BRAZILIAN PERFORMERS GO BEYOND THE STREET

The Queering and Artification of Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT

In this article we argue that Brazilian hip hop has opened up and become transgressive in terms of commodification practices, spaces of performative occupation and racial and gendered identification. Such expansion has meant not only an ideological broadening of what counts as hip hop and Black but also where such expressions are recognized as legitimate. This article focuses on the work of Emicida, Linn da Quebrada, Rico Dalasam and Jup do Bairro.

KEYWORDS: *hip hop; blackness; queer; cultural politics; artification*

Para além das ruas: rap queer e processo de artificação do hip hop brasileiro

RESUMO

Neste artigo argumentamos que a cultura *hip hop* brasileira é mais transgressora em termos de práticas mercadológicas, espaços de ocupação performativa e identificação racial e de gênero. Tal expansão significou não apenas uma ampliação ideológica do que se entende como *hip hop* e negro, mas também onde tais expressões são reconhecidas como legítimas. O artigo tem como foco os trabalhos de Emicida, Linn da quebrada, Rico Dalasam e Jup do Bairro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *hip hop; negritude; queer; políticas culturais; artificação*

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In her most recent album, *Trava línguas* [Tongue Twister], recorded in 2021, the Black trans rapper/electronic music artist Linn da Quebrada makes a subversive play on words that helps introduce the overall argument of this article. The title is more than just an allusion to a game featuring alliteration. *Trava línguas* is also a call for transformation, a forceful break of *travas* [locks] from *línguas* [languages] in the remaking of self. Rap has always been about voices and the struggle to speak, something shared by many in the transgender community, as one heterogenous group within the more general queer community, defined

as those who do not conform not only to conventional gender and sexuality norms but also to binary categorizations.

Hip hop is always in process of both self and collective reflection. For example, the US rapper Noname asks in the song refrain "y'all really thought a bitch couldn't rap, huh? Maybe this is your answer for that" ("Self", 2016). For their part, Brazilian artists Linn da Quebrada and Ventura Profana, a self-identified transgender, Black, indigenous visual artist and evangelical missionary, are more indirect and poetic in their interrogation of identity and hip hop. They chant "*se trans for mar*" (which can mean both "if trans were the sea" and "to transform oneself"), "*eu rio*" ("I am a river" / "I laugh"). The condition of transgression, taken broadly here, works its way to a moment of cleansing as the artists close the song section by singing "*contra a correnteza para me lavar*" ("going against the current/tide to cleanse myself"). Introspection is an ongoing hip hop trope.

Rappers and DJs, especially, but also graffiti artists and street dancers continually ask themselves and their audiences about boundaries: what is hip hop today? What counts and what is passé? What is "true" to the game and what is outside the lines? In some aspects, these are universal questions that artists across the globe and throughout time have pondered, but for hip hoppers in Brazil the issue is even more urgent and engaging. Hip hop, more so than contemporary genres such as country, rock, "alternative", folk, as well as other racial-ethnic kin genres like reggae and funk, is particularly dependent on dynamic technology within electronic music sound engineering and provocative identity politics. For example, rappers are constantly testing the meaning of and retooling the potential power of volatile terms such as the n-word in the US or in Brazil the negotiation of *negro*, *crioulo*, *preto*, *afro*, and *black* (left untranslated), all terms referring to Black people. Moreover, the case of Brazil creates even more complexity due to its strong global presence of Black expressive culture in the folk idioms of rearticulated "African traditions" (Bocksay, 2017). Given its relatively elevated presence in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in terms of demographics and duration — e.g., Brazil was the last nation in the Americas to abolish slavery, which happened only in 1888 —, along with long-standing practices of inter-racial sexual relationships, Brazil is, in demographic terms, the nation with the largest number of Afro-descendants. In this milieu, discourses of legitimation and authenticity take on a special, heightened quality of critique in Brazil when the topic is hip hop. Until recently, hip hop performers underscored their allegiance to the "street" and its multiple connotations as a distinct expression of Black truth, reality and identification.

In this article we focus on the current, new condition of Brazilian hip hop (Santos, 2022) and argue that hip hop has opened up to

include a wide range of expressions that expand notions of Blackness. Such expansion has meant not only an ideological broadening of what counts as hip hop and Black but also where such expressions are recognized as legitimate. Throughout the text we use the terms *queering* and *artification* to refer to such new semiotic and spatial expansion of Brazilian hip hop. Our interpretations are based on informal interviews with performers and close readings of sound and video recordings, films, fanzines and other printed material.

In the following pages, we highlight the representational paradigm of Brazilian hip hop up until the current moment so that we may contextualize the distinctive elements of contemporary artists and their aesthetic politics. In particular, we discuss the concept of "artification" by Emicida and its current articulations in fashion, as well as Blackness and sexuality via artists Jup do Bairro, Rico Dalasam and Linn da Quebrada.

