

Brazilian Popular Culture as Process and Product:  
Politicizing the Popular in *Música Popular Brasileira*, 1950-2003

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Quem pensa em música popular brasileira tem em mente alguma concepção de “povo brasileiro,” tanto quanto quem adere a ideias republicanas.

Carlos Sandroni, “Adeus à MPB”

Over the last half-century in Brazil, music has at times been conceived of as a weapon of countercultural or popular protest against dominant ideologies and political structures. In the mid- to late 1960s, during the first years of the military dictatorship, there was a period in which leftist and avant-gardist musicians were able to use TV Festivals as a forum to protest, more or less explicitly, against the cultural conservatism and political oppression practiced by the military regime and upheld by its supporters. From debates among these musicians arose a rethinking of the definition of “engaged” art, and a questioning of the political effectivity of counterculture as such. The most provocative polemic in these debates was that between artists protesting by means of promoting popular, folkloric culture and those artists who rejected a traditionalist notion of the people (*o povo*) as a necessary source of inspiration and representation of political liberation. These latter musicians, associated with the Tropicália movement, emphasized a radical departure from the restraints of tradition through avant-gardist art in the vein of the international youth counterculture of the late 60s, but also influenced by Brazilian forms such as concrete poetry and Cinema Novo.

These public debates within the realm of popular music could certainly be considered a part of what Silviano Santiago in an important 1971 essay theorized as “the anthropophagous ritual of Latin American discourse” (Santiago 2001: 38). Within Brazil, the notion of anthropophagy or cannibalism traces back to at least the Modernismo movement of the 1920s. *Antropofagia* involves the idea of a radical synthesis of (Western) identity and (Latin American) difference, often played out in

spatio-temporal dialectics such as the contradiction between modernity and tradition already mentioned. These dialectics, as well as the popular/elite binary, are also often staged in the spatial terms of the contradiction between universal and particular (or global/local, national/regional). In the postwar heyday of *forró* musician Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1989), perhaps the most famous Pernambucan musician ever who wrote many of his most famous songs in the late 40s and the 50s, the discursive synthesis of identity and difference still offered a residual space of representation for the internally displaced, subalternized masses. This cultural imagining had real political implications of subaltern orientation within the metropole towards participation in a promised modernity, or at the very least provided a utopian critique of modernity's darker side. But the ultimate repercussions of the Tropicália debate after 1968 were to demonstrate that this anthropophagous synthesis had become hegemonic in popular music and thus was rapidly losing any critical content in a postmodern era of transnational capitalism whose very logic was one of radical mixture and hybridity.

In the past two decades a constellation of musicians has arisen in the Northeastern state of Pernambuco (concentrated largely in the capital city of Recife) sharing many of the ideals of 1960s movements like Tropicália. Since the mid-1990s, this movement has called into question the conservatism of the hegemonic arbiters of "cultural patrimony," and has introduced innovations into regional music as well as reformulations of international musical trends from a critically subaltern, peripheral standpoint. Unlike the Tropicalists and protest singers of the 60s, however, these young musicians represent a broader range of the socio-economical spectrum in Brazil, many from low-income and working-class neighborhoods (rather than just the highly-educated, disproportionately

Euro-Brazilian middle-class). The Pernambucans also differ from their forebears in that they have avoided the increasingly false dialectic between the folkloric music of the people rooted in a specific region or nation on the one hand and the cosmopolitan “pop music” immersed in global cultural flows on the other. The result is an often nuanced analysis and critique of the structures of power in Brazil and the world, one that is conscious of the manner in which local music and cultural production become implicated in these structures rather than uncritically attempting a synthesis. At the same time, the Pernambucan musicians are able to creatively represent the perspectives of people in their region, and by extension of the periphery as a whole, in a global politico-economic context. Individual creativity and formal innovation are no longer feared to come at the expense of solidarity with popular struggles. However, it must be noted that while this hybrid of formal innovation, popular tradition, and subaltern critique is true of the new music scene in Recife as a whole, in practice popular tradition is sometimes treated with a reverence that segregates it from the more explicit political critiques in many musicians’ lyrics. There clearly exist identitarian narratives based on local and regional tradition, but the key point that I will outline below is that there is also an acknowledgement of the inevitable breakdown or incoherency of these narratives in the present geopolitical moment. For many Pernambucan musicians, this moment is not one for despair but one in which a profound freedom can be realized which approaches pure production.

