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Gerard Béhague
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Globalization/Modernization

Rap, Reggae, Rock, or Samba: The Local and the Global in Brazilian Popular Music (1985–95)

The notion of the global village and of the globalization of pop culture in the 1980s and 1990s has been perhaps overtaxed; the word "globalization" itself keeps losing its edge and thus needs to be re-sharpened periodically. In tackling the Western impact on world music in the 1980s, Bruno Nettl reached the indisputable conclusion that our century has been a period of musically "unprecedented diversity" (1985, 3), given the "intense interchange of musical ideas." The result of this intense interchange has undoubtedly modified the ways people think about themselves at both micro and macro levels. Veit Erlmann put the simple questions this way: "how do we think [about] the place of music in a world constructed by socially situated and yet transnationally, interculturally connected actors? How do we account for the fact that we can no longer meaningfully talk about the music of a West African village without taking into consideration the corporate strategies of Sony, U.S. domestic policy and the price of oil?" (1993, 4). Erlmann has been one of the most sophisticated articulators of global-local dynamics, which he calls "the dialectics of homogenization and diversity and the politics and aesthetics of difference." Suffice it to stress here that indeed the intrusion of alien elements into a cultural system is not by definition a destructive process, and that the possibility of a total, homogenizing system of musical production exists in multiple environments determined by the various local cultural/musical practices. Thus, globalization and localization are not mutually exclusive, and the multitude of musical products resulting from their relationship is what must retain our attention. In addition, globalization must not be conceived solely as a homogenizing process, for the numerous popular music subcultures cannibalized by it, and certainly stimulated by it, continue to assert their own different practices and ideologies. The generalized suggestion that reggae, funk, and hip-hop, for example, and the styles associated

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with them spread in uniform fashion from a center (the Anglo-Saxon world) to various peripheries (Third World areas) is grossly inadequate. Equally problematic is the attempt to establish a strict correspondence between certain genres of music and the identity (social and ethnic) of a youth group or subculture (e.g., Stokes 1994), as if such a group or subculture could be identified with one specific musical style or genre. Anthony Seeger warned against such an assumption in his essay "Whoever We Are Today, We Can Sing You a Song about It" (1994).

For the last fifteen years or so, Brazil has seen a social fragmentation (predominantly urban) and a parallel growing diversity in its popular music expressions. In 1985 Brazil returned to a democratic government after over twenty years of military authoritarian rule during which censorship was rampant and yet the popular music of the country developed in unprecedented fashion. The democratic return has meant freedom of expression and relative economic stability (especially in the 1990s and until the recent devaluation of the *real*), which prompted consumption of imported goods with the opening of the huge local market for imports. In the 1960s, after the emergence of the trend internationally known as bossa nova, the acronym MPB began to be used to designate new varieties of urban popular music, among which the most controversial was the short-lived Tropicália movement, with the great figures of Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Tom Zé, Capinam, Rita Lee and Os Mutantes, and singer Gal Costa. These artists/ musicians/poets, together with Chico Buarque, Milton Nascimento, and a few others, represented the most sophisticated cultivation of popular song in the history of Brazilian popular music, and the most overt and active involvement in politics and cultural changes as witnessed in their modern urban experience.

To celebrate twenty-five years of Tropicalismo, Veloso and Gil launched their CD *Tropicália* 2 in 1993 as a sort of nostalgic remembrance of the various components that informed their earlier experiments. On the CD we find Veloso's "Rap popcreto," a rendition of Jimmy Hendrix's "Wait until Tomorrow," Gil's "Cinema novo," and Veloso's bossa nova samba "Desde que o samba é samba," among others. But what retained most people's attention at the time was the song "Haiti," a powerful statement about various contemporary sociopolitical issues, all present in both Haiti and Brazil: poverty related to ethnicity (and the ambiguity of racial identity), police and military brutality, politicians and church officials defending the values of capital punishment and anti-abortion, collective murder of homeless children, the AIDS epidemics, etc. The two countries might otherwise be thought of as the two extremes of the Western Hemisphere. This is why the song asks and affirms: "Think of Haiti, pray for Haiti / Haiti is here, Haiti isn't here." The rap-like style of the lyrical delivery is particularly effective because rap is first and foremost lyrically and rhythmically oriented.

