill below and in the distance, the mighty Atlantic ocean. During his show, Osório would play mostly local hip-hop from other groups from the Brazilian Northeast, and of course, an occasional AfroGueto tune. Broadcasting from the Primavera radio booth gives one an empowering feeling. It is precisely this empowerment that has been provided by community radio stations in Brazil. They continue to serve their neighborhoods as sources for local music and news, content that is severely lacking on axé-dominated commercial radio.

Getting to know the members of AfroGueto and witnessing their struggle to continue to record and play live music in Salvador was telling of the entire Bahian hip-hop scene. Currently AfroGueto is working on a compilation album with the other four well-known, aforementioned hip-hop groups in Salvador. The album, to be called Blackitude, will include new tracks from each group and will be sold independently through various record stores around Bahia and in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The distribution of the upcoming compilation will stand as a milestone for Bahian hip-hop, as it will be the first nationally distributed album. Many of the musicians in these five groups hope that the widespread distribution will eventually bring them the notoriety that is currently held by internationally known, Brazilian hip-hop acts.

As these Bahian hip-hop groups begin to distribute their music commercially, the risks are greater that the industry will corrupt their current political agenda, like it has done to so many rap artists in the United States. However, with the help of organizers like Nelson Maca and Suzete Lima, Bahian hip-hop is poised to grow in a commercial sense, while maintaining its aggressive push for racial equality and black consciousness in the region.

CONCLUSION

As hip-hop's audience grows in Brazil, it faces new challenges. Not unlike attacks made by the baby-boomer generation of Americans on gangsta rap in the mid 1990s, hip-hop in Brazil continues to endure harassment from older Brazilians who have fallen for common, negative stigmatization of hip-hop in the media and view its sometimes cynically truthful lyrics as offensive or ugly. While hard-lined rap groups such as Racionais MC's and Fação Central have no intentions of toning down their lyrics, MCs like Marcelo D2 are helping to, at least, bridge the generational divide by creating music that is appealing to older Brazilians instrumentally. However, the overall political edge associated with Brazilian hip-hop does not appear to be departing us. Unlike much of American hip-hop that, through an extensive process of commercialization, has drifted away from its political roots, the vast majority of Brazilian hip-hop artists who are currently producing new music see it has their obligation to continue to make racism and social inequality mainstays as common musical themes that speak directly to their largest block of listeners, Afro-Brazilian youth.

In the case of hip-hop in Bahia, the genre's number of listeners is growing steadily even as it continues to face fierce competition from already established styles of music. While samba does not necessarily constitute a competitor for hip-hop due to its almost universal appeal to Brazilians of all ages and social demographics, Bahian pagode and Axé music continue hold to the top two positions as leaders in the youth music market. Additionally, Bahia's Afro-blocos continue to hold fast to a large share of local music-related notoriety and currently, especially within the area of tourism, generate more publicity than hip-hop.

For Bahian hip-hop to continue to grow within its local musical landscape, it must maintain alliances with other musical genres such as reggae, as well as the aforementioned Afro-blocos, that share its ideological agenda. Also, I believe that it essential for the music to continue to move forward as an organized movement. While most other musical genres in the region consist of fragmented groups who lack consistent communication among one another, hip-hop's advantage is that it is a music that is produced within a community and/or network of people. Already in its planning stages, the upcoming hip-hop compilation album, including two tracks from each of Bahia's top rap groups, is an example of such community mentality. Furthermore, organized conferences, most notably the statewide conferences organized by Suzete Lima, will

continue to provide organizational and networking opportunities for hip-hop enthusiasts from around the state.

As black consciousness and awareness of racial injustice grow in Bahia, more listeners will inevitably tune in to the messages proliferated through the state's hip-hop music. Already, it appears as though the commonly, apolitical sound of hip-hop's competitors is slowly losing listeners to rap artists who carry strong social and political messages through their music. The vast majority of Bahians experience directly, the consequences of racism within their society, making Bahia uniquely fertile ground for hip-hop to grow upon. Aside from its core audience, hip-hop, especially in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (two cities that boast the country's oldest, most developed hip-hop scenes) appears to be growing in popularity among upper-class youth as well. It would, therefore, not be a surprise to see this same phenomenon eventually develop in cities like Salvador. While it will not be an easy transition into the mainstream, hip-hop in Brazil appears to be slowly gaining ground on other genres of popular, youth music.

It is my hope that readers will leave this work with a renewed faith in the political power of hip-hop music in Brazil and on an international level. What I have personally witnessed in Bahia is a musical movement with the potential to gain significant influence in the state's political landscape. With Afro-Brazilians severely under-represented in the state government, hip-hop is poised to play a major role in the transformation of regional politics. Only the future will reveal just how far the reach of hip-hop will extend in Brazil, however, if the Brazilian youth are sign of what's to come, then we have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

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AUDIO SUPPLEMENT TRACK LIST

1. "Capítulo 4, Versículo 3," Sobrevivendo no Inferno. Racionais MC's. 1998.
2. "Panico Na Zona Sul," Raio X do Brasil. Racionais MC's. 1990.
3. "Tempos Dificéis," Raio X do Brasil. Racionais MC's. 1990.
4. "Vida Loka Parte I," Nada Como Um Dia Após O Outra Dia. Racionais MC's. 2002.
5. "Soldado Morto," Declaração De Guerra. MV Bill. 2003.
6. "Dizem Que Sou Louco," Declaração De Guerra. MV Bill. 2003.
7. "A Procura Da Batida Perfeita," A Procura Da Batida Perfeita. Marcelo D2. 2003.
8. "Re-Batucada," A Procura Da Batida Perfeita. Marcelo D2. 2003.
9. "Exijo Respeito," Exijo Respetio. AfroGueto. 2003.
10. "Povo Do Gueto," Exijo Respetio. AfroGueto. 2003.
11. "Rolé," Exijo Respeito. AfroGueto. 2003.
12. "Dois Lados," Exijo Respeito. AfroGueto. 2003.
13. "Vida De Bandido," Exijo Respeito. AfroGueto. 2003.