My presentation will examine the contestatory process through which musical conceptions of the popular have developed in Brazil since 1950, and how, for younger musicians like those in Pernambuco, these developments have necessitated a repoliticization of MPB (*música popular brasileira*) in recent years. MPB’s

depoliticization in the 1970s is intimately tied with state repression, developments in the (inter)national musical industry, and the related hegemonic status of the anthropophagic synthesis of identity and difference. Also critical to my analysis of protest or ideological critique in popular music is a consideration of the stereotypical, subaltern image of the Northeast as marginal yet authentic and how it has been either embraced as a weapon of resistance or transcended by these successive artistic currents. The association of authenticity with politico-economic marginality is a strong one in much of Brazilian popular music, and continues to be a bind with which contemporary Pernambucan musicians must struggle.

Trends within Northeastern intellectual life, educational institutions, and the regional music industry in the fifties and sixties contributed to artists' perception of a responsibility to address the struggles of the popular classes in their works. The University of Bahia emphasized the importance of regional cultural patrimony while introducing students to other cultural currents such as international avant-garde music. In Recife, Paulo Freire participated in the formation of the Movement of Popular Culture in 1961. The intelligentsia involved with this movement carried out research on regional folklore and made an ultimately elitist and technocratic attempt to "interpret, develop, and systematize popular culture" (cited in Teles 2000: 77). In addition, the biggest Northeastern record company, Rozenblit, had a strong orientation towards the (re)production of folkloric, more traditionally popular music. This orientation in turn had its roots in the year 1955, when the owner José Rozenblit attended the Congress of the Salvation of the Northeast, held in Recife (Teles: 71). Congresses such as this one which called for the preservation of regional popular tradition can be traced all the way back to

the Regionalist Conference of Recife, held by Gilberto Freyre in 1926. It was with this original regionalist conference that intellectuals first began to canonize and patronize a certain cultural tradition as authentically popular and Pernambucan or Northeastern (Albuquerque 1999).

Jumping forward to the sixties, one can now get a sense of the long tradition of regionalism which was influencing leftist protest singers from the Northeast. Considering that this regionalism's roots lie in the fears of Northeastern elites about subsumption under the national hegemony of the rising metropolitan Southeast, it is not surprising that regionalist music in this vein has been culturally conservative. When protest singers in the mid- to late sixties like Bahian<sup>1</sup> Geraldo Vandré critiqued the oppressiveness of the military dictatorship in their works, the influence of the old regionalism led them to employ traditional popular music as a sign of the civilian opposition's subalternity. The recourse to folkloric forms naturally involved the discursive use of stock images and characters such as the poor, exploited cowherd in "Disparada" [Gunshot], Vandré's 1966 composition for the II Festival de Música Popular Brasileira.

The adherents of the movement which would come to be known as Tropicália in 1968, including Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, maintained an ambivalent relationship with both leftist protest music and the cultural production of their native region, the Northeast. Since this region has been widely recognized as the most peripheral area in Brazil for at least the last fifty years, it is certainly ripe to be taken up as a signifier for the subalternity of the popular classes in Brazil. No doubt artists like Gil and Veloso recognized this, however they were unwilling to strategically essentialize the region and

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<sup>1</sup> Bahia is the biggest state in Northeastern Brazil. Most of the more famous Tropicalists were also Bahian.

its people for fear of the patronizing populism that could and had evolved out of past discourses of marginality in the Northeast. In 1967, Veloso stated in an interview:

