Funk and Hip-Hop Transculture: Cultural Conciliation and Racial Identification in the "Divided City"

Shoshanna Lurie

This article introduces funk and hip-hop culture in urban Brazil and discusses changing racial and spatial identifications rooted in the globalization of US black cultural forms and their accompanying ideologies. In my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro over the last three years, I have found that the globalization of culture is challenging traditional forms of hegemony and marginalization, making new forms of democratization of culture possible, as well as precipitating new forms of exploitation and disenfranchisement. Globalization should be seen neither as purely a matter of transnational domination and uniformity nor as a source of the liberation of local culture from hegemonic state and national forms. Developments in global communication have opened the market and facilitated contact with transnational cultural production, enabling international group identification on the basis of parameters such as race, youth, and gender. For example, Spike Lee films widely shown in Brazil have increased consciousness of both racial polarization and social disparities based on race while creating a parallel between poor, largely black and *mulato* communities in Brazil and US ghettoes.

These new "ethnic" identifications compete with those founded on the prioritization of "Brazilian" identity, privileged by cultural nationalism and traditionally seen as paramount to combating the cultural imperialism resulting from colonial and post-colonial domination and exploitation. However, they complement and add complexity to nationalistic discourses and symbols among the popular sectors of Brazilian society rather than simply supplanting previous modes of identity formation.[1] Funk and hip-

hop in Rio de Janeiro can be located among black diasporic cultures which relate simultaneously to local systems of class and race relations and global phenomena, and can be seen both as a tool and a reflection of the construction of a simultaneously local and deterritorialized cultural citizenship. They demand a recognition of the localized populace's dynamism and hybridity in relation to transnational culture, and suggest a type of "modernization from below." They are popular urban cultural phenomena which respond to and collaborate with both the positive and violent forces of globalization and suggest changing cultural, social and economic dynamics at both the local and national levels.

My approach to Brazilian funk and hip-hop places theories of globalization of culture into dialogue with a specific history of consensus-building through culture in Brazil and with lyrical, dance, journalistic, media, and interview material, attempting to equally value and engage these diverse sources. Funk and hip-hop are placed in historical perspective within the context of other black and popular cultural forms in Brazil such as *samba, candomblé*, and *capoeira*, which have each functioned to bring people of different races and socio-economic backgrounds together for delimited times and within controlled spaces. The predominance of the notion of "anthropophagy" in Brazilian intellectual thought has often ignored transnational influences on Brazilian popular culture and, as Roberto Schwarz has noted, masked the social relationship between the elite and the popular sectors within Brazil. In order to begin to understand the meaning that funk and hip-hop have for this population, it is useful to address the concept of "division" of urban space and the ideological mapping of social relationships which accompanies conceptions of physical space in the city in terms of the ways culture, and particularly popular music, has functioned as a social glue in this so-called "divided city." Funk and hip-hop comprise a diversity of expressions reflecting both conciliatory and oppositional aesthetics between the popular and privileged sectors and spaces, both resisting and conciliatory to dominant culture.

My discussion of the conciliatory function of popular culture is intimately linked to a history of race and racial ideologies in Brazil. Many cultural critics attack US critical approaches to race in Brazil which seem to categorize a reality according to standards germane to an alien social system. Though it is important to avoid this theoretical pitfall, a review of some basic statistics and concepts can help to illuminate the serious disparities tied to race which have long been occluded by a privileging of class difference,

among other tropes, in Brazil. Brazil is a country that is at least 50% black, and where 90% of black Brazilians live below the poverty line, as opposed to 50% of non-Blacks. One-third of black Brazilians receive less than one *salário mínimo* (minimum wage) and no more than 3% of university students are black. The notion of "racial democracy" has been the dominant racial ideology in Brazil since the 1930s, operating in close conjunction with the myths of social harmony and cultural democracy. This concept was developed partially in response to earlier notions of whitening as the ideal path for Brazil to follow as a nation entering into modernity; however, what was arguably originally an attempt to place value upon miscegenation and the mixed-race Brazilian majority and on Brazilian cultural exceptionalism turned into a hegemonic tool for controlling social and racial opposition. Numerous studies have confirmed that differential opportunity and treatment correspond to skin-color, so that lighter blacks are generally better off, and racial hierarchy is very present in Brazil. There has been no broad-based civil rights movement as in the US and the black movement has been very limited in scope, nor would most poor black Brazilians identify with it. The excessive culturalism and focus on cultural revalorization of the black movement has also often de-emphasized socio-economic injustice (see Hanchard, Hasenbalg). Links between cultural valorization and the struggle for socio-economic justice characterize much Brazilian funk and hip-hop.

