

NOTES ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF *MÚSICA SOUL* AND *FUNK CARIOCA*

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Abstract: A critical survey of the history of Rio de Janeiro *bailes funk* and their music in their relations with African North-American musics and the emergence of black pride in Brazilian popular music.

Keywords: *Baile funk, música soul, black soul, bailes black, hip-hop, black music.*

“And the rarities of the soul heyday, the most curious offshoots of a curious phenomenon — works like Tim Maia’s *Racional* — are sought after and treasured as the keys to understanding a different Brazil, one whose contours and mysteries were barely glimpsed before it disappeared.”¹

Also known outside Brazil as *baile funk* (funk dance), the music Brazilians call *funk carioca* (Rio de Janeiro funk) derives not directly from African North American funk but from a variety of hip-hop known as Miami bass. The name “funk” has stuck to the music because of its roots in the funk/rap fed *bailes funk* (funk dances) of the eighties², which in turn relate to the soul/funk fed *bailes black* (black dances) of the seventies³. According to the journalist Lena Frias, who named and disclosed this scene on the pages of the big press in 1976 (thus drawing

unwanted attention to the *bailes* and triggering responses from the repressive apparatus of the military dictatorship and the national intelligentsia alike), the *Black Rio* dances used to attract each weekend from five hundred thousand to one and a half million black or black-identified — that is, poor — youths from the Rio de Janeiro periphery⁴ to dance to the sounds of James Brown and other soul brothers in big *bailes* promoted by *equipes de som* (sound teams) that were the local equivalent of the Jamaican *sound systems* of the sixties and MCs hosting Bronx *block parties* in the seventies, some of them reaching an attendance of as many as fifteen thousand⁵. When electro and Miami bass replaced funk and soul as the Rio unperson’s soundscape of choice one decade later, the anthropologist Hermano Vianna estimated that seven hundred *bailes* were taking place every weekend in the greater Rio area, each attracting from five hundred (a failure) to one thousand (the average), two thousand or even ten thousand *funkeiros* (*funk carioca* funksters), adding up to at least one million young people every Saturday and Sunday⁶. Eight years later, DJ Marlboro estimated that every week in the Rio de Janeiro state eight hundred *bailes* were congregating each an average two thousand *funkeiros*, amounting to at least one and a half million youths per each week⁷.

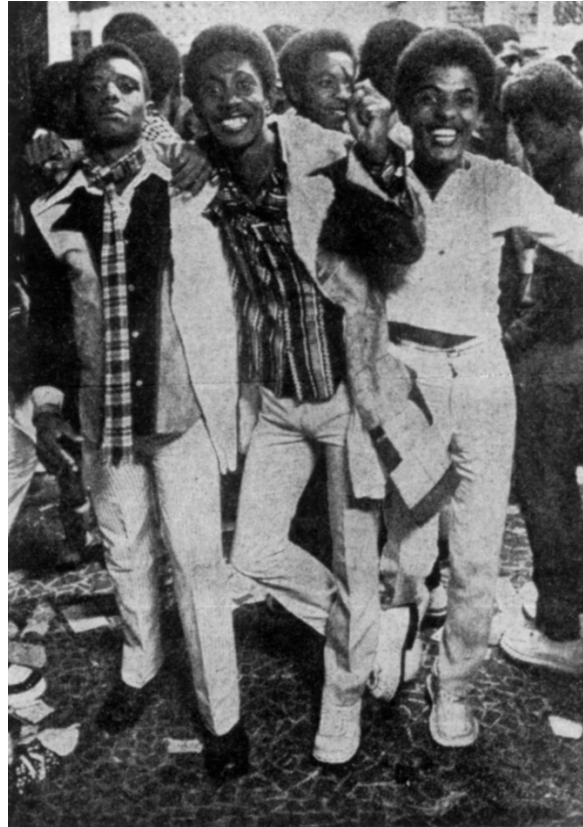


Fig. 1: *Baile black* revellers as photographed by Almir Veiga for Lena Frias's 1976 feature