EMERGENCE OF BLACKNESS AS A PARADIGM IN BRAZILIAN HIP HOP

Hip hop culture in Brazil is a form of politics and pleasure, which reveals the solidarity and the conflicts within the making of race and working-class Blackness. In São Paulo, a metropolitan area of over 20 million residents located in the southeastern region of Brazil, Blackness as a significant cultural concept emerged in the mid-20th century as massive waves of north-south domestic migration occurred to provide a labor force for the intensified industrialization project. Consequently, new forms of urbanization and racialization took place since São Paulo emerged as an economic and cultural center of Brazil and South America as a whole. In addition, the increased access to US, Caribbean, and West African social, cultural and artistic movements beginning in the late 1960s greatly influenced the manner in which Afro-Brazilians, particularly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, saw themselves and conceived of music-making.

The concept of *negritude* (treated in this article as Blackness in terms of a set of dynamic processes and practices) has taken hold in a number of diverse ways in urban Brazil over the past thirty years. The "fact of blackness", to resituate Fanon's famous phrase (1967, pp. 109-40), is remarkable in its very utterance and conceptualization considering Brazil's assimilationist society (Fontaine, 1980, p. 133). Hip hop culture, which, as we argue in this article, has widened its purview and become inclusive, stands at the center of how Black working-class persons apply *negritude* as individual attitude, collective philosophy, diasporic imagination and political strategy.

The "making of race" in hip hop culture involves becoming *consciente* [conscious] and enjoying togetherness. While in the US scholars and

rappers alike have argued that hip hop's rearticulation of the "ghetto" is a central and essential factor in the identity formation of the n-word (Kelley, 1994; McLaren, 2000), in Brazil the centrality of *periferia* [suburban outskirts] has influenced the currency of *preto*, *negro* (both meaning Black) and occasionally, *mano* [brother] as alternatives to traditional notions of Blackness in Brazil (Pardue, 2008). Part of the "making of *periferia*" involved a "blackening" of São Paulo in the mid-20th century as millions of domestic immigrants flocked to São Paulo from the Northeast. In particular, the second and third generations began to blacken the São Paulo *periferias* culturally and aesthetically through consumption and performance (ibid.).

Hip hop culture can be traced in urban Brazil starting in the early 1980s. Since the late 1960s diasporic cultural channels had widened and intensified as a result of development in informational technology, especially with regard to media sources. These included cassettes, vinyl, magazines and Hollywood movies. By 1990 Brazilian television established MTV Brasil and by 1998 dial-up internet access became relatively affordable. In the urban periphery, access was mediated predominantly by internet cafés until the first decade of the 21st century. While the first local, commercial recording of rap music in Brazil occurred in 1984 (Black Juniors, CBS), it was not until 1987 and 1988 that rappers and DJs joined forces with graffiti artists and B-boys to create a hip hop *movimento* [movement] with socially oriented objectives. Rappers in Brazil were known as *tagarelas* [babblers, yappers] in the early days, as they elaborated on the basic points of identification, e.g., "who you are and the place to be".

With regard to sound production, the early rap DJs were not yet interested in signs of local or cosmopolitan Blackness. Early Brazilian rap contained no references to the great soul or funk stars of Tim Maia, Toni Tornado, Jorge Ben Jor, Black Rio or even Gilberto Gil, who had popularized reggae and samba rock during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Brazil's early DJs and producers also did little to acknowledge international funk stars, such as James Brown or Funkadelic/Parliament. Instead, most early rap consisted of stripped-down beats from drum machines, occasional scratch sequences and unidentifiable bass lines.

Early Brazilian rap production reveals a gap in what would become a strong musical-ideological connection. By the mid-1990s hip hop sound engineers explored and fine-tuned the crucial links between sound and idea as performers explicitly "designed" (Pardue, 2008) shantytown identities and diasporic imaginations. Due to a lack of resources and technological knowledge, early Brazilian hip hop producers rarely employed melodic samples, thereby leaving the rapper to provide the primary melodic contours of any particular song through vocal rhetoric. The result was a limited presence of

musical counterpoint and an underdeveloped sense of musical and cultural signification. DJs in live performances and rap music producers in studio recording included samples as innocent hooks. For example, in "Corpo fechado" (1987) a sample of a child's toy acts as the introductory melody from which Thaíde begins his rapping. Hip hop was simply a nascent cultural form and producers treated it as, in fact, a novelty item.

In the early years of Brazilian rap music, *negritude* appeared only as an inescapable fact of self. The very utterance of *negro* was significant as these young men and women attempted to articulate experiences of marginality to a new sense of collectivity in the form of a new "hip hop movement". However, it would take time for local hip hoppers to become *informados* (informed) about what sort of identification processes and performative strategies were possible in hip hop. Thaíde and other older hip hoppers acknowledge the significance of differences in sound sampling, for example, as part of what they call *evolução* (evolution). This improvement process entails a greater knowledge of "Black" sounds and history (Pardue, 2004) and, ultimately, a move away from strategic essentialism to embrace the heterogeneity of Blackness in what we call *hip hop queering*.