“I refuse to folklorize my underdevelopment in order to compensate for technical difficulties. Look, I’m Bahian, but Bahia is not just folkloric. And Salvador is a big city. There we don’t just have acarajé but also fast-food joints and hot dogs, just like all big cities.” (Dunn: 69)

Veloso reveals here the revolution in the definition of the popular in Brazilian music which occurred in the latter half of the 1960s. While the popular was traditionally identified with folkloric, collective, non-commercial, live performance, the term *música popular brasileira*, or Brazilian popular music (MPB), would come to indicate a form of musical production much closer to the products of mass culture which had already been dubbed “pop music” in the North Atlantic (Sandroni 2002).

It is important to highlight here that one should not make the mistake of assuming MPB to be more commodified or commercial than genres typically considered folkloric and authentic, like traditional forms of *forró* and samba. These two genres, for example, had already been commodified to a great extent by the late sixties, as regional and national musics respectively. They had their own stars like Luiz Gonzaga and Cartola long before MPB canonized Chico Buarque, Veloso, Gil and others including Djavan and Milton Nascimento. In fact, *sambistas* had introduced electric guitar into Brazilian music with far less controversy than the Tropicalists’ use of the same instrument provoked in the ‘60s. And of course one must recognize that contemporaries of the Tropicalists such as Geraldo Vandré, who claimed to be representing the voice of the Northeastern people (and by extension the national opposition), were selling their product in the same music market as the Tropicalists, namely the periodic live music festivals on national and regional television.

It is worthwhile to follow this detour a bit further at this point and to discuss one of these earlier musicians in detail, to demonstrate the manner in which the dialectical thrust towards synthesis of identity and difference have been functioning in Northeastern music since at least the 1940s. Luiz Gonzaga, known as the “King of Baião,” was a nationally-famous musician and composer of the Northeastern genre of forró beginning in the latter half of the 40s. Forró is itself a musical mixture of various Northeastern styles such as *xote*, *maracatu*, baião and *coco* and incorporates European instruments like accordion and guitar, African percussion such as the large *zabumba* (drum), and sometimes also includes indigenous wind instruments. This synthesis of primarily European and African instrumentation and the third and lesser indigenous element corresponds to the national imaginary of miscegenation (*mestiçagem*) most famously theorized by Gilberto Freyre. Gonzaga himself would always perform in an ornamentalized version of the traditional costume of the Northeastern *vaqueiro* or cattleherd, an iconic figure typically considered to be of mixed racial ancestry.

Partly as a result of this performative synthesis of many different pieces of the national imaginary, Gonzaga’s famous 1947 composition “Asa Branca” has been dubbed “the true Brazilian national anthem.” Discursively, songs like this one detail the Northeastern interior or *sertão* as an imaginary space for nostalgic reflection on the traditional, rural lifestyle associated with cattle herding and small-scale sugar and cotton plantations. These rural origins are always at a remove; the internal displacement of large masses of the Northeastern poor is highlighted and often metaphorically associated with separation from a lover (a separation which was of course very real for many migrant couples). Gonzaga’s perspective is thus a thoroughly modern one, one that could



be called a synthesis of the contradictions between urban and rural, peripheral and metropolitan, and local and national spheres. Accordingly Gonzaga's forró (especially the baião, associated with a popular dance of the same name) was "a reference that help[ed] the migrant in the process of selection and reorientation of his or her perceptions, in the context of the city" (Oliveira 2000: 137, my translation). Some songs were ambivalent enough to be able to apply equally to ranch life or city life, such as "Dezessete e Setecentos" ["Seven Hundred and Seventeen"]. The composition recalls Graciliano Ramos's *Vidas Secas*, in which a vaqueiro faces difficulties in attempting to be paid fairly by his boss due to a lack of elementary mathematical education. Gonzaga and Miguel Lima's lyrics detail the complaints of a more empowered narrator who emphasizes to his boss that he has some education and he knows the exact amount that he is owed. The narrator might be a vaqueiro but could equally well be a factory worker, with the end result that the interpolation of the audience involves a synthesis of the two worlds which bracket the migrant's iterative experience. Despite the displacement and marginality faced by many poor workers, Gonzaga's work insists that they will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of without protest.

