

## Rio's Feminist Funk: An Undulating Curve of Shifting Perspectives

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Rio de Janeiro, 2002: The show for the launch of Nega Gizza's CD takes place at the Ball Room. The public waiting to get in includes a significant number of young, black women, very well dressed, thin, beautifully made-up and exceptionally tall, often taller than the men accompanying them. Security agents only allow accessing to the premises after a thorough investigation of clothes, bags, and purses. The Ball Room opens at 23:00, the show is scheduled for midnight, but it really gets rolling around two in the morning. It is especially symbolic (or ironic) that the current Ball Room was once the *Oba-Oba*, a night club, which featured the "Mulatas of Sargentelli" in shows mostly for tourists.<sup>1</sup>

The "Anfetaminas" opens the show—Luciana Rezende, Manoela Mendes, Luana and Flavia Souza Uva. "Minas" – chicks with a mission, although they still have no CD, merely a demo. Their outspoken lyrics range cover a number of topics:

Fever (*A Febre*) complains about a lack of "smart men, warm, decent and independent": "What I want is a man who is delicious—nothing more, nothing less/with neurons working overtime and a member that is *way* above average!".

Trickster-Snail (*Malandro-Caracol*): "Strong is the man who goes for what he wants, a man who doesn't beg, doesn't ask his woman for money/ guys who do, hey, they should be penalized, taken prisoner, isolated and packed up tight / declared unfit

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<sup>1</sup> The Oba-Oba, inaugurated in 1973, housing in 2002 the Ball Room, was the stage for Oswaldo Sargentelli and his "*Mulatas que não estão no Mapa*" (Mulatas Who Are Out of This World). In the 70s and 80s, this show traveled around the world, always returning to its birthplace, the Oba-Oba.

for use and, if possible, exterminated”.

Black on White (*Preto no Branco*): “They are the Brazilian mongrels, stray dogs all the way from socialite to *funkeiro* / Purebred are the Indians, the caboclos, *cafuzos* / Confused is the doctor who swears he's German / There's even a seed [gene] way back in his past, but his grandad's a nigga [...] the maid's room, individual slave quarters / tucked inside the kitchen so as to not look like what it is... ”. <sup>2</sup>

The lyrics for *Womanhood (Mulheridade)* honors women ranging from Clementina de Jesus, Frida Kahlo and Nelida Piñon to Evita, Bené (Benedita da Silva), (Dona) Ivone Lara and Mary Magdalene. Any second-wave feminist, whether liberal, radical or socialist/materialist, those forged in the battle for “women's rights of the 60s and 60s, would listen with pleasure to these lyrics which say, “You want equality, diminished by society, no matter what age, if you're vain or not. Owner of a sexuality, there's always sensuality / First cousin to the moon, whether a member of the family or raised on the street / No matter how, every woman deserves respect / A being who carries another within itself has a gift so special, a menstrual cycle / Mothers are heroines, those of the Candelária lost their boys and girls / Grief and sorrow, struggle and anger, these are the pride of the flag / Brave warriors all! Long live all Brazilian women / and to prove that there are girls in rap, we're here to stay! Thanks to you, Anfetaminas! Salve!”

Second-wave feminism in Brazil as in the global north focusses on the individual liberty and gender equality for all women framing the struggle around a critique of patriarchy. This wave focuses on the inexorable link between the persona and the political and the confrontation with sexist structures of power. It challenges the

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Stills points out that, although Brazil only abolished slavery in 1888, the country has been successful in creating a sentiment that racial discrimination is not a subject of much importance. However, Hermano Vianna, in his article “A Voz Não Cordial” (*Folha de São Paulo*, 2002) talks about the questions of race and racism in Brazil posed by the Racionais MCs in their rap lyrics—a theme that is frequently addressed by Brazilian rappers, both male and female.

hierarchy of the sexes, the subordinate status of women, the segregation of spaces and focuses on questions of identity. With Brazil in the midst of a military dictatorship, the feminist movement appears alongside many other liberation movements that denounce forms of oppression that are not restricted to economic, are "black movements, ethnic minorities, ecologists, homosexuals, [which] are complementary in the pursuit of overcoming social inequalities." (Alves and Pitanguy 1985)

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Although some couples dance on the dance floor before the show begins, no one dances during the rap performances. People crowd in closer to the stage, accompanying the show, listening in silence. The smell of marijuana spreads throughout the room. The audience's silence looks more like a type of communion, a shared ceremony.

Gisele Gomes de Souza, born in June 22, 1977 and raised by her single(?) mother, a maid, started working at age 7, dropped out of school in the seventh grade and then worked as a radio presenter for rap music programs on community radio stations. She is Nega Gizza, the "female voice of protest," as she was called by a Sao Paulo newspaper. She steps onto the stage, radiant and more than obviously pregnant (almost nine