Funk

Brazilian funk and hip-hop are very different, though they share physical and social proximity in Rio. Brazilian funk began in the 1970s when DJs went to New York to actively seek out the latest funk being produced there and to bring it back to Rio. Funk culture was briefly linked to a somewhat superficial black-consciousness movement called "Black Rio," which was deeply influenced by 1970s soul music such as that of James Brown and stressed the aesthetics more than the politics of black identity. Funk then passed through a process of hybridization and is now sung mostly in Portuguese while incorporating some Brazilian rhythms such as *samba* and *pagode*. During the 1980s funk lost most of its component of racial consciousness and came to be seen as a de-politicized cultural phenomenon. Though current funk differs dramatically from the overt political militancy of much rap, funk is anything but apolitical, registering its politics on the level of form as well as content.

Hundreds of dances of up to 10,000 young people each are held each weekend in Rio suburbs and *favelas* and are attended by as many as a million young people who have few other options for leisure in the areas in which they live. A relatively independent industry has been built around funk that includes the production of CDs, magazines, newspapers, radio and television programs, creating jobs for many people. However, funk producers arguably practice exploitation in ways comparable to multinational record labels and it is important not to glorify this industry uncritically but rather to address all aspects of its related production, distribution, and consumption.

Many funk lyrics, such as the "Rap do Brasileiro" by MC Flávio and MC Magrão (*Jet Black*, 1995), subtly function to build consensus in the city by brushing over social differences.[2]

I am a humble guy and I have no money
But I am proud to be Brazilian

Foreigners have imported cars
While Brazilians have junkers
A lot of people are living under bridges
While others have a ton of houses

I ask you all, let's all join hands
Let's end the people's misery
There are people suffering, there are people dying
In our Brazil, everything is happening

Stop, stop fighting
We are Brazilians, let's stop and think
Stop, stop fighting
We are Brazilians and our place doesn't matter

Now I'm going to say the names of all the places
That all *cariocas** would like to live
Copacabana, Leblon, and Ipanema,
Barra da Tijuca** and don't forget Saquarema
Rocinha, Vidigal, Borel, Andaraí, Chácara do
Céu and Morro do Tuiti***[3]

This song reflects the valorization of poverty, humility, and pride in being Brazilian common until recently in the majority of portraits of the popular classes (and particularly characteristic of populism). It invites all Brazilians to join together to overcome the misery in the country. It also reproduces the expected vilification of foreign capital and sees all Brazilians as disadvantaged. Though these lyrics reflect the reaffirmation of identity through home/space, by constructing a lyrical parity between opposite sides of the city, rich and poor, black and white, they also avoid engaging the class/race opposition intimately linked to these spaces, instead placing it between Brazil and foreign capital.

Songs frequently pay homage to the MCs' communities of origin, and this rootedness in a specific place, communal history and collective memory, combined with the *galera*-based organization of funk dances, complicates interpretations based on theories of the deterritorialization of culture (Canclini), of a diffused global culture as disconnected from the past (Smith), as well as those of a new urban tribalism (Maffesoli). In fact, funk acts more like a battery which recharges a sense of community, demonstrating that the local and the global clearly do not work in simple opposition to one another. Numerous funk songs, such as "Rap da Felicidade," by MCs Kátia, Cidinho and Doca (*Carnarap*, 1995), which became one of the largest funk successes with a mass audience and was made into a *samba*, reproduce this double-edged re-valorization of marginalized and de-valued urban space. Depending upon their audience and reading, they can function to justify continued segregation:

All I want is to be happy
To walk peacefully in the *favela* where I was born
And to be able to be proud
And know that the poor have their place.[4]

In the context of the historical appropriation of black popular culture by the Brazilian nation without the accompaniment of any improvement in the socioeconomic situation of the black population,[5] it is interesting that young black people would choose to identify with transnational black culture instead of the traditionally "Brazilian."[6] It is difficult to imagine funk and rap becoming national symbols as *samba* did, because they are undeniably transcultural forms. However, most of the *funkeiros* and rappers interviewed

for this study never expressed a consciousness of this choice, and some even denied that this had anything to do with their decisions to listen to funk or rap. Hypotheses such as this one must be continuously engaged with *funkeiros*, and rappers' testimonies regarding the issues, and the dialogue produced is the most important component of this type of research. Another interesting phenomenon in funk and hip-hop is the popularization of these forms with cross-class and cross-race audiences and their entrance into the mainstream.