In the mid-1990s Brazilian rappers demonstrated a relatively high level of consciousness symbolized in more systematic involvement with Movimento Negro Unificado [United Black Movement] (MNU), Geledés, and other Black political groups in addition to a more acute sensibility to diaspora and Pan-Africanism. Their influence was made manifest in the growing movement within hip hop culture called *posses* (borrowed from English and left untranslated meaning group or collective), many of which included references to Bantu, Hausa, Zulu, Jamaica, Negritude, X and other Pan-African symbols. Posses acted as cultural intermediaries between the neighborhood and the various levels of government. They cultivated the formation of hip hop performance groups as B-boys, rappers, DJs and graffiti artists exchanging experiences and strategizing to promote public events and effect social change in the *periferia*.

By the late 1990s, the group Racionais MC's emerged as leaders of a style that maintained consciousness but which was focused on poor, Black working-class youth. The group first appeared on the compilation vinyl release *Consciência Black* [Black Consciousness] in 1988 with two songs "Pânico na Zona Sul" [Panic on the South Side] and "Tempos difíceis" [Hard Times]. Their 1990 release *Holocausto urbano* [Urban Holocaust] and 1993 album *Raio X do Brasil* [Brazil X-ray] set the stage for their remarkable commercial success *Sobrevivendo no inferno* in 1997. The 1997 release, literally translated as "Surviving in Hell", sold more than one million copies, which is

indeed remarkable considering that Racionais MC's refused to appear on any mainstream media and did little formal promotion. The frontman of Racionais MC's Mano Brown became a *periferia* idol in part because he focused his stories on the extreme locality of shantytowns. He honed his considerable narrative skills to depict the *marginal* [delinquent] and the *crente* (literally "believer", term which refers to evangelical Christian devotees).

In addition, with the decline of posse and NGO influence, the São Paulo hip hop community began to figure race as ultimately secondary to sociogeographical realities of the *periferia*. To some extent, *periferia* and the *marginal* have always been dominant in hip hop, but during these years the *denúncia* (shantytown report of violence and poverty) became the unshakeable paradigm of hip hop narratives. Negritude was represented as part of the banal nightmare that is reality, and artists replaced a focus on Afro-centricity with brief qualifiers of discrimination, thus depicting Blackness as a mere side-effect of *o sistema* [the system].

In retrospect, one can see an internal struggle among rappers, in particular regarding the centrality of the street and the *marginal*. During the early 21st century, new artists rose to popularity with more *positivo* [positive] narratives of evangelical spirituality. Differences between these two major tendencies manifest themselves in graphic, sonic and spatial dimensions. The common ground among positive hip hoppers is the belief that denouncements of periferia daily life are not enough. They argue that hip hop needs to provide concrete solutions beginning with sharper strategies of collectivity built on education and entertainment. The point made by the "positivists" is one that continues until today and is part of the overall opening question of this text. Should hip hop be about leaving the *periferia* and the street behind in order to broaden the base? Obviously, "the periphery" is not a homogenous idea or place, as made abundantly clear in the scholarship of Andréa Guerra, Moisés Kopper, Benjamin Junge and others,[1] but for the purposes of this article, the *periferia* is an umbrella term of traditional, hegemonic symbols of representation with the genre of rap music and hip hop culture.

[1] See the dossier in *Novos Estudos*, v. 39, n. 1, Jan.-Apr. 2020, pp. 9-123.

BRAZILIAN HIP HOP: FROM THE STREETS TO THE UNIVERSITIES

The hip hop scene in Brazil has innovated in many ways, as more artists have achieved greater visibility. These processes relate to the rise of a new social and symbolic space of hip hop culture, particularly in rap, just as the musical genre goes through a social legitimation process. While hip hop scholars and performers have argued that these changes represent a repositioning of the social place of Black Brazil-

ians and those who live in the urban peripheries, some fans and critics have made the claim that hip hop continues to reinforce a "periphery authenticity", or what was discussed above as a *marginal* perspective.

If, in the past, hip hop culture expressed itself as a manifestation and social artistic and political organization of the streets, performed in alternative spaces and in pirate radio channels, today the "street" finds itself in museums, Spotify, Netflix, fashion parades, municipal theaters, TV channels, and published works by recognized editors and universities. Despite the recent authoritarian political scenario, the antiracist movements and struggles for inclusion have found a propitious environment in public and private politics. For example, recently, the Pinacoteca museum in São Paulo city hosted an exhibition with a work of two renowned artists. Entitled *Os Gêmeos: segredos* [The Twins: secrets], the exhibition highlighted the twin brothers Gustavo and Otávio Pandolfo's works, graffiti artists, who have shown their work in international museums and, just now, were able to have an exhibit in Brazil. After ten months at Pinacoteca, the exhibition moved out to the Oscar Niemeyer Museum (MON), located in Curitiba, in the state of Paraná, which is located, to the south of São Paulo. These exhibitions can be understood as an example of what sociologist Roberta Shapiro (2007) calls "artification", the process by which what was not considered art becomes art. According to the author, artification is above all a process:

> *Artification emerges not as a linear development but as a composite process, the cumulative result of concurrent trends that may be met by obstacles and contrary developments. Artification also progresses contemporaneously with other trends such as sportification, commercialisation and so on, whose advocates may alternatively compete or collaborate. […] Thinking in terms of artification is at once a research programme that challenges us to scrutinise the relationship between synchrony and diachrony in social change and an attempt to answer these questions in ways that are simultaneously practical, symbolic and contextual, in a processual perspective. It demands that we research not only how we come to call things art, and people artists, but what conditions triggered that change and what it entails.* (Shapiro, 2019, p. 266)

Moreover, Shapiro remarks that artification opens new possibilities of reaching social changes, since the members of dominated and marginalized groups, who were historically colonized and/or exploitated and excluded by "art", gain social dignity (Shapiro, 2007).

Currently in Brazil, many rappers have taken on such strategies to affirm themselves in the commodities market and, at the same time, keep the authenticity of reference signs of Black and "marginal" culture.² For example, the podcast "Mano a Mano" [Bro to Bro], broadcasted by Spotify featuring Mano Brown displays hip

[2]   Concerning rap representation in São Paulo as "street culture", "black culture", "outskirts culture", check the typology presented by Márcio Macedo (2016).

hop's new approach to broadcast media and production. In addition, it is important to remember that the lyrics of the group's 1997 recording *Sobrevivendo no inferno* have been recognized as a literary work by the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) , which has included excerpts from the lyrics on its entrance exam. Subsequently, a book was published by the elite publishing house Companhia das Letras.[3]

One might logically ask: how did this all happen? In recent years, in part due to the ethnic-racial quota system, there has been an increase of Black and Brown students in public universities. According to data from Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] (IBGE), in 2018 this category represented 50.3% of enrollment in Brazil. While not espousing a straight connection between culture dynamics and social structure, one must recognize the degree to which this context has impacted the wide range of outputs in art and academics.

Historically, hip hoppers have understood "education" as an informal process through social issues. In the case of rap, social life experiences are narrated in song form; moreover, the mastery of technology via samples and musical collage demands a social-historical perception. Hip hop presents itself as a culture that obliges youth on a global level to acquire a critical sense of their place in the world and to change their vulnerable and precarious conditions. In sum, hip hop generates institutional knowledge and cultural legitimacy to a whole generation, who, after incorporating the knowledge from the movement, have begun proposing social intervention projects as educators, artivists, curators, etc. It is precisely this authenticity that facilitates mediation and, maybe, conciliation among members and with others. According to Santos, in interview with *Portal da Fundação Oswaldo Cruz* (Fiocruz), the recent rap implications in Brazil can be evaluated, among other things,

> [by a] *perception that rap music and especially groups and artists from São Paulo have begun to impact not just their periphery colleagues, but also white middle class publics. This shows a larger circulation of rap and, equally, an increase of its legitimacy as many rappers heavily invest in "marginal speech" as a way to ensure authenticity of the product. Another important aspect is the greater thematic diversification (e.g., indigenous rap, queer rap, gospel rap). Whether or not these changes are seen in a positive light by "old school" members, it shows that rap as a musical form reaches a larger audience and achieves greater circulation than in the 1990s. This makes it possible for mainstream rappers to be heard as not just "marginal voices" but also as public intellectuals. I think that in this pandemic context many rappers' pronouncements to a diverse public make that clear.* (Chevrand; Santos, 2021, unpaged)[4]

Beyond rap-as-music, one finds recognition in areas of clothing, accessories, food and literature. The "multiplication of legitimation instances" (Shapiro, 2007) of this musical genre incorporates, over time, distinct representations about Black identities beyond the conventional social category of "Black Brazilian". On the one hand, current practices of rap consumption are susceptible to critiques of reinforcing neoliberal capitalism's hollowing out of transformational politics. On the other hand, the recognition that culture *moves* and travels brings the ambivalence and contradictions of art/culture into focus. In short, the periphery has become a *brand*, a commercial brand and also a brand of overcoming, which moves towards a utopia of Black becoming that is independent of physical and symbolic violence. Rapper Leandro de Oliveira, known as Emicida, demonstrates this process.