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Since the 1980s, popular music forms have developed in rather unexpected ways in that both local adherence to and adaptations of international styles *and* strongly regional musical traditions have seen concurrent cultivation and popularity. In a very pronounced sense, both foreign and local genres have been appropriated by various sectors of urban and rural communities as key symbols of social identity. At the same time, the Brazilian popular music industry accelerates these tendencies in its marketing strategies, whether through the promotion by multinational labels of national or international artists in the national market, or through the promotion of regional genres by local labels.

The further segmentation of Brazilian popular music since the mid-1980s can be viewed as a metaphor for wider and more differentiated social structures and political consciousness. My personal research interest over the years has been geared toward an understanding and explanation of the sociopolitical context in which various contemporary social groups develop their expressive forms. Thus issues of identity in national, regional, social, and generational terms, as well as of ethnicity vis-à-vis various attitudes towards musical imports, are at the core of my interpretive analyses of popular music trends.

The city of Rio de Janeiro continues to occupy a central place in the development of Brazilian national politics and in the symbolism of national popular culture. In addition, Rio de Janeiro, together with São Paulo, represents the largest urban area and consists of radically contrasting social strata and subcultural groups, the whole continuum of Brazilian ethnic types and identities, and is also the headquarters of the major corporations of the country's popular music industry. As the "national center" *par excellence* and as the main headquarters of national media organizations, Rio is the most important site for any aspiring popular music composer or performer, regardless of his or her origin. It is there that some of the most active scholars in the study of popular culture are located (e.g., Livio Sansone, Samuel Araújo, and Martha Ulhoa), as are some of the most articulate voices of political vindication for the poor and underprivileged segments of society and of the fight against discrimination and racism.

In order to obtain a fairly accurate sampling of the national and regional contexts of popular music making and consumerism, I have conducted interviews in other cities and regions: São Paulo, Salvador, Bahia, Recife, Pernambuco, Brasília, and a number of cities and towns in the interior of several states. The selection of interviewees was established with a view toward obtaining as wide a sample of social classes and related consumer preferences as possible. Thus, the findings appear quite representative overall. From the production/performance side, besides attending several live shows of popular musicians in different venues, I engaged in extensive discussions and interviews with professional and semiprofessional composers and performers, especially in Rio, São Paulo, and Bahia. To

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assess the criteria of selection for production and market strategies, I organized several interviews with music industry executives in Rio and São Paulo from multinational corporations such as SONY, BMG, PolyGram, Philips, and EMI, as well as a few national firms. Thus, I obtained whatever relevant data they were willing to provide related to popular music making, production, and reception/consumption.

My research endeavors during the last few years make it quite clear that popular music in Brazil since the 1980s has functioned in unique fashion as sociopolitical expression, i.e., as a significant marker of power relations between the various groups that constitute contemporary Brazilian society. The current state of social interaction, antagonism, and at times confrontation between social strata finds symbolic articulation in expressive popular culture, musical trends and styles, and their associations. Homologies between musical forms and practices and sociopolitical issues appear subtle at times and rather direct at others. Power and class relations, the alienation of certain groups, and the globalization process all are explicitly expressed in a number of contemporary popular music repertories whose detailed analysis must consider both textual or semantic and musical or syntactic dimensions, as well as the interpretation of these elements by various listeners.

Interviews with listeners provided information from a cross section of social groups from which it will eventually be possible to sketch a true social history of Brazilian popular music. Most of the musical and extramusical means by which sociopolitical meanings are articulated in popular music styles appear to be well understood among a majority of consumers interviewed. Rarely, however, does one find a one-to-one correspondence between the intended message (aesthetic, political, or more generally social) of the composer/producer and the perception of that message by consumers. Most commonly, the listener/consumer constructs his/her own meaning of a particular song or style according to his/her own understanding and/or ideological convictions.