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<sup>3</sup> Lyrics of Womanhood (*Mulheridade*)

months). The launch has attracted a large amount of media coverage, right up there with the majors although the CD is on an indie label. But Nega Gizza's arrival via her first CD is delicate, beginning with the name – *In All Humility (Na Humildade)* – which sets the tone for the cover photo: her hands are folded together, covering her face. On the photos inside the liner, her eyes are either closed or lowered. "Prostitute" is Nega Gizza's first hit song (on *Na Humildade*, Zambia/Dum Dum Records, 2002), and is featured on her first music clip, directed by Katia Lund who directed, together with Fernando Meirelles, the Brazilian feature film *City of God*. The video was nominated for Best Rap Production at the Video Music Brazil Awards for MTV. However, the video music soon wound up in the hands of a judge of the 1st Civil District for Children and Adolescents of Rio de Janeiro, who asked it be banned nation-wide, basing her decision on the consideration that some of the scenes incited young women to become prostitutes. (MV Bill's clip for "Soldado do Morro", met a similar fate when it was judged that the song and clip incited youngsters to join the drug trade.) "It's a letter of protest," Gizza said, "and it does not to incite prostitution. It's a protest against the media which instigates the early sexualization of five-and six-year-old girls." The lyrics of "Prostitute" begins:

Yesterday I saw an ad in the newspaper / I saw it on TV, on digital  
billboards,  
Asking for women with sculptural bodies  
To give pleasure to men, women, and even to couples  
But what I really want is to be an artist  
To give autographs, give interviews, be on a magazine cover  
I want to be really beautiful, to be seen on television,  
To catch a ride in a car and never again in a paddy wagon.

I'm depressed, the place is a disgrace, drug dealers, parasites, addicts,  
psychopaths,  
A joint to fight this fatigue, this sleepless, sedentary night of orgy  
I cry no more, I know I'm lost, my destiny is my choosing.  
Of all the social plagues, I'm the worst, cucurucu, I'm the domino effect  
[...],

This study looks at the growth of rap and favela funk and the evolution of these genres specific to Rio de Janeiro as they are produced by working-class and racialized women but as they also acquire visibility among the middle class. Here I will focus on key women performers who negotiate the use of the pejorative depictions of women inherent to these genres and use this language to express a type of empowerment. Investigations into feminism and how its ideas resonate or not with these specific women rappers and funk performers begs a brief positioning of second, third and fourth wave feminism. The overall question this article seeks to answer is how do marginalized black women who refuse the politics of respectability seize self-representation in the intensely contested field of Rio de Janeiro's geographies of race, sex and class.

Ultimately, the article will show how outspoken, female funk and rap performers have brought national and international visibility to young black Brazilian women in underprivileged areas. Their demands for the acceptance of a sexualized body and the inclusion prevalent in Third Wave feminism, which highlighted the differences in women's experience based on race, ethnicity and identity. "The identity is understood as a multiple process in which multiple gender, class, race, ethnicity and age are

articulated, forming a complex subjectivity, contradictory, that cannot be reduced to just one of these categories.”<sup>4</sup>

Building on and transcending the agenda of the third wave, funk feminism, I argue has offered an undulating curve of shifting perspectives moving beyond lipstick, libido and microphones into its fourth wave, which combines new technologies in social media with assertive forms of direct action bold embodiments and street eroticism “where shame does not exist”.<sup>5</sup>

### Origins and Genres

Originating in African-American and Latino inner-city street culture of New York in the 60s, rap (rhythm and poetry) emerged as a musical genre at the large street gatherings known as block parties. The genre has become an international phenomenon found throughout the United States, Portugal, Brazil and other Latin American countries, following the routes of the black diaspora (Gilroy 1993). It is the musical part of Hip-Hop, a street culture that includes graffiti and break dance. Traditionally, rappers speak their verses over an electronic instrument base, and their emphatic, stylized expressions focus on the detrimental social and political conditions of black and marginalized populations.

Funk, as produced in Rio de Janeiro, shares many similarities with Jamaican dancehall as well as Puerto Rican “freestyle” genres. The term “dancehall” originally meant any room where people gathered to dance, usually to live music. Dancehall

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<sup>4</sup> Carla Cristina Garcia, “Os Novos Feminismos e os Desafios para o Século 21,” *Revista Cult*. March 2013. <http://revistacult.uol.com.br/home/2015/03/os-novos-feminismos-e-os-desafios-para-o-seculo-21>

<sup>5</sup> Priscilla Frank, “Documentário ‘The L World’ Mostra Como a Quarta Onda do Feminismo Está Quebrando Tudo,” *The Huffington Post*. January 11, 2016. [http://www.brasilpost.com.br/2016/01/11/quarta-onda-feminismo-art\\_n\\_8959140.html](http://www.brasilpost.com.br/2016/01/11/quarta-onda-feminismo-art_n_8959140.html)

evolved into a form of street-style reggae, and came to dominate the Jamaican music scene after the death of Bob Marley in 1981. The female dancers and performers of Jamaican dancehall with their style of dress, moves and "attitude" are very similar to those of "favela" funk. Both are a recognizable celebration of feminine sexuality. Rap and Brazilian funk, like Jamaican dancehall, are found predominantly in slums or shanty towns, and both Jamaica dancehall and Brazil funk are seen as "inferior" by rappers and performers of other musical genres. It is also one of the characteristics that distances carioca funk from the São Paulo Hip Hop scene.

Silvio Essinger (2005) traces the origins of funk music in Rio de Janeiro to the "black" dances held at what would later become *Canecão*, a night club and show place. Funk was the word of the day, from the U.S. inspired Black jargon, "funky", and the performers that dominated the repertoire in the years from 1960 to 1970 were James Brown, Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin. Some of this swing can be found in the compositions of Wilson Simonal ("País Tropical") and Jorge Ben Jor ("Negro É Lindo"). These are the influences that would form (and inform) composer/performer Tim Maia. As the dances were transferred to the peripheries, the soul scene gradually disintegrated. DJ Marlboro, who worked a lot of the dances with his turntable and enviable collection of American LPs, began his experiments with "mixing" in the early 1980s. In 1989 and 1990, together with Grandmaster Raphael, DJ Marlboro produced the first albums of funk Carioca, which included "Melô da Mulher Feia" [The Ugly Woman Song]. In the early 1990s, the crews in the suburbs and favelas were at a fever pitch and the first mixes, such as Jack Matador by DJ Mamut begin to appear.