The appropriation and resignification of African North American musics by Brazilian artists is as old as the recording industry itself. George Washington Johnson's "Laughing Song", the biggest selling record of the 1890s⁸, appeared in the southern hemisphere as early as 1902⁹. Recorded on disc under the title "Gargalhada" by Eduardo das Neves with words by Vagalume¹⁰ in 1906, it remained on the Brazilian Odeon catalogue for approximately a quarter of a century. But whereas Johnson, an African North American, caricatures the behaviour of a black man according to white stereotypes, Neves, an African descendant, mocks bootlicking, which he presents as a widespread trait of Brazilian society. In the process, a "coon song" becomes a *lundu*, as "Gargalhada" was consistently marketed. On the other hand, Kery Mills's 1897 "At a Georgia Camp Meeting", a cakewalk of worldwide renown¹¹, appeared in Brazil under various guises in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, one of these being the song "Mulato de arrelia"¹². But whereas a cakewalk entails an African North American choreographic parody of white upper-class behaviour, "Mulato de arrelia" shows an ethnically unspecified male singer

impersonating the bravado of an Afro-Brazilian suburbanite in the Europeanized

capital of the nation. In the process, a cakewalk has turned into the Brazilian counterpart to a "coon song".

In 1961 the LP *Os anjos cantam*, by Nilo Amaro e Seus Cantores de Ébano, announced the soul crazy of the early seventies with eclectic repertoire, doo-wop arrangements and Platters-like vocal styles. On 18 March 1965, the epochal appearance of Clementina de Jesus in the musical *Rosa de Ouro*¹³ evoked the utmost blackness of Afro-Brazilian religious chanting and "had for Brazilian popular music the importance that presumably corresponds in Anthropology to the finding of a missing link"¹⁴.

On 24 June 1967, in the first anniversary of Wilson Simonal's TV-show, recorded live for the release of a double LP, three thousand mostly white people sang with him his "Tributo a Martin Luther King": "to each black that's gone one more black shall come to fight with blood or without, we also fight with songs, brother, listen to my voice, fight for us!" Recorded in February, the single had been waiting in the drawers of the censorship

service until June, when it was finally released¹⁵. Three years later, soul and funk were exploding on national television with the meteoric apparitions of Toni Tornado and Trio Ternura in “BR-3”, by Antônio Adolfo and Tibério Gaspar, and of Erlon Chaves and Banda Veneno in “Eu também quero mocotó”, by Jorge Ben. The sight of undomesticated Afro-Brazilian showmanship nevertheless triggered a multimedia war: two years later, Tornado had been driven away from the country, Simonal brought to court and slandered; deeply wounded, Chaves died of heart attack in 1974¹⁶. In 1971 both Marcos Valle and Elis Regina released “Black is Beautiful”, by the Valle brothers, demonstrating the acceptability of female or male blackness as a luxury item for whites by

whites — any unsettling feelings that the image of a white woman singing her surrender to a black male body on prime time TV might arise being conveniently deflated by her characterization as a clown. The year 1975 saw the release of Tim Maia's ascetic first *Racional* album¹⁷, the crowning achievement of Brazilian soul. *Maria fumaça*, by Banda Black Rio in 1977, and *Tim Maia disco club*, by Tim Maia in 1978, closed the cycle in a decidedly funky manner. The contemporary cultural press, however, heard the infectious sound of Banda Black Rio as the fabrication of a Syrian executive for a Yankee conglomerate¹⁸. For their part, DJs of the seventies and eighties, whether black or white, saw disco as the unfunky white thing that had killed the *bailes*¹⁹.



Fig. 2: *Baile funk* revellers as photographed by Guilherme Bastos for Hermano Vianna's 1988 book

Brazilian artists who flirted with African American soul or funk from the later half of the sixties to the later half of the seventies were legion, some of them hugely successful: Antonio Adolfo e a Brazuca, Antonio Marcos, Azymuth, Caetano Veloso, Cláudia Telles, Djavan, Dudu França, Ed Lincoln, Eduardo Araújo, Elis Regina²⁰, Erasmo Carlos, Eumir Deodato, Evinha, Fábio, Gilberto Gil, Os Incríveis, João Donato, Jorge Ben, Joyce, Lady Zu, Luís Vagner, Luiz Melodia, Manito, Marcos Valle, Maria Alcina, Marku Ribas, Orlandivo, Quinteto Ternura, Regininha, Rita Lee, Roberto Carlos²¹, Ronaldo Resedá,

Sérgio Mendes, O Som Nosso de Cada Dia, Taiguara, Trio Esperança, Trio Ternura, Wilson Simonal, Zé Rodrix. Their relation to the *bailes black* was none. In the same period, a number of Brazilian artists, one of them hugely successful, devoted themselves mostly or exclusively to soul and funk: Banda Black Rio, Carlos Dafé, Cassiano, Os Diagonais, Hyldon, Dom Mita, Dom Salvador e Abolição, Robson Jorge, Sônia Santos, Tim Maia, Toni Tornado, União Black. Whatever their relationship to the *bailes black* — and it was likely little — it is clear that these could make good without them.