The challenge to consensus

For the most part, funk has not been a race-conscious movement since the 1970s. Recently however, physical and social proximity to rap and the globalization of US valorization of difference has instigated a transformation. During the early 1990s, a number of violent incidents seemed to bring social opposition to the fore and cause a crisis in the Brazilian national myth of social harmony and racial democracy. For this discussion, the most important of these was the *arrastões* ("rioting") of 1992 and 1993, which was attributed largely to *funkeiros* and contributed to an increased consciousness of the division and difference in Rio associated with black people and black music. My argument, however, is that the *arrastões* were more a symptom than a cause—a reflection of the local integration and interpretation of US-based conceptualizations of race, difference, and social opposition resulting from what Arjun Appadurai calls "global ideological flows," specifically from the globalization of media forces and of black US music and its accompanying ideologies.

Funk songs such as "Rap da Benedita" by MC Dandara and MC Baiano (*Jet Black*, 1995), present race-and-class-conscious messages which challenge the smooth operation of consensus culture. MC Dandara, whose name pays homage to Dandara, the queen of the seventeenth-century maroon slave community of Palmares, praises Benedita da Silva, the first black woman in the Brazilian Congress and critic of the Brazilian myth of racial democracy. The song criticizes lies being circulated about Benedita in the mainstream media and encourages *funkeiros* to disregard them and choose alternative sources of information. The song then explains how MC Dandara sees pursuing her dream to be a star as following in Benedita da Silva's footsteps:

> Just be smart and act consciously
> I am proud of myself and I speak to all them [funk's critics]

My mother always spoke and guided me with words
See if you can forget about funk, since you won't get ahead
One day she nervously made me choose
Between funk and *a real** and I had a hard time
But I never abandoned my dream, I followed my *flashback***
And now I'm trying to be a star and shine on *Jet Black****
Bene, Benedita, senator of progress
As your miniature, I will, I will be successful...[7]

Funk has changed significantly since its origins in the 1970s, and violence has become a greater part of much funk culture. Simultaneously, funk has been vilified in the mass media and associated with urban violence, a characterization which is not always merited. The media fails to acknowledge the immense diversity within funk, ranging from violent club dances to entirely pacific community-based dances. It is important to engage the interpretations that *funkeiros* themselves make of their participation in this often violent activity. Interestingly, much of the discourse that emerges from the funk movement reflects statements made by academics attempting to vindicate it and compensate for its negative media image. These individuals have mostly failed to recognize the true violence involved in funk and have erred on the side of apology. Two of the major funk producers in Rio were recently arrested for promoting violence and covering up deaths and injuries at funk dances. Nevertheless, funk organizations also frequently display a public discourse of promoting peace, fighting violence, and placing value upon a culture which is marginalized and repressed by dominant society. They also organize blood and food drives and other humanitarian efforts, reflecting the deep contradictions within the funk movement and the difficulty of portraying any kind of unified vision or interpretation.

Hip-Hop

As in the US, Brazilian hip-hop culture comprises the musical expression of rap, visual graffiti, and break dance. Rap is very different from funk in Brazil, and in fact they are sometimes defined partially in opposition to one another. Whereas funk reflects primarily an "aesthetics of affirmation," rap more frequently asserts an aggressive and oppositional "aesthetics of dispossession." Rap grew largely in São Paulo, but has a rapidly expanding contingent in Rio. Since its origins in the mid-1980s, it has been much more overtly political,

militant, and racially identified than funk. It has also received much more acceptance as an aesthetically valid cultural form than funk. Brazilian rap consciously uses a US aesthetic to address a very local reality, though frequently Brazilian musical influences appear in rap as well. Brazilian rappers look primarily to earlier US message rap by groups like Public Enemy and harshly criticize gangsta rap and the commercial nature of the majority of current hip-hop culture. Rio and São Paulo rappers' stated role models often include people such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Recently, a greater diversity of middle-class and non-community based rap has been growing in Brazil, represented by rappers such as Marcelo D2. Thus, as with funk, it is important to recognize that rap cannot be rigidly defined.