By 1994, the growth of the popularity of the dances draws members of diverse segments to funk dances in poorer communities in the South Zone of Rio, such as Chapéu Mangueira in Leme, Dona Marta in Botafogo, Cantagalo (between Copacabana and Ipanema), Tabajara in Copacabana, Rocinha (between Gávea and Leblon), and

Morro dos Prazeres, a hillside community in Santa Teresa. Demonization of the genre had already begun in 1992 with the dragnets (*arrastões*) on the beaches of the South Zone of Rio being attributed to the "gangs", the funk *galeras*. What is perceived as a "dangerous mixture of social segments" begins to take place at the dances, which by mid-90s, have become an area of contention for all involved: the recording industry, sound crews and narcotraffickers alike. The violence that would begin to surface in the dances that come to be known as Side A and Side B, or *de corredor*, begins to surface.

In 2002, Serginho and Lacreia produce "Eguinha Pocotó", a simple song, almost a child-like ditty that uses onomatopoeia of a galloping horse (pocotó pocotó) confirmed funk as at the core of mainstream popular culture in Brazil. DJ Marboro's crew works on the production and distribution of funk as a national project, initiated in 1989 and which is now a mix of Miami bass with a *macumba* (Afro-Brazilian religious and musical influence. A rhythmic, five stroke pattern used in macumba rituals in Brazil; known as the hambone pattern) drum beat. *Castelo das Pedras*, a club in Rio das Pedras, Jacarepaguá garners the attention of television actors, soccer players and much of the youth of the South Zone of Rio who come to dance to the music of the MCs in these communities.

Frederico Coelho (2006) points out the genre-specific geographies of peripheries, namely, funk *carioca* (originating in Rio de Janeiro) *pagode*, *tecnobrega* in Paraná and rap in São Paulo and emphasizes that funk continues to provide the largest contribution for culture in Rio de Janeiro since the turn of this century.

### **Genres. Gender.**

According to scholar of trans-Atlantic cultures, Paul Gilroy (1993), our knowledge of the historical, technological and cultural origins of hip-hop and funk in no way helps us to



analyze its contemporary consequences. On attempting to locate women within this universe, it becomes evident that the area under investigation represents a minefield—an axis where race, gender, sexuality and class meet and overlap.

Music as performance intrinsically involves performance of gender. This is especially apparent in the performances of rappers and male funk performers. In fact, the word “rapper” is generally understood to refer to a male performer. Hence, as part of a shared imaginary, it is useful to focus a first look at this manifestation of “gender as performance” to which they themselves give evidence.

Like American rappers, the Brazilian male rapper has a repertoire of movements and attitudes: the minimalist gesture, the scowling face, a male arrogance, and a “menace to society” attitude. Hip-hop aesthetics in Brazil focus on representations of violence, in the context of a racialized security state apparatus that blends intensive militarization of policing, with sexualized, paternalistic “protection” of populations in “occupied” urban settlements (Amar 2013). Hip-hop in Brazil responds to the race and sex contradictions of what Amar calls the “human-security state” with bravado, offering an attitude of “you know who you’re talking to” throw-back to the dictatorship-honed military police in the mid-sixties and early seventies. It is a masculine discourse, but one that renders bare the social logics of race, sex, violence and security that the discourse of crime and marginalia naturalizes.

Derek Pardue’s (2010) work on Brazilian hip hoppers and gender focuses the hip-hop scene mostly in São Paulo where hiphop attitudes have traditionally played out in a very masculine, very politicized manner. In Rio, Benjamin Penglase (2010) and his analysis of masculinity and drug-trafficker power in Rio reminds us that an ideal of masculinity is always connected to perceived power, whether wielded by the drug-dealer or the military police. Again, the aesthetics of rap, whether telling the tale of the gangsta (as in M.V. Bill’s *Soldado do Morro* on his CD “Trafficking Information”) or

revealing the tell-it-as-it-is first-person, witness/prosecutor-for-the-people history of urban privation, circle around masculine violence. In Rio, M.V. Bill continues to be a rapper/activist icon. But in Rio de Janeiro, the “Rio 40 graus”, not conducive to hoodies and head rags, there has been room for other types of rappers. Although Gabriel, *o Pensador*, is recognized as being a rapper, his music also verges on pop. Planet Hemp mixed hip hop with rock and also gave birth to famous rapper Marcelo D2, whose rap boasts of slick hip hop productions and frequent samba influences. De Leve (Ramon Moreno de Freitas e Silva) with his irreverent references and techno elements was one of the many rappers to gain fame through Elza Cohen’s Zoeira Hip Hop at the now defunct Sinuca Palacio, Rua Riachuelo 19, Lapa, in the years following the closing of the Circo Voador in 1998. Beginning in 2004, both the Circo Voardor and Elza Cohen’s projects are again on the map.

Although he has achieved mainstream visibility, it is no surprise that MV Bill remains linked to his neighborhood, Cidade de Deus (CDD). This is his place, in a literal sense, which both legitimizes his authority while providing inspiration for his lyrics. This is the place from where and for whom he speaks, both culturally and politically - Messenger of Truth (*Mensageiro da Verdade*) Bill.