So the syntheses of identity and difference or modernity and tradition were already well-established by the time the turbulent debates of the '60s arose. In any case, Veloso's assertion that "Bahia is not just folkloric" and his refusal to folklorize underdevelopment have been identified as indicators of the Tropicalist desire to participate in an international modernity (Dunn: 69). One should also note that the statement reveals a desire to escape the Northeastern "popular" as it was understood nationally and perhaps to reformulate it. By this time the Bahian Tropicalists had

emigrated to the Southeastern metropolises of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where they came face to face with the stereotypical imaginary of the Northeast as a thoroughly impoverished and marginal region. In the cultural sphere, this marginality was transformed into an aura of authenticity that surrounded the cultural products of the putatively popular-folkloric region. But Tropicália, at least initially, was deeply critical of such markers of authentic subalternity. In a 1968 script for a TV Globo television special, Tropicalist writers Torquato Neto and José Carlos Capinan parodied the conservative, nationalist populism that could result from such assertions of folkloric authenticity:

Our political regime is one of the most perfect in history. Here perfect democracy reigns. In the area of folklore, we find a people who have no complexes, whose days are filled with sambas and macumbas. (Dunn: 128)

Glauber Rocha's 1967 film *Terra em transe*, itself both an influence upon and reflection of Tropicália, also made a similar critique with a scene in which a populist politician addresses a crowd while Afro-Brazilian musicians play a joyful samba in the background. The politician's supporters hold blank placards, emphasizing the emptiness of his discourse.

The thrust of the Tropicália protest in 1968 relied upon a rejection of the status quo conservatism on the left and right, a cultural radicalism. If the movement involved any populism, it was one which Christopher Dunn has characterized as "aesthetic," following Fredric Jameson (Dunn: 124). This aesthetic populism involved the use of *cafona* or kitsch to identify with a broader pastiche of public tastes and to critique the putatively "good taste" of both the leftist bourgeoisie and the conservative elites allied with the military government. The Tropicalists recognized that both the left and the right could essentialize traditional popular culture for their own purposes. For the leftist

opposition this entailed gaining sympathy for the downtrodden public in the interests of promoting its own often narrow agenda, while the military government was quick to celebrate the joyful creativity of the masses through nationalist cultural events like the ultimate mass opiate, *carnaval*. In fact, Dunn reveals that military authorities did not become suspicious of the Tropicalists because they perceived them as leftists, instead it was the flamboyant spectacle of their televised performances that initially attracted the state's scrutiny and eventually led to their exile as subversives in 1968. When Gil and Veloso returned from exile four years later, they continued their innovative approaches to MPB, introducing Afro-Caribbean music and so-called "modern international black music" (i.e. funk, soul, etc.) to the country and continuing to play with forms like concrete poetry not traditionally incorporated into popular music (Dunn: 130). Rarely was this conceived of as a political protest, however—for this very reason they were able to come back to Brazil during the height of the dictatorship while more doctrinaire leftist protest singers like Geraldo Vandré were still in exile.

As the 1970s progressed, the cultural liberalization which Tropicália had introduced to the country led to an opening up of the music market to multinational corporations such as Warner, RCA, Philips and Ariola. The initial critical mass of creative impetus which had led to the creation of the *música popular brasileira* niche gave way to the censorship and oppressiveness of the harshest years of military rule. By the time the government began to loosen its stranglehold on cultural production a bit in the mid- to late '70s, North American and European music were well on the way to establishing their hegemony in record sales and airtime. In spite of (or because of) military oppression, the Tropicalists had helped achieve a radical internationalization of

the Brazilian music scene, but probably not on the terms they had envisioned. As internationalization lost any ideological grounding and became merely a cultural trade imbalance favoring foreign markets, MPB itself became more and more an exclusive marketing niche for a small group of established former TV festival stars and their protégés who had obtained contracts with the major record companies. Some of these stars, including Chico Buarque, Veloso and Gil, even attempted to start an independent record label in the '70s by buying up the ailing regional production company, Rozenblit. But this attempt was quashed more or less directly by the multinationals, either through lucrative offers to some of the artists involved or pressure on the lending bank (depending upon the source one believes) (Teles: 106-8).