It was not always easy to assess the level of that ability and conviction through interviews. Sociopolitical issues of the period perceived by the listeners appeared rather homogeneous: the state of poverty of the majority of the population, for instance, emerged as a central theme and was viewed by some as a socioeconomic slavery system. This theme was balanced by a great sense of hope motivated by the return of democracy (when people in their forties were voting for the first time in their lives, since there were no open elections during the over twenty-year-long military regime) which supposedly would facilitate access to better economic conditions; a new freedom of expression generating a sense of exuberance commonly associated with the Brazilian character, but also promoting creativity and experimentation in expressive culture; and the general recognition and acceptance of the diversification of Brazilian culture encouraged by democratic renewal.

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The correlation of the motivational bases of various mass-mediated popular musical forms with sociopolitical issues of the period points to a general concern with class and ethnic identity, regional and national dialectics, especially as related to *música sertaneja* (Brazilian country music), and *cantoria* (narrative sung poetry of the Northeast), which frequently refers to the plight of indigenous communities and migrant workers and to ecological problems such as those affecting the Amazon (as, for example, Vital Farias's very expressive "Saga da Amazônia").

The Samba Tradition

The samba, especially the genre associated with Rio's carnival and its "samba schools," continued during this period to be the national festivity par excellence. Even without the popularity that it enjoyed in the 1930s and 1940s, the *carioca (i.e.,* from Rio) samba continues to act as the national unifying agent. This image has particular political relevance because in the early 1990s Rio appeared as a symbol of nation, reinforced by the separatist movement emanating from *gaúcho* (Rio Grande do Sul) politicians who advocated the independence of southern states from the republic. In an interview published in *Jornal do Brasil* (June 1990), the famous Bahian popular composer Caetano Veloso asserted that the samba school "Mangueira, and by extension Rio de Janeiro, both represent national unity. Now that people talk about separatism, it's good to strengthen Rio as symbol of nationality." Despite the fact that Rio has not been the capital for almost forty years, the city possesses better conditions for acting as a representative of Brazilian unity than the current capital Brasília. The selection of the city to fulfill that function is eminently political, and the popular samba that originated in Rio contains in its historical trajectory the synthesis of nationality because its invention as national music was a process that involved numerous social groups. Indeed, the samba did not transform itself into national music through the efforts of any one specific social or ethnic group. On the contrary, many groups and individuals participated more or less actively in the formation of this genre.

No one can deny the significant role played by Afro-Brazilians in the invention and development of the samba. And no one can deny the existence of a strong repression of Afro-Brazilian popular culture, a repression that influenced quite markedly the history of the samba. But concurrently one must recognize that, in juxtaposition with this repression, other ties united members of the Brazilian elite and popular social classes, facilitating a definition of Brazilian nationality centered on the concept of miscegenation or pride in the *mestiço* elements of popular culture. Thus, urban samba continues to be an integral part of the process of national construction and of the invention of "Brazilianism." Indeed, samba must be viewed

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primarily as the product of the relationships between different social groups and, most likely, the only major form of popular culture that has continued to function as a coalescing factor in an era of fragmentation and separatism. According to my interview data, the various subspecies of urban samba cultivated in the 1980s and 1990s appear to maintain this tendency. For instance, World Cup soccer championships are frequently celebrated through music and particularly through samba, as a genre through which all people can relate. The 1994 and 1998 events each had their own sambas composed for the occasion: "Copa 94" by the group Gera Samba, and "Copa 98" by Gilberto Gil.

The international flow of music genres and styles in current Brazilian popular music is nothing new. What appears to be new is the local response to that flow, in that instead of simply assimilating outside influences into a local genre or movement, the presence of foreign genres is acknowledged as part of the local scene: samba-rock, samba-reggae, samba-rap. But this acknowledgment does not imply mere imitation of the foreign models or, for that matter, passive consumption by national audiences. Let us examine one example of hyphenated samba, the so-called samba-reggae.

The *bloco afro* phenomenon as of the mid-1970s became closely associated with a Bahian black political cultural movement of vindication and recognition, and resulted not so much in what has been called uncritically a "reafricanization" of Bahian carnival music, but in a deliberate and new valorization of Afro-Bahian cultural roots (hence more of an "Afro-Bahianization" process). Traditionally, Bahia never had direct contacts or connections with Jamaica, but in their own activist ideology of black exaltation, the young *bloco afro* musicians naturally recognized symbolic models of contemporary black consciousness: themes of the U.S. African-American civil rights movement and the Black Soul movement, and especially the Jamaican independence movement since the 1960s and its messages in reggae and Rastafarianism. Thus, the sudden popularity of reggae music and musicians in Bahia was not the result of the effects of the transnational music industry, but of the need to establish cultural and political links with black communities across the Americas that had faced and were facing similar sociopolitical situations.