Fig 3: *Baile funk* as filmed by Denise Garcia in 2005

The question of the relationship between the *bailes black* of the seventies and the *bailes funk* of the eighties is not a settled one. In her remarkable study of the Renascença Clube, where, from 1972 to 1975, Asfilófilo de Oliveira Filho, a.k.a. Dom Filó, hosted *Noite do Shaft* (Shaft's Night), one of the seventies *bailes*, Sonia Giacomini resorts to interviews with former participants to highlight ruptures rather than continuities between the two scenes²². Most people²³ agree that in the later half of the seventies the *bailes* were mortally struck with a combination of factors: negative attention triggered by Frias's article; hostility of the samba world; the arrival of disco in 1978. Vianna²⁴ nevertheless records the existence in the mid-eighties of *bailes funk* in which DJs played “an older kind of funk” — very likely, funk tout court — also providing details about the shifts, first, from African North American soul and funk to disco, then to a slower kind of rhythm and blues locally known as *charme* and finally to African North American hip-hop, a process he deems completed in 1985²⁵. On the other hand, comparisons between the photographs that illustrate Frias's 1976 article, those in Vianna's 1988 book and frames of Denise Garcia's 2005 movie, *I'm Ugly But Trendy*, show the postmiracle proletarianization of the poor. Accordingly, I have chosen to emphasize connections that link the places where the *bailes* have happened, the social stand of the dancers, the places from where they come, the relationship of their clothing and dancing patterns to those of the so called Zona Sul and, more than anything else, their common reliance on African North American vinyl. However, if it is true that in the grooves of such vinyl the kinship between African North American soul, funk and hip-hop is inscribed, it is also true that reminiscers of the *bailes*

black of the seventies have often voiced their contempt for today's *funkeiros*²⁶ as have Brazilian hip-hoppers²⁷. Quoting Vianna, *funk carioca* is “the excluded of the excluded”²⁸. Even so, Oséas Moura dos Santos, a.k.a. Mr Funky Santos, the DJ/MC behind the early *bailes black* of the seventies²⁹ in the now defunct Astoria Futebol Clube, in Catumbi, begrudgingly acknowledges the kinship between both scenes by admitting that “if there is *pagode* today — see the way the guys look and talk —, if there is *funk [carioca]* today — no matter how mediocre it may be —, if there is rap today — but a beautiful rap, like that of Racionais MCs — it is all soul's fault”³⁰.

Not unlike Northern Soul, a scene that gravitated around the spinning of obscure up-tempo Motown-like US-made records from the mid sixties to the late seventies in such English towns as Manchester, Wolverhampton, Tunstall, Wigan³¹, Blackpool, Cleethorpes and Stoke-upon-Trent³², the 1970 to 1989 Rio de Janeiro *bailes* relied on US-produced African North American musics spun in such unfashionable toponyms as Acari, Andaraí, Bangu, Catumbi, Coelho da Rocha, Coleginho, Duque de Caxias, Grajaú, Irajá, Leopoldina, Madureira, Marechal Hermes, Méier, Mesquita, Nilópolis, Niterói, Parada de Lucas, Pavuna, Pendotiba, Penha, Ramos, Rocha Miranda, São Gonçalo, Tijuca, Vila da Penha and Vilar dos Teles. Nonetheless, while the Northern Soul scene lost momentum when in the early seventies African North American music production moved towards Philly soul and funk thus causing a lack of the right kind of obscure records, the Brazilian *bailes* showed a willingness to assimilate a variety of black musics — from King to booty — and thus fed on US imports for two decades before generating their own sound.

Execrated and extolled by the media³³, for whom the slum dweller is either a bandit or a very creative person, as Ivana Bentes states in a recent interview³⁴, and figuring side by side with *sertanejo* (Brazilian country music), *pagode romântico* (nineties romantic pop samba) and *axé* (up-tempo Afro-pop from Bahia) among the most cited genres in lists of musical abominations, *funk carioca*, in which the slum dweller can be at the same time violent and very creative, constitutes the first Brazilian genre of electronic dance music, our “house” music. Like Chicago house, *funk carioca* results from the creative appropriation of cheap technology by non-musicians to produce music for segregated segments of the population, such as young black gays of Chicago, or, in the case of *funk carioca*, young inhabitants of economically deprived urban areas of Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian cities.