Pastiche, *cafona* and kitsch became the norm with rereleases of North American music and cover bands dominating the air. This presented a problem for the tropicalist aesthetic, which had relied upon its countercultural oppositionality to orient itself ideologically. The lack of ideological orientation has yet to be conclusively resolved or even really addressed by the stars of MPB, who in recent years have released a large number of "live albums" which simply reintroduce to their fans previously-recorded songs played in concert. By 1979 the Brazilian recording industry had become the sixth biggest in the world, at the same time that younger musicians were beginning to criticize the hegemony of foreign music and MPB and the related difficulty lesser-known artists faced in building audiences when there was little investment in new talent (Teles: 106). Even several years after the mangue bit music scene in Recife began to build a national fan base in 1994 and some of the bands had released albums with Sony Music in São Paulo, these musicians were still noting that the FM airwaves were lagging behind,

continuing to play primarily foreign music, MPB and to a lesser extent some more traditional genres like forró. Fred Zero Quatro, the lead singer of Mundo Livre S.A. (MLSA), noted that “Mangue motivated the public, only the radio stations didn’t change...No station acknowledged the scene” (Teles: 301).

Largely independent from these problems on the national level, Recife and Pernambucan bands position themselves in a variety of different ways vis-à-vis tradition or cultural patrimony on the one hand and modernity or local/(inter)national musical miscegenation (*mestiçagem*) on the other. Artists like Mestre Salustiano and Selma de Coco, while embracing tradition and the folkloric, seek to promote and disseminate genres like *coco*, *maracatu* and *forró* via professionally produced CDs and international tours (principally in Europe). Younger musicians and groups like Cordel de Fogo Encantado, Comadre Florzinha and Mestre Ambrósio uphold traditional regional and local music as a valuable heritage while introducing lyrical and musical innovations in the form of local hybrids, new instrumentation, and textual reflection on the status of local culture, history and music within a transnational matrix of production.

Many younger Pernambucan musicians in the present adhere more or less explicitly to the precepts of the mangue movement (AKA mangue bit), developed in the early 1990s by bands such as Chico Science & Nação Zumbi (CSNZ) and MLSA. The name mangue bit incorporates the word for swamp in apposition with a word that through an admixture of Portuguese pronunciation and English orthography has the dual meaning of a piece of digital data and a rhythmic pulse. The symbols of mangue bit include a satellite dish planted in the mud of Recife’s estuary system and a crab with brains. These binary symbols follow the “poetics of playful contradiction” first developed by Oswald

de Andrade with his metaphor of the school and the forest, intended to oppose the technologically advanced metropole with the marginalized, exploited natural world. Threatened Nature itself reflects the oppression of the popular classes who live along Recife's rivers in direct contact with this fragile ecosystem at the same time that they are tuned in to the antennae of mass communication (Santiago 2001; Dunn).

In this sense the mangue movement follows the musical and ideological example of the Tropicalists—although not just that of the better known Bahians, since there was also a contemporaneous tropicalism in Recife in the 60s (Teles). The more internationally-oriented mangue artists (such as CSNZ, Faces do Subúrbio, Lamento Negro, MLSA and DJ Dolores) incorporate musical styles from funk to hard metal, techno, and rap. For instance, CSNZ made at least five remixes in different styles (e.g. the “ragga” and “trip hop” versions on *Afrociberdélia*) of the Gilberto Gil classic “Maracatu atômico,” itself a composition in the tropicalist vein which involves the playful contradiction between the atomic age and a traditional Northeastern musical style, a style which takes on the attribute of “electronic race” (see *Millenium: Gilberto Gil*). This kind of musical “repetition in difference” also reflects the legacy of Andrade's metaphor of cannibalism or *antropofagia*. Mangue bit, also known simply as mangue, consumes, digests and renews not only international musical trends but also local and national popular music standards. But I will argue that musicians in this “new music scene” do not swallow everything whole; they often take a critical position vis-à-vis hegemonic models of syntheses between the global and the local or modernity and tradition. At the same time this critical position maintains an openness to and great respect for local traditions and older generations, as can be seen from the recent Luiz