During the 1990s, the most influential and successful current in Brazilian rap was led by the São Paulo group, the Racionais MC's. Their last CD, *Sobrevivendo no Inferno* (*Surviving in Hell*) (1997), has sold over a million copies and is called "The Bible" by many fans. Their philosophy includes staying in the neighborhood, giving back to the community, keeping their own record label, and refusing interviews with Globo, the dominant media network. They now appear regularly on MTV, won best Brazilian video at the MTV video music awards in 1998, and their DJ KL Jay is the host of *Yo*! MTV Raps Brasil. Though many would question the ramifications of this success, the Racionais have continued to be very militant, which makes sense since they are selling records this way. Marginality has become very commercially marketable in Brazil during the last few years, a phenomenon I believe is linked to a new type of valorization of difference.

The video for their song "Diário de um Detento" ("Prisoner's Journal") from the CD *Sobrevivendo no Inferno* (1997) is an angry portrait of the uprising and massacre at Carandiru Penitentiary in 1992, in which at least one hundred and eleven prisoners were killed by the military police. An aggressive aesthetics of dispossession is reflected in the words of the narrator of the song, a prisoner disappropriated of his civil rights, his right to speech and a fair trial, who asks at the end of his story of the massacre: "but who will believe my statement?" The video achieves its impact partially through visual imagery: it was filmed in part at Carandiru Penitentiary and includes photos of real prisoners, real news footage from the day of the massacre, and images of real prisoner's bodies in boxes. It is cut with footage from the Holocaust, linking racism in Brazil to genocide and, similar to many of their songs, includes a great deal of religious imagery.

This was the opportunity the system wanted
Notify the IML*, the big day has arrived
It all depends on the whims of the big man
who prefers to be neutral on the telephone

Ratatatá caviar and champagne
Fleury went to have lunch, fuck my mother
assassin dogs, tear gas...
[the officer] who kills more thieves wins a medal

The human being is disposable in Brazil
like a used maxi- or scouring pad
Prison? Certainly the system didn't want it
hides what the soap opera doesn't reveal...

cadavers in the pit, in the interior courtyard
Adolph Hitler smiles in hell
the government's Robocop is cold, feels nothing
only hate, and he laughs like a hyena

Ratatatá, Fleury and his gang
they're gonna swim in a pool of blood
but who will believe my statement
October 3, diary of a prisoner.[8]

Changing ideologies of race

The introduction to the Racionais' song "Capítulo 4, Versículo 3" (*Sobrevivendo no Inferno*, 1997), which is spoken almost as an alternative news report, is an aggressive condemnation of racial inequalities in Brazil. Depending on the listener, it is either a slap in the face to the dominant audience or a call for identification with a group of dispossessed black people:

60% of youth from the periphery with no police record have suffered police violence
For every 4 people killed by the police, three are black
Only 2% of students in Brazilian universities are black
Every four hours a black youth is killed violently in São Paulo
Speaking here is Cousin Black, yet another survivor.[9]

The Racionais and other "conscious rappers" use the term *preto* instead of *negro*, insisting on a term historically used more pejoratively by non-blacks and also further articulating their disidentification with the *Movimento Negro*, which they believe is elitist and unable to reach the majority of the black population. Rio DJ TR, ("Racial Test"),[10] a biracial person who opts to identify himself as black, takes advantage of the discussions of race and whitening that his name evokes to raise consciousness among his interlocutors. Many rappers point to the need for a binary black/white definition of race as a necessary step toward creating the racial unity required for change in Brazil. By asserting a discourse of racial equality and citizenship and by accessing US sources of racial tension and conceptions of civil rights in their own public discourse, Brazilian rappers are challenging to the urban consensus. They strike at the core of hegemonic conceptions of "Brazilian" identity by aggressively critiquing racial inequality. By embracing US ideas of racial consciousness (as they interpret them) and of race as biologically determined, they dispute the notion of the harmonious Brazilian racial continuum. Assuming and respecting blackness is a common theme in Brazilian rap songs and is represented in graffiti in Rio's cohabitational facility (project) *Cidade de Deus* which reads "Negralize já" ("Blacken now").