EMICIDA'S HIP HOP BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

Emicida's path, in particular upon consideration of the launch concert of his last album *AmarElo* [a pun that can be understood both as "yellow" and "love the bond"] (2019), located at the Municipal Theater of São Paulo, which subsequently became a documentary movie available on Netflix, may be read in terms of artification. Emicida places himself as the ideal type to comprehend the changing process of the rap scene. His artistic work and rise to relative fame corroborate the argument that rap is going through a new condition, an analytical category that synthesizes the ongoing process of legitimizing rap, characterized by: 1) digital technology impact; 2) management dynamics of artistic career; 3) increased cultural legitimacy; 4) artists' status change; 5) internationalization of Brazilian Rap; 6) expanded meanings of the rap/hip hop concept; 7) more female and LGBTQIA+ protagonists; 8) audience diversification (Santos, 2022).

The legitimacy process of Brazilian rap began in the early 1990s with successes by Thaíde and Racionais MC's, and also by the short trajectory of Sabotage (1973-2003), whose was featured in the movie *O invasor* [The Trespasser] (2001) as well as the heralded film *Carandiru* (2003). Emicida's business *ethos* is fundamental to comprehend the rap changings in Brazil in what is referred to as career professionalization. According to Felipe Oliveira Campos:

> The group which he has affiliated with looks for more artistic development and his market insertion, through the professionalization and focusing on the career, than the goal of organizing political activities by Hip Hop engagement. It is a fact, however, that some moments "belong to Hip Hop" and, in this case, he could dismiss certain artistic practices due to the weight of politics. (Campos, 2020, p. 93)

The professionalization ethic is evident since the beginning of Emicida's career. The rapper has invested with his brother in Laboratório Fantasma [Ghost Laboratory] (LAB) enterprise foundation, a mix of store, record company, branding and producer (Teperman, 2015; Santos, 2020). The LAB, established in 2009, is the materialization of Emicida's aesthetic-ideological purpose. Among the examples of the artist's consecration, we highlight the LAB's first run at São Paulo Fashion Week (SPFW).

NEW HIP HOP SPACES

LAB debuted in 2016 at the SPFW runway. This launch helps demonstrate the changes in social and symbolic spatiality in contemporary rap in Brazil. The event caused repercussions across conventional and social issues throughout Brazil. Emicida and Fióti counted on the stylist João Pimenta's support, who is acknowledged for making clothes for "real people". Their fashion show concept mixed African and Japanese references. To Emicida and Fióti, this crossover shows that: "Rap drinks from many sources, takes what it likes and creates something new with that. This is called *to sample* and everyone does this, even without noticing. We took this technique to clothes" (apud Pedroso, 2017). According to Emicida, the inspiration to create the collection was based on the legend of Yasuke, an African slave who was taken to Japan by Jesuits during the 16th century, becoming a Black samurai. In the rapper's words: "we made a mixture, not a stereotype of two cultures which I'm fascinated about. Besides, there is the fact that Brazil is a country where there are more black people out of Africa and more Asians out of Asia. So we are resignifying our history" (apud Diniz, 2016, unpaged). A week after the launch, the rapper was in Tokyo giving concerts with the Japanese band Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra, and wearing the clothes inspired by Japanese culture presented at the fashion show.

Moreover, the debut in Japan exemplifies rap's new condition in Brazil. Upon reflection about the fashion show, it becomes apparent that this space, previously occupied by a white and middle class majority, now was being occupied by the *periferia*. In an interview to *Claudia* magazine, Emicida explained: "[we] have arrived at an elite space, but we still have to be loyal to our periphery origins and to our philosophy of inclusion" (apud Pedroso, 2017). Furthermore, he declared at the runway, "*ser livre tem preço no mundo onde preto assusta*" [to be free has a price in a world where to be black is scary]; "*hoje é o dia da favela invadir o FW*" [today is the day that the slum is gonna break into the FW]; "*fiz com a passarela o que eles fizeram com a cadeia e com a favela: enchi de preto*" [I've done to the runway what they did with jail and shanty town: I filled it with black people], "*isso é história*" [this is history] (apud Pedroso, 2017).

In the video that can be seen on YouTube, another element of the supposed periphery/marginal authenticity appears.[5] After the rapper's entrance, the dark stage lights up and at its center a big screen that traverses the whole stage features pictures of *quebradas* [slums] together with a repeated clenched fist. The images dovetail with Emicidas discourse: "*hoje é dia de invadir o Fashion Week*" [today is the day to break into Fashion Week]. In the song "Yasuke (Bendito, louvado seja)", recorded just for the LAB's fashion show. Emicida located this sense:

Bendito, louvado seja
Isso é pra afastar todos os maus espíritos, sai! Axé!
Sempre foi quebra de corrente, sem brincadeira
E sua luta escondida na dança (pode pá)
É igual capoeira (é noiz)
Resistência mocada na trança
Beleza guerreira (axé)
A magia dum talo de arruda
Que vale uma floresta inteira (galhinho de arruda)
Abre o olho, maloqueiro (maloqueira)
Não dorme de toca
As pessoas são como as palavras
Só tem sentido se junto das outras
Foi sonho, foi rima, hoje é fato pra palco
Eu e você juntos somos nóiz
E nóiz que ninguém desata
(A rua é nóiz!)