Social conditions for marginalized youth in low-income brackets in both Brazil and the United States lend themselves to comparison In the United States, the systematic decimation of young black men as a result of the drug and weapons industries, as well as the prisons and education systems verges on genocide (Andrew Ross 1994). In Brazil, the indiscriminate use of weapons by both police and “gangstas” contributes to a similar situation.

In both the United States and Brazil, it is undeniable that the phenomena of hip-hop and funk have brought some visibility to marginalized youth and the poor political and economic conditions in which they live. Yet, in Brazil, the Brazilian media and the

public in general has consistently avoided focusing the inherently political structure evidenced by these musical genres. Rap, with its increasing degree of recognition—and criticism—on a national level reveals a battle for a space of representation and the negotiation thereof. However, in 2001, at the inception of this research in Rio de Janeiro, it was the invisibility of rap and funk in general that caught one's attention. B. Negão, MV Bill, Mister Catra, Tati Quebra-Barraco, Radical Rappers, Ghetto Children, DJ Marlboro, and DJ Hum were unknown to a large part of the middle class population as well as to entire groups of young musicians participating in the city's music scene of the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro.

Hermano Vianna (1998) in his thesis on funk states that there were approximately seven hundred funk dances throughout the Metropolitan Area of Rio de Janeiro (Grande Rio) Rio in the 1980s, attracting over a million youth. Twenty years later, rap and funk dances continue to grow. The sound crews of DJ Marlboro alone were producing an average of thirty dances every weekend, not counting those produced by other crews.<sup>6</sup> Even at that time, the number of people frequenting the dances was significant. But they were not seen by the Brazilian middle class in general. And this was an essential part of the problem: To see and to be seen.

Michel Misse (1989) maps the dynamics of the evolution of the "divided city" syndrome as follows:

"a process that begins in the mid-forties, directly linked to the growing process of economic and social modernization. "With the removal of many favelas in the South Zone, housing developments caused by the Via Dutra, the transfer of the Federal District to Brasília, the real estate

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<sup>6</sup> DJ Marlboro, interview by Kate Lyra. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, August 14, 2003.

boom in Rio's South Zone, Tijuca and Barra da Tijuca would further demarcate the socio-spatial separation between "rich" and "poor" areas. Little by little, suburbs and metropolitan areas were transformed into "zones of containment" of previous interclass living in the city, further widening the old divide between "city" and "asphalt" in an overall, general separation of the "North Zone" (including all suburbs and peripheral municipalities of what is known as the Baixada Fluminense – Fluminense Flats) from that of the "South Zone."

The economically and socially marginalized groups become permanently marginalized, far from the eyes of the middle class. As the saying goes, out of sight, out of mind.

**See. Be seen.**

When one directs a film, reality is first edited by selecting the size of the shot, determining if it will be a wide angle, a medium shot, or a close-up. One can cut out everything that is not of immediate interest to focus on one particular area, creating one specific vision of one particular world. A director can remove all excess, push away objects that can disturb the scene. But even when filming, complete control is elusive. The shadow of a microphone might suddenly slip into the frame. Or an unadvised passerby can unexpectedly stumble into the shot.

So it was that, in spite of all its "invisibility," unplanned images of young men who frequenters of the funk parties would sometimes surface. In 1992-1993, what would come to be called dragnets (*arrastões*) swept the beaches in the South Zone of Rio, which could be considered the very heart of the middle and upper classes, it was not the girl from Ipanema, tall and tanned and young and lovely who swayed gently across our

television screens, but rather dark and young and belligerent males who swept across the white sands of *Arpoador*, fighting and stealing and frightening the middle class almost senseless: guys from the *galeras* of the funk *bailes*, as the media informed the general public. In these same years, images of the massacre of young adolescents at the Candelaria shocked people in Rio and around the world -- as did the images of the massacre in Vigario Geral. These images would haunt us. As MV Bill says, "When the blood on the hillsides spills onto the asphalt, that's when everyone starts to get worried."

In the flow of life that can be seen around us, images intrude in an unplanned montage as dissonant as a jingle edited into the middle of a Villa-Lobos concerto. Russian and Soviet filmmaker and film theorist Lev Kuleshov proved that two shots projected in succession are not interpreted separately by the viewer. If a shot of a close-up of a man is followed by a shot of a plate of food, it looks as if the man is hungry. If the same close-up of a man is followed by a woman lying in a coffin, we believe the man looks sad. And each succeeding shot changes the meaning of the previous, shuffling the images like a pack of cards. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederick Jameson (1991) discusses the "pastiche" of American culture today. Hip-Hop, Rap and Funk tap into the pastiche, being a composition of other works, a concoction of multiple ingredients assembled through sampling, editing, montage, and scratch (a new use for turntables, and one which would create a new jargon: *turntablism*). In both Brazil and the U.S., this pastiche builds on samplers, sampling of sounds, "cannibalization" of styles and genres leaving us with a sense of déjà-heard, and with no real gain other than a certainty that black music flows through and around rap which is about self – self-history, self-insight – and that this "self" is masculine.