To avoid the staging of acid-house-fuelled free-parties or raves, in 1994 the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland gave the police “powers to remove persons attending or preparing for a rave” where music “wholly or predominantly characterized by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats” was played³⁵. A constant item on the agenda of the Legislative Assembly of the Rio de Janeiro State, which — with precarious syntax and concord — once declared “forbidden the execution of pieces of music and procedures of crime apology in places where social or sportive events of any nature take place”³⁶, *bailes funk* once shared with UK raves the privilege of being fed by a music governed by specific legislation. Although such laws have been recently revoked³⁷ and replaced with legislation declaring that “all types of discrimination or prejudice, whether of social, racial, cultural or administrative nature, against the funk movement or its members are forbidden”,³⁸ *bailes funk* must be understood in the context of not only the appropriation of African North American musics by marginalized sectors of the Brazilian (sub)urban population but also of the acts of physical and symbolic violence perpetrated against these populations by individuals, civil society, the media, the police, the army and the state, of which the compulsory criminalization of the poor is only one instance³⁹. The history of *funk carioca* consummates the brutal disruption of the mystique of joyous interaction between

masters and slaves, the slum and the beachfront, the living room and the kitchen, the modinha and the lundu. The nationhood *funk carioca* portrays is partitioned. Yet, in the historiography of *funk carioca*, the integrationist paradigm holds sway.

For Vianna⁴⁰, Macedo⁴¹, Essinger⁴² and Thayer⁴³, the *Bailes da Pesada* (heavy dances), which white middle-class radio-DJ Newton Duarte, a.k.a. Big Boy, and mestizo club-DJ Ademir Lemos put on in the upmarket Canecão beerhouse in the early seventies, play the role of funding events. If Vianna⁴⁴ and Marlboro⁴⁵ are right, *funk carioca* appeared when a white upper middle-class anthropologist — Vianna himself — presented a white lower middle-class suburban DJ, Luís Fernando Mattos da Matta, a.k.a. DJ Marlboro, with a drum machine. For Essinger⁴⁶ and Marlboro⁴⁷, the first commercial release of *funk carioca* — the LP *D.J. Marlboro apresenta funk Brasil*, produced and co-authored by Marlboro in 1989 — followed thence, an interpretation endorsed on the LP sleeve. Even *proibidão* (big forbidden thing), a subgenre dealing with the feats and fights of the criminal factions⁴⁸, is presented by Essinger⁴⁹ as originating from the first album of clean-shaven media-friendly Marlboro.

In addition to *proibidão*, also known as *funk proibido* (forbidden funk), *rap de contexto* (context rap) or *funk de facção* (faction funk), musical subgenres include *funk sensual* (sensual funk), *funk consciente* (conscious funk), *funk melody* (melodious funk), *funk de raiz* (rootsy funk), *gospel funk* (evangelic funk) and *montagem* (assemblage, exploring the rhythmic repetition of vocal fragments, as in early house). Nonetheless, the frontiers between crime, sex, awareness, romance, rootedness, the Gospel and dehumanized speech are often difficult to ascertain. The dances may be divided into *bailes de comunidade* (community dances), inside the *favela*; *bailes de asfalto* (asphalt dances), outside it; *bailes de rua* (street dances), now rare; and *bailes do bicho* (murder dances), *bailes de briga* (fight dances), *bailes de corredor* (corridor dances), *lado A e lado B* (A-side, B-side) and *quinze minutos de alegria* (fifteen minutes of joy), all extinct now, in which violence had a recreational character. In any of these events, the music will come: from a DJ who plays *funk carioca* tracks from CDs or a portable computer; from one or more MCs

who rap/sing — often accompanied by a group of dancers (the combination of MC and dancers forming a *bonde*) — to the sound of a DJ who plays a combination of beats and breaks triggered from a drum pad; or from an often invisible DJ who releases an elaborate pre-recorded track on top of which the MC raps/sings live. Whatever the format, a massive wall of loudspeakers is de rigueur. *Equipes de som* are owned by *donos de equipe* (sound team owners), who hire DJs, sound engineers and dancers in addition to owning phonographic copyrights, hosting radio and TV shows, and maintaining MCs under more or less exclusive contracts. For one leading MC, they are “the cancers of funk”⁵⁰. Still, a recent study by the Laboratory of Applied Social Research of the prestigious Getúlio Vargas Foundation has found that Rio de Janeiro MCs receive by far the largest share of profits in the *funk carioca* economy⁵¹, sixty-one per cent of them having never been under contract with an *equipe de som*⁵².

NOTAS

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4 I am using the word “periphery” with reference to its literal and figurative senses, the human geography of Rio frequently placing side by side the dwellings of upper and lower strata (hence the omnipresence of tropes of place in narratives of Rio de Janeiro popular musics).

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