[Blessed, be praised
This is to ward off all evil spirits, get out! Axé!
It's always been a current break, no kidding
And your fight hidden in the dance (you can do it)
It's like capoeira (it's us)
Resistance in the hair braid
Warrior beauty (axé)
The magic of a stalk of rue
Is worth an entire forest (rue twig)
Open your eyes, maloqueiro (crazy folk)
Be clever
People are like words
They only make sense if they are with each other
It was a dream, it was a rhyme, today is a fact for the stage
you and me together we are us
And no one can undo that [(pun:) it's a knot that no one unties]
(The street is us!)]

The verses printed on the clothes like "*I love quebrada*" and "*A rua é nóiz*" [The street is us] equally contribute to reinforce the perspective of marginal affirmation. Furthermore, the African origin word "*ubuntu*", that has already been used by Emicida for some years, also appears on the clothes and accessories during the fashion show. *Ubuntu* means harmony, humanity, and opposes hedonism and individualism. It expresses the following perspective: "I am because we are" or "I can exist just because we exist". The social meaning of the runway emerges from African resistance and the recuperation of history as well as Black culture affirmation. Emicida's strategy, on the one hand, presents a notable political intervention, as never before had a SPFW runway been occupied by so many Black and people who are considered outside the standard of conventional beauty established by a white gaze.

It is important to note that "diversity" has become a significant discourse within contemporary neoliberal capitalism. According to Nicolau Netto (2009, p. 20), diversity is inherent to the globalization process; it "reaches its apogee in our time, because in a world of fragmented relations it is capable of undertaking difference contention processes". That is to say, narratives of diversity tend to ameliorate the tensions of difference without making any progressive change. Renato Ortiz clarifies this relationship when he writes that

> It is important to realize that discourse on diversity hides other questions like inequalities. Above all, when we place ourselves into a universe where the asymmetry between countries, social class and ethnicities is unmistakable. It is unsatisfactory that the world might be simply multicultural, made by a set of "voices". It could hardly be seen as a kaleidoscope, a metaphor frequently used by many authors, an instrument that combines the colorful fragments in an arbitrary way in the function of moving the observer's eyes. The interactions between the diversities are not arbitrary. (Ortiz, 2007, p. 14)

At this point, we return to the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Walter Benjamin (1987), in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", demonstrates that the practice of "political aestheticization" was incorporated by fascism. However, what might be the contours of the reverse — "art politicization"? We ask whether or not Emicida's provocations during the São Paulo Fashion Week might contribute to a *periphery aestheticization* or a more robust *aesthetic peripheralization*.

In general terms, *periphery aestheticization* operates as an ephemeral acknowledgement of a determined social group, which has been historically excluded. Negative stereotypes shift. What used to be

devalued finds a higher symbolic value. The second term, *aesthetic peripheralization*, represents not only acknowledgement, but also taking the "effective ways" toward material and symbolic reproduction as cultural agents. Therefore, it operationalizes resources that make it possible to go beyond any mere spectacle.

Our reflection about the LAB's fashion show through these two terms makes it difficult to assess Emicida's artistic trajectory as part of the new condition of rap. There is no doubt that the rapper's design and the collective's performance at the SPFW runaway have exposed the normative exclusionary practices of this space and emboldened an ongoing process of social legitimacy of hip hop in Brazil. However, it is not without its own ambivalences. On the one hand, the intervention brings social dignity — because it provides legitimacy to groups that have been historically subordinated in socially recognized spaces. Nonetheless, the material and subjective elements of this event are held in tension for the cultural agents from the periphery. It appears that Emicida's project hovers somewhere in between *periphery aestheticization* and *aesthetic peripheralization*. Fióti and Emicida have an autonomy to create, make and spread their work without any other company's mediation. There are partnerships. In other words, the *Lab* has the effective means of production. At the same time, in many ways, they suggest a certain brand of meritocracy. For example, the lyrics of the song "Yasuke (Bendito, louvado seja)" say: "*Do topo do* rank *mais triste da* city *pro topo do palco*" [From the top of the saddest city rank to the top of the stage]. This can easily be interpreted as a form of neoliberal subjectivity, which features "generalization of competition as a new conducting rule and the company as an example subjectivization" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 17).

Given the current milieu, we suggest that despite the Lab's political intervention in the name of inclusion, there are significant concerns regarding the limitations of *ubuntu*. Can there be "harmony" when achievement is ultimately measured in terms of individualism? The combination of artist-entrepreneur seems existentially limited when it comes to radical politics. In our view, the process of *periphery aestheticization* moving towards an *aesthetic peripheralization* must proliferate and spread to other spaces of cultural politics beyond the catwalks.