Musically, it was the *bloco afro* Olodum and its lead percussionist, Neguinho do Samba, that began to combine the basic samba beat of the *blocos* with merengue, salsa, and reggae rhythms and debuted their experimentations in the carnival of 1986. The new *toques* (drumming patterns) were labeled "samba-reggae" and consisted basically of a pattern in which the *surdo* bass drums (four of them at the minimum) divided themselves into four or five interlocking parts. Against this, the high-pitched *repiques* and *caixas* filled out the pattern with fixed and repeated rhythms in a slow tempo, imitating the shuffle feel of reggae. Another toque involved an additive pattern (3+3+4+3+3 etc.) of the *repiques*, resembling the *clave* rhythm

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and others from Afro-Caribbean dance music (see Crook 1993). Moreover, besides changing older-style thick drum sticks for thin flexible ones (resulting in a much sharper attack and a drier timbre), Olodum percussionists added three timbales with a sound reminiscent of Cuban and Puerto Rican popular music. The connection to the Caribbean was not only musical, hence aesthetic, but also political-ideological.

The Dialectic of Tradition versus Modernity/Innovation

A dialectic of tradition versus modernity/innovation is also quite evident in the music of Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso. Buarque is well known for having supported progressive causes in the early 1980s, appearing at benefits for striking workers and at opposition rallies in Brazil, and performing in Angola and at the 1983 Concert for Peace in Nicaragua. In the mid-1980s, several of his songs discussed the period of redemocratization in Brazil. His career developed under authoritarian rule, but his compositions articulated the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of an entire generation. Chico Buarque's style (both music and text) was certainly innovative, although as a whole his works remain close to mainstream bossa nova and classic samba. He recognized, however, the validity of the experiments with elements of rock music and other trends undertaken by other leading figures of his generation. In an example of reflexivity, many of his songs of the period commented on the modernization of Brazilian popular music and on the shifts in cultural values that affected his generation.

Veloso, on the other hand, has represented the avant-garde and experimentalism in Brazilian popular music of the 1970s and 1980s. He was both the theoretical spokesman and practitioner of the widespread hybridization of Brazilian popular music in the 1980s. In addition to his early provocative combinations of folk, traditional, pop, and art music, he cultivated trendy international styles, always in a strongly imaginative and personal (Bahian) manner. In so doing, he sparked renewed national debate over the "Americanization" of Brazilian popular culture, cultural imperialism, and colonialism that began in the I940s with Carmen Miranda. A critical analysis of this debate reveals that perceptions of Brazil since the early 1980s are far from homogeneous. On the contrary, there is a clear indication in the popular musical products of that period that modern (and postmodern) Brazil is seen as a mixture of mixtures.

Gilberto Gil

Gilberto Gil continued to delve heavily into his Afro-Brazilian (Bahian) roots during the period under consideration, blending international pop

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music (rock, funk, reggae) with Brazilian urban music. As a native of Bahia, he felt a close association with the Black Movement of the 1980s, musically expressed through the genres *afoxé* and *bloco afro*. Already on his LP *Refavela* (1978) he began to focus on worldwide black culture and to explore Afro-Bahian roots together with an assimilation of Caribbean and African-American musical forms. Some analysts of his music have seen a certain degree of contradiction between Gil's overt affirmation of a cosmopolitan neo-negritude, as in such works as "Axé Babá" and "Logunedé," his support of the "funky samba," of Rio de Janeiro's black youth, and his concessions to market pressure in the interests of commercial success. Indeed, his repertoire of the 1980s showed an increased cultivation of fashionable dance music trends, such as disco, reggae, soul, funk, rock, "technopop," and even punk. But despite this attention to and involvement with the music industry, his Afro-Bahian involvement appears quite sincere and certainly very successful as well. Even his adherence to reggae is justified, in his own words as "a form of democratizing, internationalizing, speaking a new language, a Heideggerian form of passing along fundamental messages." In my research, interviewees' reactions to Gilberto Gil's music of the 1980s were quite revealing in their diametrically opposing views, split along regional lines. People in Bahia were generally much more in tune with his stylistic diversity (including his funk-*afoxé*) and trajectory than were those in the southeast who felt more alienated by it.