Gonzaga tribute album (*Baião de viramundo*) featuring many of the rising stars of the new generation.

Many of the bands in the Recife mangue bit scene demonstrate what Alberto Moreiras calls a critical regionalism. Critical regionalism is

an enterprise of thinking that takes the subaltern perspective, formally defined as the perspective from the constitutive outside of hegemony, as the starting point for a critique of contemporary consciousness. Its goal is twofold: on the one hand, to continue the enterprise of deconstruction of melodramatic consciousness, whether local, regional, national, or global, understood as the false consciousness of a real situation; on the other hand, to move toward alternative, non-hegemonic local and regional histories that will seek to constitute themselves as the real consciousness of multiple and always false situations. (Moreiras 2001: 53)

The critique of melodramatic consciousness here entails a step outside of false dialectics like those I have outlined in this paper: between region and nation, nation and globe, and more specifically between a folkloric-popular periphery and an avant-guardist, cosmopolitan center. If we take, for example, “O mistério do samba,” the lead song on a recent album by MLSA, it will become clear what “a real consciousness of multiple and always false situations” looks like in the Brazilian context.

One might imagine from the title (“The Mystery of Samba”) that, like Hermano Vianna’s classic study of the same name, the song unveils some new historical explanation for that Brazilian national obsession, samba. But this is far from the case. In fact, the message of the song is precisely that *there is no mystery*. The song addresses the essence of samba directly and in a resolutely negative discourse:

Samba is not from Rio Samba is not Bahian Samba is not from the *terreiro* / Samba is not African Samba is not from the hill [favela] Samba is not from the salon / Samba is not from the avenue Samba is not carnival Samba is not from TV Samba is not from the stage Like all tradition chants...It’s all a great invention / Samba is not emergent Samba is not the school’s Samba is not fantasy Samba is not rational Samba is not of beer Samba is not the mulata’s / Samba is not the *playboy’s* [English in original] Samba is not liberal Because samba is not *chorinho* Samba is not regional Like all tradition chants...It’s all a great invention / There’s no mystery... (*Por pouco*: liner notes)

The lyrics of “O mistério do samba” confront the listener with an array of dual associations that s/he may likely have connected with samba (Rio/Bahia, salon/favela, rational/fantasy). As the song indicates, the voice of tradition could certainly negate one half of any of these apposed tropes, i.e. a traditionalist might say “Samba is not from Rio” or “Samba is not rational.” But melodramatic consciousness, following the script of identity and difference, modernity and tradition, or elite and popular, requires that the speaker join this negation with an essentialist affirmation—“Samba isn’t from Rio, it’s from Bahia.” In this example phrase, to affirm one of the poles of the dualism is to assume a false consciousness wherein one gives up all agency to the structures of power that prop up this discourse of origins. The lyrics effectively deconstruct such simplistic yet powerful statements by negating both clauses and stepping outside of the false dialectics they represent. Taken as a whole, the song represents “a real consciousness of multiple and always false situations.” The one positive statement is that “it’s all a great invention,” which demonstrates that the singer is critical of the ideological structures that undergird all of these hegemonic commonplaces about samba. This line of the lyrics is underlined by a transition from a more traditional carioca samba using *pandeiro* (hand drum) and lightly-plucked *cavaquinho* (Brazilian ukelele) to the loud entry of a brass ensemble evoking a much more blatantly “invented” or denaturalized sound.