The Public Prosecutor's office in Rio de Janeiro took note of the growing amount of information it continued to receive regarding the growing violence dominating some

of the dances in the Baixada Fluminense, an underprivileged suburban area of Rio de Janeiro. In November 1999, the Congressional Committee of Investigation on Funk (CPI—Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito—of the State Legislature of Rio de Janeiro) met to determine the causes of this violence at the funk dances and to create measures to contain it. Funk, as a musical genre, came into focus. People giving depositions discussed its aesthetics, with some attributing a diabolical power to the funk rhythm, alluding to its ability to stimulate violence and rampant sex, reminiscent of, similar situations with the advent of the waltz, the *maxixe*, samba and, more recently, rock 'n roll. Funk rhythm appears for the first time on a national level in Brazil and it is already stigmatized.

The second shock for middle-class sensibilities pops up with the advent of funk lyrics called "degrading", lyrics that portray women as "bitches", "fillies", *popozudas* (big booty women), "prepared", "ordinary" (remembrances of Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues). Funk becomes even more stigmatized because of its lyrics, its choreography, in short, its language.

### **Being Human. Man. Woman. Gender.**

Maria Elisa Cevasco (1999), in her studies of feminism, defines language as a "practical consciousness. It is through language that we relate to reality". *This* research, therefore, could not begin without some inquiries about these constructs and gestalts, linguistic and non-linguistic, as well as factors of performance as seen in relation to women.

The socio-linguist Eliane Vasconcellos Leitão (1988) in *A Mulher na Língua do Povo* (Woman in the Language of the People), based on material gathered from 1978-79, cites the entries found in the New Dictionary of the Portuguese Language, by Aurélio Buarque de Holanda, for the word *man*: "any individual belonging to the animal species

that has a higher degree of complexity in the evolutionary scale; a human being; mankind, humanity; a human being, with its duality of body and spirit; a human being of the male sex". Man also appears in the following expressions: "man of the street – a man of the people; A good man – an honest individual; man of action – an energetic individual; man of God – a holy man, pious; man of letters – an intellectual, writer; man of the people – an individual considered as representative of the interests and opinions of the common man; a public man – an individual who is devoted to public life". *Woman* is defined as: 1 - the female sex after puberty; 2 - wife. The word woman appears even in the expressions: *mulher à toa* - harlot; a woman of the street - harlot; woman of the life - harlot; a public woman - whore; a fallen woman - whore; Caesar's wife - woman of unimpeachable reputation. In other words, a woman as conceived by a collective consensus reflected in a dictionary only is dignified if she belongs to someone. But whatever way you look at it, "gender" is not a synonym for "woman".

In the post-structuralism period, its main exponent, deconstruction, provided throughout the eighties a foothold for subordinate groups through the questioning of the hierarchies hidden in binary opposites. Deconstruction allows a perspective in which neither of the binary oppositions – center / periphery; male / female; model / imitation; signified / signifier— is considered superior to the other. Cevasco, however, calls for caution, and asks whether the recognition and combating of hierarchical relationships on a rhetorical level can guaranty success in the combating of hierarchical relationships in which "language is not merely a game of signifiers, but rather a human practice enmeshed in social conditions where fight and not "fair play" is the rule.

In a reference to Hegel, Kate Millet (1971) defines "politics" as "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of people is controlled by another". "Politics" for the purposes of this work, is the negotiation and management of power, public status, identity and participation. In order for women to participate in this

ongoing process of negotiation, they need visibility and voice.

## Visibility and Voice

What, in fact, do the performances and voices of these women signify in rap and funk? Or perhaps it would be more pertinent to ask what does the absence of women in this phenomenon which is multiplying so quickly outside the mainstream, but definitely within a "male-stream"?

Although rap and funk are cultural expressions whose characteristics are quite different, both reflect a great deal about the universe and the situation of underprivileged and mostly black women in Rio.

In this attempt to see and hear women of rap and funk in Brazil, some information leaps to the fore. Visibility as per radio rotations, music videos, or CDs is highly restricted when it comes to women in rap. In 2002, Nega Gizza was the only carioca rapper whose CD had been distributed in record stores. It was her first, and her last CD. The "Anfetaminas" never managed to launch a CD, merely a demo whose distribution was practically nil. In the area of funk, Tati Quebra-Barraco and her music could only be found on "white label" CDs, sold by specialized street vendors in downtown Rio, (many of whom sell only pirated goods), although her songs were available on some Internet websites. Deise Tigrona was stymied at every turn with recordings of her own compositions that have been managed by a certain DJ who doesn't pay her those royalties usually due to a recording artist and composer.

Even though there are still few women visible in the rap of Rio de Janeiro, the number of women rappers in Brazil continues to grow. Verônica and the Outlaws in Brasília, The Anastácias, from Porto Alegre, Sacerdotisa from Florianópolis, Damas do



Rap, MC Rose, Rúbia (do RPW), Rose, Visão de Rua from São Paulo (Dina Dee and Lia).

### **Eu Não Sou Cachorra, Não! Não?**<sup>7</sup>

Daring, in fact, is what appears in the performance of the women in funk — daring, cheek, impudence, audacity, boldness and a lot of nerve. Contrary to rap, the funk scene counts with a lot of women: Panteras, Pepitinhas, Pitchulas, Tchutchucas, Bonde das Loiras, Bonde das Minas, Bonde da Tigrona, Deyse Tigrona, Gaiola das Popozudas, and the pioneer performer of them all, Tati Quebra-Barraco. Set to a Miami Bass (or Miami freestyle) and with its provocative, contagious, outrageous and fun (even funny) lyrics, the songs of the “minas”, the gals of Rio funk are already invading other dance halls around Brazil. The highly stigmatized funk offers an interesting reflection on the use of language. As noted by Marlboro, “Funk is the music seen with enormous prejudice, yet is the least prejudiced of all the genres.”