Brazilian Rock of the 1980s

The explosion of *rock brasileiro* began in 1981 with the first expressions of the "Brazilian New Wave," later renamed the New Jovem Guarda by the media. The innovations of the English New Wave movement, with its surprising variety of styles, arrived in Brazil through such groups and personalities as the Gang 90, Blitz, Barão Vermelho, Kid Abelha, Paralamas do Sucesso, Ritchie, Lulu Santos, Rádio Taxi, Sempre Line, João Penca and Miquinhos Amestrados, and others. A retrospective reading of that trend allows us to view this movement as a reflection of the worldview of urban youth who had grown up under a dictatorial regime and faced such processes as urban/industrial expansion, and family deterioration. This is the same generation that enjoyed the democratic *abertura* (opening) and began to absorb rather quickly an infinite amount of new information, previously inaccessible. The universe of that generation appeared rich in diversity, implying a desire to enjoy the present. Indeed, daily life becomes the expression of a new sensibility. In 1982 the group Blitz exploded across the entire country with "Você não soube me amar," 800,000 copies of which were sold in a few months. This event opened the way for national rock groups to sign contracts with large recording firms. Despite inflammatory

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criticism on the part of supporters of a nationalistic crusade, Brazilian rock began to be seen as a new force in local popular music, no longer a pale imitation of foreign models, but the sound of the 1980s/90s.

Beginning around 1985, one could see that the new consumers of national rock had become segments of the urban youth that faced antagonism from all social classes and were slowly constituting a trans-class group. The very process of development of Brazilian rock clearly had as a background the sociopolitical scenery of the country at that time. In addition, the punk uprising that emerged with some force under the slogan "Punks Are Not Dead" had a strong influence on the Brazilian groups. This music was fundamentally stamped by sociopolitical protest. The most important bands of the period that deserve further attention included Legião Urbana, Titãs, RPM, Capital Inicial, and Ultraje a Rigor. The year 1985 was also the occasion of the first "Rock in Rio" event, a mega-production festival that included the famous national and international stars and was treated by the local media as a sort of tropical Woodstock.

In this movement toward the internationalization of Brazilian rock the band RPM ("Revolutions Per Minute") had a short-lived but significant impact, bringing about a cultural revolution and a new political dimension (clearly articulated in song lyrics). Since 1986, the *bloco afro* (with such groups as Ilê Aiyê, Olodum, Muzenza, and Araketu) exerted strong influence on the development of Bahian "afro-pop" taken up by such groups as Chiclete com Banana, Mel, Laranja Mecânica, and Novos Bárbaros, which became a media phenomenon almost overnight (late 1980s). This was in effect the first time that mass-mediated music in Brazil mixed with ghetto culture.

Around 1987–88, Afro-Bahian rhythms began to influence some of the main bands of Brazilian rock, thereby creating a break with the original English-oriented, white rock that influenced national groups so markedly. The first group to incorporate such rhythms in its music was Paralamas do Sucesso, which while criticizing English neocolonialism simultaneously created new opportunities for Brazilian rock and a more genuinely national product. Movement toward the "black sound" also followed the explosion of funk, hip-hop, and rap internationally. By the early 1990s, one noticed in song lyrics a deliberate balance between national/international political issues and daily subject matter. But the main alteration of the rock scene was found in the very nature of the musical style. Afro-Brazilian genres became the greatest source of inspiration for a significant segment of national rock. Thus the nationalism-vs.-"global village" issue that had been at the center of Brazilian musical debate in the 1960s and 1970s was addressed in different terms. It was no longer dealt with in terms of polarity, but instead through a hybridity that incorporated Brazil into the international panorama of pop music.