The author of “O mistério” and lead singer of MLSA, Fred Zero Quatro, is essentially cataloguing the breakdown of popular narratives about samba, and by extension about Brazilian popular music in general. But the song also reveals the radical freedom of the popular imaginary in this moment of fragmentation, for “the moment when a narrative, any narrative breaks into its own abyss is also a moment of flight in



which subjectivity registers as noncapturable.” “[I]ndeed,” continues Moreiras, this is “a moment of pure production without positivity that will not let itself be exhaustively defined in the name of any heterogeneity” (Moreiras: 56). In another song on the same album, Fred Zero Quatro describes the standpoint of the renegade drummers (*renegados batedores*) of this new subjectivity, who produce a “demented samba.” The dangers of false dialectics still abound, “On one side the dubious and farcical resistance of the consecrated traditions, and on the other the dangerous seduction of antennae.” But taking one of these positions will not allow one to change a world in which the high executives of “mega-corporations” have

for decades been buying and subordinating congresspeople, democrats, modernists, liberals, patronizing presidential campaigns, financing government plans, arming, plotting new global consortia that are rapidly assuming control of immense and strategic state patrimonies—in the end, conquering small, medium and large emerging markets on all continents (those, those, that we once called countries). (“Batedores”)

But the lyrics emphasize that “a [renegade] drummer does not eat out of anyone’s hand” and exhort musicians of like mind to a radically deconstructive praxis: “Our combustible is sound.”

One can witness such a deconstructive praxis in the band’s approach to Luiz Gonzaga’s music on the *Baião de Viramundo* tribute album. MLSA covers the song “Dezessete Setecentos” discussed above in its original form. The lyrics in the new version are the same, however MLSA adds an interlocutor in the form of a distorted, strident electronic voice which repeats the words “seven hundred seventeen” after the lead vocalist, who is saying/singing he is owed that amount. One perhaps humorously ironic way of reading this innovation is that the vocalist is at a drive-through restaurant window and listening to a garbled repetition of his words through an outdoor speaker (evoking Caetano Veloso’s reminder that the Northeast also has fast-food joints). In this

reading, both questioner and interlocutor have become alienated from the subject of power, which itself has become very difficult to represent in the present. Meanwhile the two subaltern voices are alienated from each other via technological interference, actors in a melodrama not of their own making. Towards the end of the song the vocalist says the word *patrão*, almost as an afterthought. This word, which would certainly have evoked the rancher or plantation master in Gonzaga's original, seems to have lost all significance in the new version. It remains merely as the trace of a previous cognitive mapping of power.

I have demonstrated how the hegemonic dialectic of populism either celebrates an imminent modernity for the people or promotes uncritical worship of the traditions of the people. Previous generations of Pernambucan musicians in the 1940s and '70s were in large part unable to escape this dialectic, nor were they able to maintain Recife as their primary site of production. Thus we find ourselves today presented with a historically significant phenomenon in Pernambuco. The example of MLSA signals that the music scene in Recife has in the past decade been able to produce a subjectivity and subaltern critique in direct dialogue with national and international spheres, without finding itself captured by hegemonic identitarian dialectics or any related uncritical, anthropophagic urge. The dialectics in question are all the more powerfully seductive in an era often characterized as postmodern, even as the dualisms involved become more like antinomies which can never really be resolved in a synthesis. It must be emphasized that for music and cultural production to be critically acute or properly postmodernist, more is required than driving one of these modern dialectics of identity and difference to synthesis. Such anthropophagic resolutions of contradictions have been happening in Brazilian musical

production since at least the beginnings of samba around 1920, and were certainly visible in Luiz Gonzaga's formation of forró outlined above. In the end, what is uniquely "postmodernist" about the music scene in Pernambuco is that musicians are becoming very critical of these dialectics and attempting to sidestep them altogether, or at least to rethink them critically as irresolvable antimonies in the present historical moment.

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