Afro-Cosmopolitanisms

Discourses on Race and Urban Identities in Brazilian Hip Hop

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Abstract *Hip hop is a cultural practice in which Black youth in Brazil's working-class, urban communities have explored and expressed their lived experiences. For this chapter, I will examine how contemporary hip hoppers have developed an urban cosmopolitanism characterized by a Black aesthetic rooted in a working-class ethos that responds to the racial discrimination and social marginalization they experience. These hip hoppers, in particular during the 2010s and 2020s, incorporate expressions of Blackness into their work as they seek to not only publicly denounce racial and class prejudices, but espouse new forms of Black pride: they call upon the American notion of the ghetto to espouse a Black urban cultural identity rooted in their lived experiences in the* favelas *(slums) and* periferias *(working-class outskirts); they frequently reference Afro-diasporic historical figures and Black pop culture; and they follow in the practice of Afro-Brazilian cultural productions from previous generations by calling upon African-based cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions as a way to celebrate their ethnic heritage. Ultimately, this newer generation of Brazilian hip hop problematizes how Blackness has been minimized and marginalized in Brazil through meta-narratives like racial democracy by situating itself within a global Black urban cultural practice.*

On May 13, 2012, Afro-Brazilian rapper Emicida was arrested in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte at the conclusion of his show. He sent out a tweet regarding the incident stating that "I was arrested for disrespect to authority after a show in BH [Belo Horizonte] due to the song 'Dedo na ferida' [Finger in the Wound]" (@emicida: 2012). The song was dedicated to the victims of the *favelas* (slums or shantytowns) of Moinho, Pinheirinho, Cracolândia, Rio dos Macacos, and Alcântara (the majority of whom are Afro-descendant and working class) who were displaced by violent police action in São Paulo. A spokesperson for the military police claimed Emicida was arrested for inciting the public to make obscene gestures to the police who were policing the event as well as politicians. Emicida was eventually released the next day; however, the incident along with the song at the center of the controversy—which was released on Emicida's blog in March of that same year—speaks to larger power dynamics related to race and social class imbued within Brazilian society. The rap song and the police's violent reaction to it, in a way reveal what anthropologist João Vargas identifies as the hyperconsciousness of race, in which Brazilians and the Brazilian state go to great lengths to repeatedly deny the central role race has played in the country's social formation even though ideologies like racial democracy[1] have been used to create the myth of harmonious social relations between different races and social classes (2005: 15). Emicida's

1 Racial democracy was an idea developed during the 20th century to describe racial relations in Brazil. It was advanced by scholars, in particular Gilberto Freyre, who wrote about racial formations in Brazil in his 1933 book *Casa Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves). The idea of racial democracy is rooted in the notion that Brazil is beyond racism and racial discrimination due to the mixing of different races and ethnic groups throughout its history. Contemporary scholars have pointed to the problems of racial democracy in that state apparatuses have used this ideology to argue that while other forms of discrimination may exist, racism is not an issue for Brazilian society, thereby making it difficult for individuals and organizations to effectively address problems to do with racism in civil society. For additional analysis on the relationship between race and national identity in Brazil, see Thomas Skidmore's seminal work *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (1992).

song and performance speak to how Brazilian rap is disrupting these social norms by addressing issues relating to racism and inequality in a direct manner by evoking Afrocentric cultural traditions and histories that create a Black identity not limited to the dictates of hegemonic cultural norms that have a vested interest in maintaining existent racial and social hierarchies.

Emicida's body of work represents a larger trend taking place among certain sectors of contemporary Brazilian rap in the 21st century, namely achieving commercial success while staying committed to an Afrocentric aesthetic that situates it within the larger African diaspora both within and beyond Brazil. He, along with other contemporary Brazilian rappers like Baco Exu do Blues, Rincon Sapiência, Drik Barbosa, Tássia Reis, and BK, compose raps that center the Black experience in Brazil by focusing on issues that range from racism, state violence, and social inequality to topics that celebrate the importance of their African ancestry. Like the Golden Age of hip hop in the United States (mid-1980s to early, mid-1990s),[2] they are currently part of the mainstream hip-hop scene in Brazil but continue to experiment with different rhythms and frequently use rap as an artistic and poetic medium that addresses important social issues and cultural traditions related to Afro-Brazilian communities through an Afrocentric lens.