### **Phavela Phunk**

To enter the *quadra* of Emoções, a club at the entrance to the favela community, Rocinha, one is subjected to a review even more rigorous than that of the Ball Room, complete with metal detector and a pat-down. It is 11pm, and funk is running wild – and loud. A few youngsters, looking to be some 8 to 10 years of age are practicing some complicated moves. The *galeras* are arriving, but the party itself will really only begin after 1:30am, when these youngsters have gone home. *Lacraia*, a famous figure on the Rocinha funk

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<sup>7</sup> In English, “I am not a bitch, no! No?”

scene hangs out, his hair dyed blond and clipped close to his head, a long, exotic earring hanging from his right ear. Few people smoke. By the smell, these are commercially produced—and sold—cigarettes. Men and women perform choreographed steps. Most of the young women are casually dressed and many wear shorts. A *bonde* – a “gang” (as in “hail, hail, the gang’s all here...”) forms, recalling “conga” or “bunny hop” lines from the fifties, although the dance steps and contortions are more overtly “sexual”. But the over-all mood is festive, playful. Closer to the stage is DJ Marlboro. The sound is deafening. This is the same stage where Tati made her first appearance. DJ Marlboro says she is the “woman of the future. “Tati Quebra-Barraco, Tatiana Laurence dos Santos, began her funk career at age 23. The mother of two children, she was a nanny in the Cidade de Deus before becoming a funk performer. She is attributed with using the word “bitch” for the first time in a song – a fact that creates controversy even today. Although a Rio newspaper from 2001 called her an “ephemeral success”, Tati has been in the funk business for many years now and her success continues to grow. Her song *Barraco III* has become another hit:

Call me a bitch and I’ll say bow-wow

Call me a kitten and I’ll say meow

Come in the face, in the mouth

Come wherever you wish”.

Second-wave feminists called attention to the sexual stereotypes used to categorize women who were relegated to being mere sexual objects. In this sense, the way men speak of women in rap music and funk has created much controversy—understandable outrage. Is this a backlash prepared to defeat and reverse the advances made at such cost by long-time movements battling for women's rights? Is this new “language” just

one more degrading strike at women, revenge set loose in face of women's relatively newfound freedom?

For however shocking the portraits of women defined—and defiled—in the lyrics of rappers and male funk performers, what can one say when the rapper or the funk performer is herself a woman? Who are these women who appear to be not at all fragile, delicate, modest and certainly not quiet? What is being negotiated in their frank discussions about sex, prostitution, desire, and race that appear in the lyrics of rappers and women funk performers? When does sexuality and the sexual also become the political? And where does feminism fit in?

### **Feminism: In theory. In practice**

The rappers of the group *Anfetaminas* show reservations in regards to the women's movement now referred to as the Second Wave. Certainly, they are not the only ones to express this. Asked about the role of women in rap, Gizza Nega says, "Women have no role in Rap, they have a fundamental role in Brazilian society." She denies she is sending any sort of a message to women, and sums up, "I'm not a feminist group, I'm a rapper. I even understand the concept, but I disagree".<sup>8</sup>

With the passing of time, the word "feminism" aged and acquired different meanings. For some women (and men), feminism means hatred of men. Others equate "feminist" with a homophobic label "lesbian". Younger women have incorporated the

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<sup>8</sup> Gizza, in interviews to Real Fórum (April 14, 2009) and the magazine Ocas: "I'm not going to send a message to women. I'm sending a hint to whoever is reading this. I am not a group of feminists, I'm a member of a group of rappers. I even understand the concept, but I don't agree. I think it will only change when we have a lot of young women making a lot of noise. The heads up I'm sending is the following: integration is a utopia, but respect is a project that has to be in the soul of each and every one of us. It is us!" Available in [http://docvirt.com/docreader.net/DocReader.aspx?bib=arq\\_cultura&pagfis=28099&pesq=](http://docvirt.com/docreader.net/DocReader.aspx?bib=arq_cultura&pagfis=28099&pesq=)

ground conquered by the feminist movements of the 60s and 70s, seeing this progress as a "done deal", forgetting or ignoring the radical changes that feminists from the sixties, in fact, put in place.

Nevertheless, women of the Third Wave of Feminism want even more than previous generations. They want the freedom to be sexual objects and subjects. They embrace even more completely their personal and political contradictions, make room for the inclusion of broader ideologies, recognizing differences of race, class and sexual orientation, claiming their own rights as sexual and gendered women.

If Second Wave feminism focused on issues of equality, Third Wave feminism have focused on the right to be different. While Second Wave feminists were united in a "sisterhood" that appeared to be predominantly white, first-world, literate, and heterosexual, fighting for equality and against the stigma of being classified as "sex objects", women of the Third Wave are joined in a frank acknowledgment of difference, inclusion and a celebration of sexuality.

A young boy with libido is simply called a young man. But how do you define a young woman with libido? Is she a bitch? A *cachorra*? A puta? A slut? Have we been catapulted back to the 70s? In the dialogical game of seduction, who is in power: The seducer or the seduced?