QUEERING HIP HOP

There is a common saying among Brazilians in general and among Brazilian hip hoppers in particular that the art or movement "has evolved". The expression includes a certain teleology confirming that there is a natural improvement of hip hop over time. Hip hoppers

have tried to capitalize on the implicit unity in "evolutionary" discourses, i.e., we are all on the same page when it comes to hip hop and where lyrics, styles and sound production are headed. The concept of "queer" (defined as non-conforming to binary notions of gender and sexuality) complicates this idea, and while some believe that queering hip hop fragments the movements and detracts from its power and persuasion, ultimately these variable expressions serve to better represent hip hop and advocate for more meaningful inclusion. As Taylor reminds us, "queerness" is best thought of as "a social position or act that upends categories of race, gender, and sexuality. In short, attitudes about sexuality, and especially sexual 'deviance,' have frequently been married to attitudes about blackness" (Taylor, 2018, p. 62). Queering hip hop recuperates agency in the articulation of sexuality and thus opens up the semantic spectrum of what Blackness can potentially mean. Moreover, the potential transformative impact on persistent toxic masculinity is perhaps most compelling in the rap/hip hop scene. Hall and Jagose's assessment of Ahmed's concept of "queer feelings" is apropos: "it is rather in the moment of queer's proximity to (hetero) normativity — the uncomfortable fit of queer bodies to heteronormative spaces — that queer can be at its most transformative" (Hall; Jagose, 2012, p. 422). More specific to the Brazilian case, performers queer the iconic street, the jagged asphalt of the urban periphery, and bend it, bifurcate and multiply the way towards knowledge and self/collective realization. The recently formed artist collective Quebrada Queer [Queer Slum] embodies this idea as literally "*quebrada*" means broken, hence the term implies a fragmentation or refusal of convention.

Before discussing a selection of artists who are moving the needle, a brief scholarly literature review is necessary. In Brazil, while several research nuclei have emerged working towards greater theoretical and empirical engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues, the medium of hip hop culture has been underrepresented. Tanya Saunders, a US scholar who has conducted fieldwork mostly in Cuba and also in Brazil, has written cogently about the presence and work of Black, lesbian hip hop collectives in Cuba, such as Las Krudas Cubensi, and Brazilian hip hop activists like Lú Afrobreak, as suggestive of a transnational turn in hip hop feminism (Saunders, 2016; 2017). Saraiva, in his short text on the provocations of queer theory and performance on "mainstream" Brazilian rap, reminds us that icons such as Racionais MC's and Criolo deleted or changed male chauvinist or homophobic lyrics of early songs from their repertoire (Saraiva, 2021, pp. 133-4). This is significant given the generally high level of territorialism, sexism and egocentrism among rappers.

Moreover, the gradual queering of Brazilian hip hop owes part of its success to the popularization of decolonial thought. This is true not only in Brazil, but throughout Latin America and the Global North. That homophobia is an expression of colonial thought rooted in hierarchical rationalization of difference exercised through oppression has become increasingly important in contemporary hip hop. Scholars such as bell hooks (1990) have become common references among hip hop activists to open up the spectrum of what is Black masculinity and femininity and the politics of representation, most dramatically performed through musical speech, that is, rap.

> *The subject speaks from a perspective based on her/his social position, which becomes a political body. This process of understanding has been fundamental in deepening the debate with regard to structural oppression in society. The new voices of hip-hop, such as Quebrada Queer, Monna Brutal, Linn da Quebrada, Jotta Robson, Rimas e melodias, DJ Mina Simone, NegaNativa, the graffiti crew Teta Atoa, among others, have been subverting these structures and bringing new visibility to masculinities, femininities, gender and sex.* (Saraiva, 2021, p. 137)

Queering hip hop is also about sexual desire, another canonical theme of rap and hip hop since the beginning. Just as so many cishet males have bragged about heteronormative sex as a mark of empowerment, literal physicality as control, most queer hip hop/electronic artists foreground sex as a domain to demand recognition. In the song "*Tomara*", Linn da Quebrada and feature artist David Sabbag are explicit about bodily pleasures. In the chorus of the song Linn plays with the verb *tomar* (to take, or, in more sexual contexts, a reference to bodily penetration) and its future tense conjugation of *tomará* [will be penetrated] along with the colloquial term *tomara* (I hope this happens, an expression of conditionality). One could certainly argue that they are interrogating what queer theorists and activists, such as Sara Ahmed, have called the "orientation of the pleasure economy" — i.e., pleasure is only recognized as legitimate based on its target.