Hip hop has a long history in Brazil, going back to the early 1980s and changing through different phases during the last thirty-five years. Because Brazil has the largest Afro-descendant population outside of Africa, hip hop has always been framed by concerns with racial inequality and reaffirming pride in one's ethnic identity. Hip hop has been a space where Afro-descendant youth in Brazil's working-class, urban communities have been afforded the opportunity to explore and express their experiences as marginalized citizens. One of the foremost scholars on Brazilian hip hop, Derek Pardue, has observed how this

2 See Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994) and Imani Perry's *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (2004) for a more detailed analysis of the social and cultural impact of rap during the Golden Age era in the United States.

musical genre and cultural practice has brought race to the forefront in Brazil through the categorization of what he views as the four phases of *negritude*[3] in Brazilian hip hop (2011: 98). For this chapter, I will be examining how hip hoppers that have emerged during the fourth phase (1999–present), which is characterized by a Black aesthetic rooted in a working-class ethos, employ a dialectical response to the racial discrimination and social marginalization they experience (Pardue 2011: 115–16). I would even argue that there is a fifth stage, which combines Afro-Brazilian roots, rhythms and references to other Afro-diasporic icons, images, and new forms of rap like trap with a strong political message that now has commercial success through self-created recording labels.[4] These hip hoppers, in particular during the 2010s and early 2020s, incorporate what I observe as three key types of expressions of *negritude*, or Blackness, into their work as they seek to not only publicly denounce racial prejudices, but espouse new forms of Black pride: they call upon the image of the American Black ghetto as a way to address poverty and social inequity in Brazil's major cities; they reference key historical figures from the African diaspora and Black American pop culture, which they have developed into what I label as an urban Afro-cosmopolitanism; and they follow in the practice of Afro-Brazilian cultural productions from previous generations by calling upon African-

3 Derek Pardue argues that there are four moments of rap music in Brazil tied to discourses on *negritude*, or Blackness: The first takes place from 1987 to 1992 and promotes a *união* (unity) ideology. The second takes place between 1992 and 1996 and focuses on using a resistant Afro-Brazilian ideology, which generates a *negritude* discourse in working-class Black communities. The third takes place from 1996 to 1999 and shifts to a marginal aesthetic with narratives about *periferia* (urban periphery) life. Moment four takes place between 1999 and the present, in which a tension between *periferia* narratives and *negritude* ideology can be found in Brazilian rap.

4 Emicida created his own record label, Laboratório Fantasma (Ghost Lab), in collaboration with his family. Baco Exu do Blues also created his own label, 999, to increase the representation of rappers from the Brazilian state of Bahia. Rincon Sapiência has the label MGoma, which is a reference to the term *ngoma*, which are musical instruments used by the Bantu peoples in Brazil. The term derives from the Kongo word for drum.

based religious and spiritual traditions to situate rap and hip hop within the larger trajectory of Afro-Brazilian culture and history. Ultimately, the dynamic nature of how this new generation of Brazilian rappers construct their identity comes about through political rhetoric, which problematizes how Blackness has been minimized and demonized in Brazil through meta-narratives like racial democracy and references to Afro-Brazilian traditions that ultimately situate themselves within a larger, global Black tradition.

In this chapter, I will be examining the body of work of two rappers who have emerged as key players in the Brazilian hip-hop scene during this fifth phase, and who embody these more complex constructs of Blackness in Brazil: Baco Exu do Blues and Emicida. Born Diogo Álvaro Ferreira Moncorvo, his stage name Baco Exu do Blues contains several references to Black culture. Exu is an *orixá* (deity in Afro-Brazilian religions), who is the messenger that communicates with humans on behalf of the other *orixás* and opens paths for humans. Blues refers to the African American musical tradition, which always interested Baco due to its history and mythology. He has become a leader of the hip-hop scene in his hometown of Salvador, Brazil's fourth-largest city, which is known as *Roma Negra*, or Black Rome, for having a population that is over 80 percent Black. His focus on promoting rap music from Salvador and other areas of Brazil's Northeast region can be seen in the creation of his music label, 999, and in one of his first recorded songs, "Sulicídio" (Southicide), which criticizes how Brazilian rap has historically been concentrated in the Southeast region in cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Emicida is the stage name for Leandro Roque de Oliveira, a rapper from São Paulo's urban periphery. His name combines the words MC and homicide in reference to his ability to destroy his opponents in MC battles when he was an up-and-coming young rapper. He also has his own record label, Laboratório Fantasma, which produces not only his music but other rappers from São Paulo. The commercial success of both Baco Exu do Blues and Emicida via their own labels has allowed them to maintain a strong focus on themes in their rap music that center the experiences of Afro-Brazilians. However, before examining the three key elements of how they construct an Afrocentric aesthetic through rap, it

is important to provide some historical context to better understand the racial dynamics, political tensions, and hip-hop formations that have occurred in Brazil during the last four decades.