Although resistant to the word "feminist", the young performers in Brazil and other countries are very aware of and more partial to a particular way of being a "womanist", as rapper Queen Latifah defines herself, admitting that she found it difficult to identify with "white" feminism. Flavia, of the "Anfetaminas", says that she feels a little sorry for the feminists, whose feminism was no different from machismo. Luciana from the same group and during the same interviews continues: "It is always harder for us, like, we have to chase after everything, but there is also our other side that ends up in second place, behind the guy..." Flavia (interrupting) "Our achievements, the

things we have achieved do not imply that you can give up any of your previous obligations. So you work, your husband “lets” you work—he also works—but you’re the one who puts his slippers on him when he gets home, who brings him the paper, you take care of the kid. Even when you are at work, you are still the mother.” Liana and Manoela agree: “Feminism tries to reach an extreme in an attempt to reach the middle ground. It is necessary, but not ideal, not yet, because I want chivalry to still exist”. Luciana: “If the fact that I am a woman means I have to be a feminist, as an obligation, no. However, if it is to add value, if that is the case, I am a feminist. I accept.”<sup>9</sup>

Nega Gizza writes a dedication in the liner notes for her CD: “Listen up, I offer this, my dream, to all the prostitutes of this country and to all women in general, who have to prove they are real women every single day.”

As Deyse Tigrone says in one of her songs, “I’m not just a cute little bod/ You need some brains in the bargain/ I, Deyse Tigrone / I’m very interesting / You want to change the way I am / It’s the way I talk.”

Although reluctant to be identified as feminists, or to use the word “feminism”, Nega Gizza, Luana, Manoela, Flavia, Luciana and Deyse reflect the ideals of Third Wave Feminism, championing inclusion, sexuality and difference in their lyrics and in their lives. Each “walks the walk and talks the talk”.

### **Third Wave Feminists**

Often referred to as “lipstick” or “girlie” feminism, Third Wave Feminism points to an intergenerational struggle. Third wave feminists, according to Richards and Baumgardner, continue the quest for equality, but not in detriment of their sexuality.

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<sup>9</sup> “As Anfetaminas”, interview by Kate Lyra. Rio de Janeiro, RJ. November 12, 2002.

They want to be both subject and object.<sup>10</sup> In the United States, referring to the use of the words "girl", "bitch", "slut" and "cunt," Richards poses the question of who is in control of these words. (A similar situation occurs in rap, both in Brazil and in the United States, where racist words are used by black performers) "For so long these words were used against women. Now, using these words is a woman's attempt to reclaim them", she says, noting that these words are much more hostile when they are used against women than when they are used by women.

By using the "insults", these pejorative terms, as triumphant and glorious banners, today's young women reverse bias, leaving no small amount of perplexity in a world dominated by corporate, conservative lines of thought current in the "mainstream". Babes in Toyland, L7 and the punk movement Bratmobile; women rockers like Bikini Kill, Hole, 7 Year Bitch; funk performers such as Tati Quebra-Barraco and Deyse Tigrona, rappers Missy Eliot, "Anfetaminas" and Nega Gizza co-opt the language used against women to use it to their advantage.

Lead by the women of the middle and upper classes, the main revolution of the 1920s was the First Wave of the feminist movement, related to the question of political citizenship, the question of the vote. Zuleica Lopes de Oliveira Cavalcanti<sup>11</sup> draws attention to the impact of the Second Wave of the movement in the 70s in Brazil, resulting in the increase of middle-class women in the labor market<sup>12</sup>, occupying routine administrative areas, non-manual jobs, increasing schooling, increased separations, and divorces. A change in reproductive patterns began to appear, with a significant drop in the birth rate. The configuration of the Brazilian family began to change, as well as

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<sup>10</sup> In interview to Tamara Straus in November 29, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Zuleica Lopes de Oliveira Cavalcanti, interview by Kate Lyra. Rio de Janeiro, RJ. June 23, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> One must point out that women from lower income brackets in Brazil have always worked outside the home.

gender relations within the family. The discussion of the private that is also public begins drawing increasing attention to the issue of sexuality.

### **An Undulating Curve of Shifting Perspectives**

To challenge the phallogentric epistemological / ontological systems in the field of language itself, in which legitimation and exclusions are formed, these performances of funk by young black women bring to light the previously hidden or confused privileges of gender, class, race and territory. Women's voices in rap and funk call into question reifications of gender and identity. Music finds resonance in society, in those women for whom access to public health systems, reproductive rights, images of the female body, parenting by single mothers, education, employment, violence against women, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS represent increasingly critical points. Fifty percent of Brazil's population is women, of whom 36 million are black women, representing 23% of the total population, 44% of the female population, 27% of the rural population and 22% of the urban population. A black woman earns 55% less than non-black women, and 60% of households headed by black women have a monthly income of less than US\$75.<sup>13</sup>

Space and place must be grounded in reality. Expectations for women who are able to speak out for themselves oscillate from optimism to despair. The above-cited numbers speak for themselves. Living in a favela, such as Morro dos Prazeres, Santa Marta, Pereira da Silva (among others) is like living on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment

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<sup>13</sup> Data from the National Household Sample Survey, Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), 2000 census. <http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=787>

building where the elevator is permanently on the blink, the toilets never work properly and garbage disposal is precarious.

Gone are the days celebrated by Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica's "Penetrables" inspired by his time spent in Morro da Mangueira and his observation of the easily penetrable, lean-to shacks that formed most of the living quarters of the inhabitants of the area at the time. The houses in Mangueira, Santa Marta, Prazeres, Complexo do Alemão, and so on, are now built of bricks and, in some cases, ownership has been properly registered. Gone also is the bandit, *Cara de Cavalo*, celebrated by Oiticica in his banner featuring the fallen man and the title: "Be a marginal. Be a Hero."