The claim to be capable and empowered enough to control one's representation has always been central to rap and hip hop. In the music-video collaboration "All you need is love", Jup do Bairro, Linn da Quebrada and Rico Dalasam each take a verse and spin out from this generic catch phrase. While their styles and vocal timbres vary, what unifies the song beyond the curious mixture of electronic ambient beats and synths with a hint of *bloco afro* percussion is the visual presentation of each artist. The background moves from one classic historical image to another, from Egyptian pyramids (Jup) to a sequence of what appears to be a Greek or Roman statues (Rico

and Linn). Juxtaposed against the sepia, earth tones of dust and ruin, framed by flaming torches, all indicating deep history and ancient "civilization" (not located at all in Brazil), each artist holds up a futuristic digital portal that projects the face under a blue neon hue with a focus on the crystal-clear enunciation of each word of sentiment, vulnerability and desire. In short, the visual contrast of sepia-neon highlights the artists' control over self and message. The song ultimately invokes power within an overall discourse of giving, not domination.[6]

The video recalls a powerful passage in Jefferson Tenório's recent novel *O avesso da pele* (literally, "The other/under side of the skin"). The book is a series of memories written by a son for his recently deceased father. Negritude as a conscious formation emerges in various scenes throughout the book, and at one point, Pedro, the narrator, recalls a conversation with his father when he was nine years old:

> You always said that Black folks had to fight, because the white world had taken almost everything that was left over from us. We must preserve the flip side (the avesso), you told me. Preserve that which no one sees. It doesn't take long and skin color goes across the whole body and it determines our way of being in the world. No matter how much your life is measured by skin color, no matter how much your attitudes and ways of life are under this domain, you, somehow, must preserve something that doesn't fit into that, you got me? So, among the muscles, organs and veins there is a place that is just yours, isolated and unique. And it is in this place that your sensitivity and affection are settled. And these affections are what keep us alive. (Tenório, 2020, p. 61)

It is this negotiation of vulnerability and protective security that the hip hop queering invokes. In this sense, as contemporary artists expand the purview of hip hop and Blackness and, by extension, Brazilian popular culture, they are sensitive to an inner truth of self that is under attack by mainstream thought and racist, homophobic terror. The queering of hip hop complements the current embrace of vulnerability in global pop through genres such as Emo and Soundcloud rappers, such as Lil' Yachty and Juice WRLD, new soul artists such as Frank Ocean, and mixed-genre artists such as Brockhampton. In paralell with the work of scholars, including hooks (2003), Neal (2013), Rudrow (2019), and Williams (2017), it has become more commonplace in hip hop to question conventional expressions of masculinity and to accept vulnerability as a state of self-knowledge and not necessarily as shame or weakness. The video "All you need is love" speaks directly to this perception.

[6] Jup do Bairro describes empowerment through a discourse of solidarity: "We're constantly getting knocked down through bad pay, unnecessary bureaucracy and people who question our skills", she explains. "But when we arrive together, it makes everything easier". Available at: ‹https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/12/brazil-black-trans-musicians-linn-da-quebrada-jup-do-bairro-badsista›. Accessed on: Jul. 18, 2023.

CONCLUSION

As occurred in many centers of global hip hop production, Brazilian performers and fans, during the late 20th century, practiced, and in some cases still do, a strategic essentialism of cultural politics. While rappers expressed "consciousness" that included elements such as the Afro-Brazilian sounds of the *berimbau*, candomblé percussion, and the political rhetoric of Afro-centrism, the paradigm of Brazilian rap and Blackness up until the mid-2000s was limited for the most part to a narrow sense of masculinity and street politics. This was indeed important in the early period of legitimation, especially due to the massive influence Brazilian musical and cultural genres, such as samba, have on people's tastes and affinities. Reports of police violence and racism contextualized within complex realities of the urban periphery continue to be an essential part of hip hop culture and especially of rap music. However, over the past decade, with the rise of artists like Emicida, featured in this chapter, hip hop has expanded and begun to occupy new territories, e.g., fashion show runways. Moreover, the increasing number of LGBTQIA+ performers, who have embraced and innovated rap and afro-electronic music, stretch conceptions of gender and sexuality as part of a general queering of popular culture and an opening up of everyday dialogues around individual and collective identification.

Although it may seem surprising, given the oversaturation of misogynist rappers on mainstream music platforms, it has been precisely (some) Black rappers who have been at the vanguard of a movement to articulate cultural entrepreneurship with progressive identity politics, what we have referred to as the *artification* and *queering* of Brazilian hip hop. Such provocations, to be open, brash, and literally be "trans" and move across conventional borders of genre and gender (in Portuguese, curiously, these two terms are represented by the single word "*gênero*"), occurred during the most repressive and violent regime in Republican Brazilian history, one that governed through explicit white supremacy and homophobia. And, although this statement in the past tense due to the recent regime change in the presidency of Brazil, many elected governors, including the governor of São Paulo State (home of Brazilian hip hop and most contemporary queer electronic music), still maintain the orientation that the police can kill non-white, non gender conforming people with impunity (ANTRA, 2020; Carneiro, 2022; Stabile; Giancola; Arcoverde, 2023). Even though we have flagged potential traps of neoliberal Black capitalism evident in some rap projects, the current Brazilian rap and hip hop scene is indeed remarkable. And, to be "conscious" and fair, we have only scratched the surface in this essay.

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Both authors contributed theoretical and empirical sections to the text and collaborated on the overall frame.

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