Historical and Political Context of Brazilian Hip Hop

Hip hop's emergence in Brazil can be traced back to the rise of Black soul and power movements in major cities like São Paulo, Salvador, and Rio de Janeiro in the late 1960s, which were influenced by the transnational flow of Black music from abroad. Because of the limited economic opportunities and the political repression of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1964–85, Afro-Brazilians organized informal parties, which resulted in the development of a nightclub circuit, particularly in São Paulo (Pardue 2011: 36). These dance parties were known as *bailes black* (Black dances) where sound system teams would play international Black music, primarily funk and soul music from the United States (Santos 2016: 167). It was common for thousands of people to show up for a *baile black*. One of the most well-known sound system teams, ChicShow, would organize some of the largest *bailes black* in Brazil at the time, including one where James Brown performed in 1978 (Santos 2016: 167). These gatherings became important spaces for the circulation of not only Black music, but the introduction of ideas related to Black Power consciousness. Ideas by Black writers like Angela Davis and Malcolm X in the US, images of Black celebrities both in Brazil and abroad, and even film scenes with African Americans were projected at *bailes black*, thereby sharing information about Black pride movements throughout the African diaspora that instilled a sense of Black pride among participants (Santos 2016: 168). The impact of Black consciousness can be observed with the sound system teams as they took on names like Black Power, Zimbabwe, Soul Grand Prix, and *Atabaque*[5] to reflect an Afrocentric positioning.

5 *Atabaque* is a drum used to maintain the rhythm for the music and singing performed at a *roda*, or circle of practitioners of *capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian martial art.

The circulation and commercialization of rap in Brazil was due to the sound systems that provided a space for it in the nightclubs. The nightclubs that initially hosted the *baile blacks* began to give space and time for rap music and break dancing. Brazilian sound teams that hosted *bailes black* provided opportunities for local MCs to perform as well. Derek Pardue noted that one of the most well-known sound system teams, Chic Show, "was the first crew to explicitly incorporate a time slot for rap during the dance parties called the rap club (*clube do rap*)" (2011: 36). And some of these sound teams, like Zimbabwe, also proved key in producing some of the foundational rap records of the late 1980s and early 1990s, including one of most important early rap compilations: *Consciência Black* (1989), which included songs by Racionais MCs, one of the most important rap groups of all time in Brazil (Pardue 2011: 37).

The introduction and circulation of Black music from abroad, including rap, coincided with the rise of the Black political movement in Brazil during the 1970s. The late 1970s and early 1980s in Brazil were known as the *Abertura* (opening) as the country transitioned from a military dictatorship to a democratically elected government. During this time, Black political groups like the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (Unified Black Movement) became prominent in addressing institutional racism. Rappers and posses mirrored these political movements by narrating in their music the everyday problems impacting their communities (Weller 2011; Pardue 2011).

This political militancy can be seen in the early albums of Brazilian hip hop, in particular with Racionais MCs. The 1989 album *Consciência Black* (Black Consciousness) in which they contributed two songs, echoes the *bailes black* of the 1970s and early 1980s that mimicked African American funk, soul, and rap with names like Grandmaster Rap Junior, Criminal Master, Sharylane, and Frank. In 1990, Racionais MCs released their first album, *Holocausto Urbano* (Urban Holocaust), which focused heavily on a militant aesthetic, addressing the stark realities of living in São Paulo's urban periphery. Their focus was on using rap as a political tool, and they did not want to mix in Brazilian rhythms or focus on images of celebration at a time when violence and poverty were negatively impacting their communities. This tension between a focus on the harsh life of

the urban periphery and the privileging of an Afrocentric lens continued through the 1990s until the turn of the 21st century, when the fourth phase as defined by Derek Pardue combined the narratives of urban life with a *negritude* ideology (2011: 115).

Emicida and Baco Exu do Blues build on this long tradition in Brazilian hip hop of addressing social inequality while centering Black culture. Both artists frequently produce songs that address the realities of living in *favelas*[6] and urban peripheries (state violence, racism, social inequality) juxtaposed with a rhetoric that calls upon their African ancestry and rich cultural traditions. They both created their own record labels to not only produce their own music, but identify and highlight other Black rappers, visual artists, and writers. They see themselves not only as rap artists, but as cultural producers of Black art, music, and literature. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is to examine how their rap music reflects a larger trend in contemporary Brazilian hip hop of creating dynamic and complex constructs of Black identity in Brazil.

Ghetto/Gueto

The first of the three Afrocentric expressions that I categorize in Emicida and Baco Exu do Blues's work, the adoption of the term *gueto*, has to do with publicly denouncing racial prejudices and social inequity. Jennifer Roth-Gordon, in her study of everyday language in urban Brazil in relation to race notes that "the globalization of hip-hop culture has made urban space particularly salient, and the ghetto (or the 'hood') is arguably one of US hip hop's most visible exports, iconically linking Blackness to urban space" (Roth-Gordon 2009: 65). One way in which urban youth do this is by renaming buildings after the boroughs of New York City. In the

6 *Favelas* are informal, working-class communities that started to build up in Brazil's major cities during the 20th century as people were displaced from city centers and others migrated from Northeast Brazil to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These communities historically have experienced income inequality and state violence.

case of rappers, they adopt a language that creates a narrative that mimics the experiences of the Black American ghetto to highlight the state violence that Afro-Brazilians from marginalized communities experience.