The dirt paths still seen in Eduardo Coutinho's documentary on Santa Marta ("Santa Marta Two Weeks on the Hill") can no longer be found. Márcio Amaro de Oliveira, the young man Coutinho interviewed in this same documentary and who declared on screen that he would like to become a graphic artist, later became known to the world as Marcinho VP, head drug dealer for Santa Marta and the man contacted by Michael Jackson's film crew when preparing the shoot of the music video "They Don't Care About Us" in 1996. The painting on the helicopter landing left no doubt that the hill was under the care of the *Commando Vermelho*. On July 28 2003, Marcinho VP was found suffocated to death in a dumpster at the Dr. Serrano Neves Prison, also known as Bangu 3.

Since 2012, in those favelas, which have UPPs (Units of Pacifying Police), funk dances can only take place if those responsible for the event request and register the upcoming date in advance, music can only be played until 3am. Women in areas that host UPPs and drug dealers are still unable to reach out for help and protection when needed. On the other hand, police presence has forced some activities to be taken elsewhere, when it was ascertained that product (drugs and armaments) is being



stashed in rural areas on the outskirts of Rio's metropolitan areas rather than in favelas themselves. The women with the microphones are also moving to new locations.

### **Voices with Microphones**

Like their male counterparts, women in rap and funk also draw attention to specific and significant segments of the population, creating visibility and voice. Women and black women in low-income brackets perform many different roles. As providers, as the women responsible for the moral support and education of their families, these women are part of the ongoing process to assure their civil rights and their participation as women and as citizens.

Nega Gizza was awarded the 2009 Hutúz Award for Best Groups or Solo Female Artists of the decade. She is one of the founders of the NGO CUFA (*Central Única das Favelas*) where she continues to work with youth from Cidade de Deus. Activities range from the production of music videos, documentaries and shows, in addition to classes that feature aspects of hip-hop culture.

In 2004, the fashion brand Cavalera brought Tati Quebra-Barraco to open the show at the São Paulo Fashion Week. Today, Tati "Quebra-Preconceitos" is in control of the microphone and the TV screen, as the star of *Lucky Ladies*, Fox Life's first reality show in Brazil. The show also includes *Mulher Filé* (Yani de Simone), Mary Silvestre, MC Carol, MC Sabrina and Karol Ka. The show began airing in May of 2015.

NGO's such as CRIOLA, ACMUN, Maria Mulher and the Grupo de Mulheres Felipa de Sousa continue to advance Black women's social and political organizing in Brazil in many areas, including that of Black women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Fourth wave feminism has grown out of the internet, connectivity, social media

and inclusion. It addresses the way women are represented in the media. On the web, *Blogueiras Feministas—de olho no web e no mundo—*<sup>14</sup> present fourth wave considerations as feminism again takes center stage.

These are heady times. Maya Angelou<sup>15</sup> said, "we need to be seen, all over the place. We need to be seen as well as heard." The women of rap and funk in Rio de Janeiro beginning in the early 2000s made sure that Black women from the favelas of Rio were seen and heard. It is their due to be recognized. They have paved the way for other generations who now come to the fore: young, Black cinematographer and activist Yasmin Thayná with her film *Kbela*, activists and bloggers Djamila Ribeiro and Estefania Ribeiro. The academic work of Janaina Damasceno and Sônia Beatriz Santos<sup>16</sup>.

The undulating curve of shifting perspectives reveals a new, more-inclusive feminism today for women in general and for Black women in Brazil. In 2015, Black Brazilian woman marched on Brasilia. Their lyrics<sup>17</sup> begins:

“We, Black women of Brazil, together with the women of the world affected by racism, sexism, lesbophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination, we are on the march. Inspired by our ancestry, we live with a legacy that demands a new pact of civilization. We are girls, adolescents, young women, adults and the aged, we are heterosexual, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered, *quilambolas*, Black women of the

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<sup>14</sup> The blog can be accessed in <http://blogueirasfeministas.com>

<sup>15</sup> Marianne Schnall's article "Things Maya Told Me: My Favorite Insights and Quotes From My Interviews With Maya Angelou" for the Huffington Post. ]

<sup>16</sup>“Os Segredos de Virginia: Estudo de Atitudes Raciais em São Paulo (1945-1955)” (2013) and “Brazilian Black Women's NGOs and Their Struggles in the Area of Sexual and Reproductive Health: Experiences, Resistance, and Politics”, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> Available in <http://www.marchadasmulheresnegras.com>

fields, the forests and the waters, residents of slums, suburbs, homes on stilts, we are the homeless and those living on the streets. We are domestic workers, prostitutes, sex workers, artists, professionals, rural workers, workers of field and forest, chefs, intellectuals, recyclers of garbage, *yvalorixas*, shepherds, pastors, students, communicators, activists, members of congress, teachers, managers and much more. The ancient wisdom we have inherited from our ancestors is reflected in the concept of Well Being, which founds and constitutes the new concepts of collective and individual management of nature, politics and culture, that give meaning and value to our existence, based. On the utopic sense of living and the construction of a world of all and for all. As protagonists, we offer the State and Brazilian Society our experiences as a way to collectively construct another dynamic for life and political action which is only possible through the of racism, sexism and all forms of discrimination responsible for the denial of the humanity of Black women and men. We declare that the construction of this process begins here and now."

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