An important sociopolitical question that remains open has to do with the term "urban tribe"that Brazilian rockers have used to describe themselves. It

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is significant to consider this reference to an archaic form of social organization (tribalism) in the urban/industrial context of a multimedia universe. Ideologically, the option may have been the result of a search for utopian freedom, for more leisure time, for music and dance, and a negation of authority, or perhaps a search for egalitarian culture as seen in numerous Indian communities. Contemporary urban tribalism viewed from this perspective would allow a reorganization of social relations, no longer based on institutions such as school, the church, or businesses, but rather on the solidarity that emerges from affection and empathy (see Guerreiro 1994). Such a reorganization would be indicative of a process of transition from modernity to postmodernity. At the same time, neotribalism may represent a deconstruction of individualism in favor of a new type of association. If one considers that by the early 1990s Brazil's adolescent population numbered some 68 million, the rock and pop music scenes may indeed provide important clues about youth culture and about future social change.

Significance of Funk and Rap

During the period 1985–1995, many Brazilian black pop musicians were quite active in the local adaptation of African-American musical trends such as funk and rap. However, rock music in Brazil has been associated predominantly with the white middle class, while funk and rap, introduced in Brazil in a systematic way in the 1980s, are heavily supported in big cities by people (and especially teenagers) of the lower socioeconomic class, primarily blacks. According to anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho (1994), some of the musicians and singers of these styles "have associated themselves openly with the various black movements." In addition, funk musicians have frequently commented in their songs about the race relations in Brazil and have expressed black pride openly.

In the mid-1990s in Rio de Janeiro, funk and rap were reported in the press as being adopted by the drug lords of the city. The "kings" of Rio rap at that time, William Santos de Souza and Duda (Carlos Eduardo Cardoso Silva), who earned about 580,000 reais per month in 1995, recorded a famous rap around 1990 titled "Rap do Borel" (Borel being a slum in the Tijuca neighborhood where drug dealers operate) in homage to a gang. There are raps for almost all *favelas* (slums) in Rio, and even a "Rap da DRE" (Rap of the Divisão de Repressão a Entorpecentes, or Division of the Repression Against Drugs) that emerged as a challenge to that drug enforcement agency. The famous organized crime group "Comando Vermelho" (Red Command) is known to have subsidized funk parties to recruit young kids for drug dealing. More radical types of funk and rap, however, have been used mostly for sociopolitical messages about local, regional, or national issues, as demonstrated by

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the rap groups Câmbio Negro (Black Change) and Chico Science. Câmbio Negro is one of the groups adhering to *rap consciência* (socially conscious rap), which is in opposition to hip-hop, considered alienated and consumerist. The non-compromising ideology of the *rap consciência* current openly reflects militancy against racism and social injustice in a deliberately shocking, curse-laden language.

Gabriel O Pensador is the intellectual, activist rapper from Rio notorious for his biting attacks on some of the major ills of Brazilian society: poverty, racism, violence. His first hit in 1992 (at the age of nineteen) was "Tô feliz (matei o presidente)" (I'm happy, I killed the president), in protest against the corruption of President Fernando Collor de Mello. During a well-publicized tour of Portugal in 1994, his piece "Lavagem cerebral" (Brainwashing) won widespread acclaim as a strong social critique of Brazilian society and of the ideology of the dominating classes.

Conclusions

Are the Brazilian versions of reggae, funk, rock, soul, etc., simply imitations or more idiosyncratic local renditions of global trends? The various trends in Brazilian popular music since about 1980 reflect in convincing fashion a diversity of ideologies and through them a plurality of social and ethnic identities. Perceptions of these styles from the viewpoint of the consumer/listener relate to their socially situated origin, as one might expect. Either directly or indirectly, the various styles allude (often metaphorically) to major cultural, social, political, and economic issues faced by various sectors of Brazilian society. The specifics of this musical and linguistic articulation remain to be elucidated at the micro level. Methodologically, such analysis, which I have already begun, will entail the hermeneutic analysis of song texts, a recreation of the intentions of the producers/creators, and, most important, an analysis of listener responses which in many cases also involve a re-working of those intentions. Ultimately, my study will provide a relevant overview of the social history of Brazilian popular music of this period, demonstrating the relationship between musical forms, styles, and practices with social structure and class interests.

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