Returning to Emicida's song introduced in the chapter's introduction, "Dedo na ferida" (Finger in the Wound), I examine how his use of language tied to the ghetto references the displacement of predominately Black and Brown communities and calls upon the legacy of slavery to critique the state's continued oppression of these communities. The song starts with Emicida dedicating it to "the victims of Moinho, Pinheirinho, Cracolândia, Rio dos Macacos, and Alcântara and all the *quebradas* devasted by greed." Meanwhile, the music video displays clips of actual residents from these communities and police in riot gear attempting to displace them. Emicida's *quebrada*, which is equivalent to the term "the hood" in American English, is a word commonly used by rappers, artists, and everyday residents from *favelas* and *periferias* in Brazil's major cities. While it is meant to evoke an urban space that has experienced social marginalization, the term can also be used as a form of pride in which the user of the word indexes their community origin.

The first stanza of the song addresses how residents of contemporary *quebradas* are being displaced due to larger economic interests valued by the state and property development companies and have no political power to stop the destruction of their communities:

Vi condomínios rasgarem mananciais	I saw condominiums tear up springs
A mando de quem fala de	Under the command of who speaks
deus e age como satanás	of God but acts like Satan
(Uma lei) quem pode menos, chora mais,	(A law) who has less, sobs more,
Corre do gás, luta, more, equanto	Run from the gas, fight, die, while
o sangue corre	the blood flows
É nosso sangue nobre, que a pele	It's our noble blood, that our skin
cobre,	covers,

Tamo no corre, dias melhores,	We're in the daily grind, better days,
sem lobby	no lobbyists
Hei, pequenina, não chore	Hey, little one, don't cry
TV cancerigena,	Carcinogen TV,
Aplaude prédio em cemitério	Applaud for the building on the
indígena	indigenous cemetery
Auschwitz ou gueto? índio ou preto?	Auschwitz or ghetto? Indian or
preto?	Black?[7]
(Emicida 2012)	

"Tear up springs" refers to environmental and social impacts of city expansion, specifically gated communities (known in Brazilian Portuguese as *condomínio fechado*) being developed in recent years in the suburbs of São Paulo. The suburbs have historically been populated by working-class communities, but upper-middle-class and wealthy residents have looked to the outskirts as a place where they can create planned communities that are far from what they view as urban problems like traffic congestion and crime. However, these new real estate developments urbanize previously natural areas and displace poor communities that are forcibly removed from their homes by the police, which Emicida comments on when these residents must "run from the gas, fight, die." He also criticizes the hypocrisy of politicians, in particular evangelical politicians who have gained political power in recent years in Brazil and frequently invoke God in their campaigns but support the passage of laws that favor these condominium and shopping development projects to the detriment of *favela* residents. This difference in treatment of Brazilian citizens based on class, race, and location (*periferia* and *favela*) has a long history in Brazil, especially in São Paulo, from the later half of the 20th century to the present (Holston 2008).

7 All translations of lyrics to English are completed by the author, Eliseo Jacob.

"Noble blood" evokes the long history of resistance by Afro-Brazilians fighting against the necropolitical state that has manifested itself through unjust laws initiated during the colonial period with slavery to the outlawing of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices at the turn of the 20th century and the current economic exploitation, and state sanctioned violence in the urban periphery of São Paulo. "Auschwitz or ghetto" is a powerful image comparing the *favelas* to the concentration camps and Black American ghettos. Emicida highlights what many Afro-Brazilian activists and scholars have observed: that there is a Black genocide taking place in contemporary Brazil through poor living conditions and police violence. Jaime Alves refers to this genocide in São Paulo's urban periphery as the double negation of Afro-Brazilians as citizens (person) and as humans (individual) (2014: 11–12).

Baco Exu do Blues' song "Tropa do Babu" echoes Emicida's commentary on the ghetto as a metonym of Black genocide in Brazil. The song was included on his third album, *Não tem Bacanal na Quarentena* (There's no Bacchanalia in Quarantine), which was released during the early months of the pandemic.[8] "Tropa de Babu," or Babu's Crew, refers to Afro-Brazilian singer and actor Babu Santana, who has played an important role in promoting Black musicians and artists. Babu was born and raised in the *favela* Morro do Vidigal (Vidigal Hill),[9] which overlooks Ipanema beach in

8 The album was originally titled *Bacanal* (Bacchanalia), but with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, it was updated to reflect the drastic changes occurring in the world. All the beats used in the songs and the guest artists who participated in the album were produced virtually due to the pandemic.