US black music and hip-hop style, made more accessible in Brazil by the globalization of media and commerce, has served as a medium for the transmission of racial consciousness and as a motivation to further question issues such as racial identification. MC Bill described his first introduction to rap, which was after seeing the movie *Colors*:

> In 1988, I heard the soundtrack to the film *Colors*, directed by Dennis Hopper, which included a lot of rap. I had a magazine that told the history of the film and talking about the rap artists and what they discussed in their lyrics. This was when I became interested. Only in 1990, after researching a lot, reading about people mentioned in the lyrics like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and understanding the reasons for talking about those issues, did I write my first lyrics. (Personal Interview)

Though many critics would argue that following a US path to decreased racism and discrimination is at best a mixed-bag, my point here is not to address the relative merit of US or Brazilian forms of racism and anti-racism nor to argue that Brazilian rappers' interpretations of the US situation is even

accurate. Rather, I attempt to trace how these appropriations play out in Brazilian society and I believe the key to these groups' influence is in the locating and adaptation of these US-originated discourses in and to specific places in urban Brazil.

In the Racionais MC's video for "Mágico de Oz" (*Sobrevivendo no Inferno*, 1997), the hope for change is associated with the US civil rights movement, accomplished by invoking images of Malcolm X, the KKK, the Rodney King beating, lynching, and chain gangs. A T-shirt panned-in on at the end of the video reads "Nothing changed. Let's change it," thus appealing for the cooperation of the viewer in a movement for racial justice. The song and the video together perform an almost ritualistic naming and extensive showing of poor, largely black, suburban, peripheral areas of São Paulo, similar to what occurs in much funk:

> Jardim Filhos da Terra e Tal, Jardim Leblon, Jaçana and Jova Rural*,
> Piqueri, Mazzei, Nova Galvão, Jardim Curisco, Fontales and then.
> Campo Limpo, Guarulhos, Jardim Peri, JB , Edu Chaves and Tucuruvi.
> Alô Doze, Mimosa, São Raphael, Zaki Narchi all have a place in heaven.[11]

The significance of this placing of peripheral and marginal spaces and of active figures from these spaces on the map and in the public sphere, viewed by millions of largely young Brazilians on MTV, cannot be overestimated. The creation of an alternative public sphere upon which this broader visibility depends is extremely significant. These developments will necessarily have repercussions on both poor and affluent, black and white members of this generation and on their conceptions of race and the urban spaces associated with it. The MTV model (which is international and not bound by the particular conciliatory forces of the dominant Brazilian media that originated with and are intimately tied to the authoritarian military dictatorship) has given marginalized groups a mass forum to get their oppositional messages out.[12] Second, and perhaps even more importantly, media like MTV and other transmitters of US black music and style have given people the idea that expressing and disseminating their ideas in this way is worthwhile and necessary.

This article has attempted to introduce Brazilian funk and hip-hop to the US audience as well as demonstrate some of the ways that funk, like many popular cultural forms, has played a conciliatory role in Brazilian society. It

has argued that the emergence of a growing social and racial oppositional consciousness in both funk and hip-hop can be partially attributed to flows tied to cultural globalization. Rather than view the crisis of hegemonic ideologies of cultural, social, and racial consensus and harmony as rooted in the increased violence in contemporary urban society, this article places culture at the center of a challenge to these reified national myths. Confrontations and transformations are occurring through the media of popular music largely as a result of poor black Brazilians' identification with and local adaptation of an aesthetics and politics of "global" black culture.

Notes

[1] Mike Featherstone stresses that it is misleading to conceive global culture as necessarily entailing a weakening of the sovereignty of nation-states and an eventual global cultural homogeneity and integration. Ulf Hannerz suggests that global culture is marked more by an organization of diversity than by a replication of uniformity (237), or what Arjun Appadurai calls the "repatriation of difference" (307).

[2] This theoretical approach is indebted to George Yúdice's analysis of funk. However, whereas Yúdice saw funk as a reflection of a waning national identity, I demonstrate that funk is both invested in and contestatory of national symbols.