9 Many *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro are located on hills and mountainsides, thereby including the word *morro* (hill) in the community's name like *Morro do Vidigal* is common. In the Zona Sul (South Zone) of Rio de Janeiro, there is a stark class divide between the upper-class communities in neighborhoods like Copacabana and Ipanema and the *favela* residents who live in the hills above them. There is a common expression in Brazilian Portuguese that refers to the geographic divide, which emphasizes the social inequality between the rich and poor: *do morro* (from the hill) and *do asfalto* (from the asphalt).

the south zone of Rio de Janeiro. He began his acting career with the theater group, Nós do Morro (Us from the Hill), a *favela*-based company and school founded in 1986 in the *favela* where he grew up. The song title expresses a sense of solidarity among young Black men throughout Brazil who are linked to Babu due to their experiences of being raised in the *favela*—Brazil's equivalent of the ghetto. Babu has also starred in multiple Brazilian films and television series with narratives tied to the *favela* and urban periphery, including the films *City of God* (2002), *Something in the Air* (2002), *City of Men* (2007), *Maré, Our Story of Love* (2008) and the series *City of Men* (2002), *Mais X Favela* (2011–14), *I Love Paraisópolis* (2015), and *Os Suburbanos* (2015–18). Therefore, by referencing him as the namesake of the group, Baco Exu do Blues is making it clear that this is a crew from Brazil's ghettos.

The refrain, which opens the song, and the first stanza reiterate a sense of pride in being from the ghetto and engaging in politics of resistance to outside social and economic forces that attempt to silence the voices of young Black men from historically marginalized communities in Brazil:

Todos meus manos são preto	All my homies are Black
Tropa do Babu, tudo preto	Babu's Crew, all Black
Mato esses hippies sem medo	I kill those hippies without fear
Olha, meu irmão, vim do gueto	Look here brother, I'm from the ghetto
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Não me desculpe, negrão mó rude	I don't apologize, super rude Black dude
Vignado amigos, Boyz In The Hood	Avenging friends, Boyz in the Hood
Tipo Eazy-E, Doctor Dre e Ice Cube	Like Eazy-E, Dr. Dre and Ice Cube
999, pretos com attitude	999, Blacks with attitude
Tá na minha cidade e me odeia,	You're in my city and hate me,
então se mude	so leave
(Baco Exu do Blues 2020)	

"I kill hippies" refers to the foreigners that visit and inhabit Salvador. Despite Salvador being a predominately Black city, Afro-Brazilians have had little political and economic power there, commonly seen as a population meant to project Brazil's cordial diversity in the cultural tourism industry by propping up Salvador as the "capital of happiness," despite being one of the most violent cities in Brazil for Black youth (Smith 2016: 3–4). The references to the movie *Boyz in the Hood* (1991) and the members of the rap group NWA, several of whom are originally from Compton and South Central Los Angeles, point to the impact of the image of the Black American ghetto in the imaginary of Black youth from Brazil's *favelas* and urban peripheries. Baco mimics NWA's confrontational positionality by not apologizing for not having a deferential attitude.

Baco Exu do Blues echoes the issue of Black genocide in Brazil that Emicida addresses in his songs. He concludes the song by using Babu's words to discuss the state violence that takes place in the *favelas*:

O mundo passa por cada coisa	The world has experienced everything
Você ainda se surpreende com o mundo?	You still are surprised by the world?
O quê que foi o nazismo? O quê que foi o nazismo?	What was Nazism? What was Nazism?
O quê que foi a escravidão?	What was slavery?
Voce ainda se espanta com o mundo?	You still are surprised by the world?
O quê que são as favelas?	What are favelas?
E você ainda se espanta com o mundo?	And you still are surprised by the world?
Não se espante! Segure na sua convicção	Don't be shocked! Be firm in your convictions
Que o mundo precisa de pessoas com convicções	That the world needs people with convictions
(Baco Exu do Blues 2020)	

The final verse is an excerpt from an interview Babu gave where he was commenting on the legacy of genocide in Brazil, the Black Atlantic, and globally. He links what has been taking place in the *favelas* to larger scale mass genocide during the Transatlantic slave trade and the Jewish Holocaust during World War II. How he concludes his response is important in that he recognizes that genocide is a never-ending cycle, and for it to end we need people to not be silent in the face of such violence.

Afro-Cosmopolitanisms in Brazil

The second characteristic that defines this generation of current rappers and hip hoppers has to do with the creation of an Afro-cosmopolitanism in which they reference key historical and political figures from the African diaspora, call upon African American pop culture and musical traditions, and demonstrate a deep understanding of global Black political movements. I use the term Afro-cosmopolitanism because it points to these rappers being conscious of shared experiences and histories with other communities, both within Brazil and abroad, which are a part of the larger African diaspora.[10] They are developing narratives in their raps that are not confined to the traditional, Eurocentric forms of cosmopolitanism, but instead focus on alternative forms of cross-cultural exchange, namely Afrocentric in nature, which illustrate the development of a diasporic citizenship that goes beyond the confines of national borders (Koshy 2011: 594).

Emicida makes conscious decisions in the way he frames his songs to make them connect to a larger body of knowledge tied to the African diaspora. He accomplishes his goal through the composition of song titles that reference key historical Black figures, thereby exposing listeners to content related to global Black history. The figures he references

10 In the article "Funk and Hip-Hop Transculture: Cultural Conciliation and Racial Identification in the 'Divided City," Shoshanna Lurie provides insight into how cassette tapes of funk and hip-hop music from the US were circulated in Brazil (2000).

span different corners of the African diaspora from Brazil to Africa and even Asia. In 2015, the song "Mandume" was released on his second studio album, *Sobre crianças, quadris, pesadelos, e lições de casa* (About Children, Hips, Nightmares and Lessons from Home). The song title is a direct reference to Mandume ya Ndemufayo, who was the last king of the Oukwanyama kingdom, which was located in southern Angola and northern Namibia. He was known for resisting Portuguese and German colonists until his death in 1917 during battle with South African armed forces. Interestingly, the lyrics to the song have no direct reference to Mandume. However, the themes Emicida and his guest artists address related to cultural resistance tie back to Mandume's legacy as a figure of resistance to Western colonial rule. Another song, "Yasuke (Bendito, Louvado Seja)," was produced for a fashion show Emicida organized with his brother for their clothing line—also named Yasuke—at the 2016 São Paulo Fashion Week.[11] The song was later released as a single in 2017. Yasuke was an African brought to Japan in 1579 by the Portuguese in service of a Jesuit missionary and eventually became a samurai. Emicida and his brother chose Yasuke as the name of the song and clothing line because Brazil has the largest Afro-descendant population outside of Africa and the largest Japanese community outside Japan; therefore, they wanted to merge those two important influences on Brazilian culture into their music and fashion (Emicida 2016). Emicida also names songs in honor of historical Afro-Brazilian figures. His 2018 single with the eponymous title "Inácio da Catingueira" gives visibility to a lesser-known person. Inácio (1843–1879) was an enslaved African from Northeast Brazil who was known as the "artist slave" or "genius slave" for his artistic abilities in poetry and music (de Oliveira 2020: 393). Despite being illiterate, he was known for his ability to improvise verses

11 For more information on Emicida's project at the 2016 SPFW, see the following report by AfroPunk: https://afropunk.com/2016/11/brazilian-designers-defy-gender-norms-showcases-body-type-diversity-and-models-with-vitiligo-in-their-yasuke-collection-at-sao-paulo-fashion-week/ (Boateng 2016), and a video of the fashion show: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvgwJf3rpjU&ab_channel=LaboratorioFantasma (Laboratório Fantasma 2016).

and became famous in his region for being able to beat other poets in contests known as *pelejas* (verse exchanges) using the *literatura de cordel* (Cordel Literature) poetic tradition (Nunes and Nogueira 2015). Emicida named the song in his honor since he saw many parallels in his own life as an artist and rapper producing music in the face of adversity. The way in which Emicida incorporates references to these historical figures points to how they serve as a model for how he and other Afro-Brazilians can excel in the face of racial inequality. He is also dialoguing with these historical figures through his music to position himself within the larger pantheon of Black leaders and artists found throughout the African diaspora.

Brazilian rappers have made frequent references to African American culture and history in their music, including the civil rights movement of the 1960s, highlighting important intellectual and community leaders and Black American pop culture references (Pardue 2011; Santos 2016). Baco Exu do Blues follows in this tradition by centering the contributions of African American music and culture to the African diaspora in his music. His stage name includes a direct reference to blues music, which he has repeatedly stated is "the first rhythm to make Black people rich" (Cavalcanti 2018). The privileging of blues and African American music can be observed in his second studio album, *Bluesman* (2018), in which four of the nine tracks on the album make direct references to African American music: "Bluesman," "Me Desculpa Jay-Z" (Excuse Me Jay-Z), "Kanye West da Bahia" (Kanye West of Bahia), and "BB King." According to Baco Exu do Blues, the genesis of the album "was to have a blues album without playing the blues" (Cavalcanti 2018). Alluding to blues music and its legacy while maintaining being a rap album, in particular Brazilian rap music, highlights the shared histories and rhythmic structures Baco can make between Afro-Brazilian and African American musical traditions. The first track on the album, the eponymous "Bluesman," functions as Baco's thesis for why blues music is foundational to Black musical traditions. The song's first verse functions as a preface where Baco discusses the importance of Blues music to the

African diaspora. Muddy Waters' song "Everything's Gonna Be Alright"[12] plays in the background as Baco shares his views on blues music:

Eu sou o primeiro ritmo a formar	I'm the first rhythm to form
pretos ricos	rich Blacks
O primeiro ritmo que tornou pretos livres	The first rhythm that made Blacks free
Anel no dedo em cada um dos cinco	Ring on the finger of all five
Vento na minha cara, eu me sinto vivo	Wind in my face, I feel alive
A partir de agora, consider tudo blues	From now on I consider everything blues
O samba é blues, o rock é blues, o jazz	Samba is blues, rock is blues, jazz
é blues	is blues
O funk é blues, o soul é blues	Funk is blues, soul is blues
Eu sou Exu do Blues	I'm Exu do Blues
Tudo que quando era preto, era do	Everything when it was black was of the
demônio	devil
E depois virou branco e foi aceito	And later it turned white and was accepted,
Eu vou chamar de Blues	I'll call it blues
É isso, entenda, Jesus é blues	That's it, understand, Jesus is blues
(Baco Exu do Blues 2018)	