[3] Eu sou um cara humilde e não tenho dinheiro
Mas eu me orgulho de ser um brasileiro

Os estrangeiros têm carro importado
Enquanto os brasileiros só tem carro esculachado
Tem muita gente morando embaixo da ponte
Enquanto que tem outras que de casa têm um monte

Eu peço pra vocês, vamos todos dar as mãos
Vamos acabar com a miséria do povão
Tem gente sofrendo, tem gente morrendo
No nosso Brasil tudo está acontecendo

Pare, pare de brigar
Nós somos brasileiros, vamos parar pra pensar
Pare, pare de brigar
Nós somos brasileiros e não importa o lugar

Agora vou falar os nomes dos lugares
Que todos cariocas* gostariam de morar

Copacabana, Leblon, Ipanema
Barra da Tijuca** e não esqueça Saquarema
Rocinha, Vidigal, Borel, Andaraí, Chácara do
Céu e o Morro do Tuiti***

**cariocas*: people from Rio
**affluent neighborhoods
****favelas*

[4] Eu só quero é ser feliz
Andar tranqüilamente na favela onde eu nasci
E poder me orgulhar
E ter a consciência que o pobre tem seu lugar

[5] A process I acknowledge is much more complex than I am able to portray here and which I also don't argue has been entirely negative.

[6] George Yúdice sees allegiance to funk as an "opting out" of other musics associated with nationalism. Young people interviewed for this research who listen to funk most frequently also listen to *samba*, *pagode*, rap and other types of Brazilian music, so the impact is one of complementation more than substitution.

[7] Basta ser esperto e agir consciente
Tenho orgulho de mim e falo pra essa gente:
Minha mãe sempre falou e com palavras me guiou
Vê se esquece essa de funk, que você não vai pra frente
Um dia ela nervosa, mandou eu resolver
Entre a real* e o funk sem saber o que escolher
Jamais deixei meu sonho, segui meu flashback**
Hoje tento ser estrela e brilhar na Jet Black***
Bene, Benedita, senadora de progresso
Sendo sua miniatura, faço, faço sucesso....

**a real*: reality
***flashback*: a style of funk music which samples 1970s and 1980s music
****Jet Black*: a funk CD collection.

[8] Era o brecha que o sistema queria
Avise o IML*, chegou o grande dia
Depende do sim ou do não de um só homem
que prefere ser neutro no telefone

Ratatatá caviar e champagne
Fleury foi almoçar que se foda a minha mãe
cachorros assassinos, gás lacrimogêneo...
quem mata mais ladrão ganha medalha de prêmio

O ser humano é descartável no Brasil
como módes usado ou Bombril
Cadeia? Claro que o sistema não quis
esconde o que a novela não diz...

cadáveres no poço, no pátio interno
Adolph Hitler sorri no inferno
O Robocop do governo é frio, não sente pena
só ódio e ri como a hiena

Ratatatá, Fleury e sua gangue
vão nadar numa piscina de sangue
Mas quem vai acreditar no meu depoimento?
Dia três de outubro, diário de um detento.

*Legal Medical Institute (the agency that removes cadavers for autopsy)

[9] 60% dos jovens de periferia sem antecendências criminais já sofreram violência policial
a cada 4 pessoas morta pela polícia três são negros
nas universidades brasileiras apenas 2% dos alunos são negros
a cada 4 horas um jovem negro morre violentamente em SP
aqui quem fala é Primo Preto, mais um sobrevivente.

[10] My thanks to Jennifer Roth Gordon for introducing me to DJ TR.

[11] Jardim Filhos da Terra e Tal, Jardim Leblon, Jaçana e Jova Rural*,
Piqueri, Mazzei, Nova Galvão, Jardim Curisco, Fontales e então,
Campo Limpo, Guarulhos, Jardim Peri, JB , Edu Chaves e Tucuruvi.
Alô Doze, Mimosa, São Raphael, Zaki Narchi tem um lugar no céu.

*peripheral neighborhoods of São Paulo

[12] Though global media have also made poor young people even more conscious of their relative deprivation and have forced them to make all kinds of sacrifices to possess US consumer goods, a trend deeply criticized by "conscious" rappers.

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