12 Born and raised in Mississippi, Muddy Waters is considered the father of modern Chicago blues.

Stating everything is blues, Baco is recognizing a shared genealogy of Black music not just in Brazil, but the larger diaspora. Blues music's roots go back to the 19th century in the US American South with the incorporation of African American spirituals, work songs, and chants. The call-and-response structure is also key to blues music, which is a common musical pattern found in musical traditions with ties to Africa. Blues music did not come before all other musical forms in the African diaspora, but by stating that "samba is blues, funk is blues, soul is blues," and so on, Baco Exu do Blues is making a keen observation that all the musical forms listed have a shared history in rhythmic structures that can be traced back to African-based forms. Additionally, the final lines of the stanza point to the history of Black music being marginalized, but then experiencing appropriation by White artists, who then circulate it into mainstream popular culture, which is not unique to African American culture. Afro-Brazilian musical forms, like samba, have roots in the legacy of slavery and African rhythms, passed through periods of criminalization, and then eventually became appropriated and seen as part of Brazil's national identity. Blues music, therefore, becomes a metaphor for understanding the complex, rich, and at times violent history of Black music in the Americas.

Afro-Brazilian Cosmologies

The final characteristic that defines the Afrocentric focus of this current generation of rappers and hip hoppers has to do with how they situate themselves in relation to previous generations of Afro-Brazilian musical and cultural traditions with a common practice of calling upon African-based spiritual and cultural practices. Different Black artists and musicians have commonly given reference to Afro-Brazilian cosmologies through the *orixás* of Afro-Brazilian religions like *Umbanda* and *Candomblé*.[13] *Orixás* are deities or spirts that were originally rooted in the

13 *Umbanda* is a hybrid religion that brings together beliefs and practices from African religions, Roman Catholicism, and Indigenous beliefs. It is common

religion of the Yoruba peoples of West Africa and are now commonly found in Latin American religions rooted in the African diaspora, including Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. These African-based religious practices are currently very active in Brazil and have become a part of certain aspects of Brazilian popular culture and music. However, despite their vibrancy in Brazil today, these religions still experience discrimination by politicians and by certain sectors of civil society, in particular from specific Evangelical sects that have gained prominence in Brazil in recent years, especially with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Therefore, incorporating references to religions like *Candomblé* has two purposes: to publicly acknowledge their ethnic identity as Afro-Brazilians and as a form of cultural resistance against White supremacy.

Emicida's song "Ubuntu Fristaili" from his 2013 album *O Glorioso Retorno de Quem Nunca Esteve Aqui* (The Glorious Return of Who was Never Here) positions the idea of the cypher within the context of Afro-Brazilian spiritual rituals. *Ubuntu* is a well-known African concept—I am because we are—and *Fristaili* is the phonetic spelling of the word freestyle for native Portuguese speakers. The idea of the cypher as a group of people who gather to watch an impromptu rap battle or performance parallels the gathering of followers of *Candomblé* in the *terreiros* (temples or religious houses), where spiritual rituals and practice take place. Within the song, Emicida performs a rap that references how followers of *Candomblé* interact with each other and invoke the *orixás* tied to their religion:

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in this religion for the *orixás* to have been syncretized with Catholic saints. *Candomblé* is an African-based religion that emerged in Brazil during the 19th century. Like *Umbanda*, it is a mix of West African religious traditions with Roman Catholicism. Veneration of the *orixás* is a central tenet of *Candomblé*. Each practitioner has a patron *orixá* that chooses them when initiated into the religion. For more information on the transnational nature of *Candomblé*, see J. Lorand Matory's *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (2005).

A África está nas crianças, e o mundo?	Africa is in the children, and the world?
O mundo está por fora	The world is on the outside
Então saravá Ogum, saravá Xangô, saravá	So saravá Ogum, saravá Xangô, saravá
Saravá vovó, saravá vovô, saravá	Saravá grandma, saravá grandpa, saravá
Saravá mamãe, saravá papai,	Saravá mother, saravá father,
De pele ou digital, tanto faz é tambô	Made of skin or digital, it doesn't matter it's a drum
Eu meto essa memo, eu posso	I get into it, because I can
Eu tô pr aver, algo valer mais que um sorriso nosso	I'm worth seeing, is something worth more than our smile
Graças ao quê, graças aos raps	Thanks to what? Thanks to raps
Hoje eu ligo mais quebradas do que o	Today I connect more hoods than
Google Maps	Google Maps
(Emicida 2013)	

The expression *saravá* is a common greeting used by followers of *Candomblé* and *Umbanda* and can be synonymous to other terms like *salve* (save) and *bem-vindo* (welcome). In the song, Emicida is greeting or welcoming not only family members, but two important *orixás*: Ogum and Xangô. Within the Candomblé religion, Ogum is the deity tied to iron, metal, technology, and war. Ogum is also known among Yoruba religions as the first *orixá* to descend to Earth to search for an adequate home for humanity. Xangô is the deity of thunder and fire and is also known as the founder of the cult tied to the *eguns* (spirits of the deceased). Therefore, Emicida's reference to these two *orixás* is not by chance due to their spiritual and cultural importance.

The importance of rhythm and beats in the cypher becomes tied to the central role of music found in Afro-Brazilian religions as explored in the second half of the stanza. Emicida alludes to how percussive in-

struments, whether digital or physical, serve the same purpose in both hip-hop culture and *Candomblé*. Drums are used during rituals in the *terreiro* and are frequently used in Afro-Brazilian musical traditions that call upon the *orixás* not only as a spiritual practice, but to express one's cultural heritage tied to the African diaspora.

The hybrid nature of Afro-Brazilian cosmologies comes to the fore in Baco Exú do Blues's raps as he explores the intersections between African-based religious practices and Western influences. The title of his first solo album, *Esú* (2017), highlights the importance of the *orixás* in his work as a hip hopper and his identity as an Afro-Brazilian. While his stage name has the Portuguese spelling (Exu) of the key *orixá*, the album uses the Yoruba language spelling of the deity. As previously noted, Exu is one of the most important *orixás* due to their role in providing communication between the *orixás* and humanity. In the eponymous titled song, "Esú," Baco makes multiple Afro-Brazilian and Western cultural references, thereby illustrating that his cultural and religious identity is syncretic in nature:

Componho pra não me decompor	I compose so I don't decompose
Poeta maldito perito na arte de	Cursed poet specialist in Arthur
Arthur Rimbaud	Rimbaud's art
Garçom, traz outra dose, por favor	Waiter, bring another round please
Que eu tô entre o Machado de	'Cause I'm Between Machado de
Assis e o de Xangô	Assis and Xangô
Soneto de boêmia, poesia,	Sonnet of Bohemian poetry,
melancolia	melancholy
Eu sou do tempo onde poetas ainda	I'm from the time when poets still
faziam poesia	made poetry
Saravá, o canto de Ossanha vem	Saravá, Ossanha's song is
me matando	killing me
...	...

Aqui, se escuta o batuque do trovão	Here one can hear the thunder's rhythm
Thor e seu martelo, Jorge e seu dragão	Thor and his hammer, George and his dragon
Ciranda do céu, rave de tambor	Ciranda from heaven, drum rave
Os deuses queriam chorar por amor	The gods wanted to cry for love
Aqui, se escuta o batuque do trovão	Here one can hear the thunder's rhythm
Os deuses queriam chorar por amor	The gods wanted to cry for love
(Baco Exu do Blues 2017)	

"Between Machado de Assis and Xangô" refers to Machado de Assis—who scholars consider to be the most important writer in the history of Brazilian literature and was of African descent and participated in White, lettered society—in dialogue with the *orixá* of lightening, fire, and justice. The juxtaposition of these two figures reveals an existential question that the rapper poses to himself as to how to gauge his approach to society: be more conciliatory within the norms of White society or be more confrontational rooted in an Afrocentric positionality. This tension between western culture and his African roots continues throughout the stanza as he makes references to the influences of French poetry in his education, the Marvel universe, and Catholic saints. Thor's role as the God of thunder ties back to the *orixá* Xangô, and St. George is frequently associated with the *orixá* Ogum due to both figures' use of metal weapons to combat their adversaries. Ultimately, Baco Exu do Blues' ability to juxtapose his exposure to popular culture, western literature, and Catholicism with his Afro-Brazilian identity highlights how contemporary rappers belong to the rich tradition of Afro-Brazilian artists' evocation of deities and practices tied to African-based cosmologies.

Emicida and Baco Exu do Blues are just two of many contemporary Brazilian rappers who engage in an Afrocentric aesthetic and discourse;

however, by providing an in-depth analysis of their raps, a deeper understanding to how these three iterations of Black cultural expression manifest within the current hip-hop scene becomes clearer. While previous generations of Brazilian hip hoppers have also incorporated a *negritude* ideology, what makes Emicida, Baco Exu do Blues, and other rappers of this current generation unique is the creative control they have through their independent recording labels that have not only provided commercial success but enabled them to explore what it means to be Black in Brazil in more nuanced and complex ways. Ultimately, their musical productions reflect a hip-hop community in Brazil that sees itself as part of a larger Black cultural tradition that goes beyond the limits of their national identity.

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