

# FAVELA UTOPIAS

## The *Bailes Funk* in Rio's Crisis of Social Exclusion and Violence\*

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*Abstract: Rio de Janeiro's bailes funk, or funk dance parties, with their often intensely violent and aggressively sexualized nature, are fundamental expressions of the culture of the city's favelas, or squatter towns, with tremendous significance for enormous crowds of poor, young people who attend them. This article draws on ethnographic research and participant observation, conducted by the author throughout years of living in the favela of Rocinha, and close readings of funk lyrics to explore the utopian impulse at the core of the baile funk experience, especially in community dances sponsored by gangsters held in the streets of favelas. Like some other cultural expressions of African diaspora communities, these bailes conjure up and sustain a morally and politically charged musical space that joins the young people together, emotionally elevating them above the harsh conditions of their lives into a spiritual state that makes available to them the feeling of living in a better world.*

Eu só quero é ser feliz, andar tranqüilamente na favela onde eu nasci  
e poder me orgulhar e ter a consciência que o pobre tem seu lugar.

*"Rap da Felicidade," by MCs Cidinho and Doca<sup>1</sup>*

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1. "Rap da Felicidade" was written by Julinho Rasta and Kátia and performed by the famous funk duo MCs Cidinho and Doca. The song was released by the Som Livre record label in 1995 on the seminal funk album *Rap Brasil*. The following translation is my own, as are the others that appear in this article: "I just want to be happy, to walk peacefully in

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## KIDDY FUNK AT THE EMOTIONS CLUB

From high atop his father's shoulders, a toddler in a tank top sways to the pervasive beat of the music coming through the massive speaker stacks at the Clube do Emoções. The nightclub is located at the foot of the favela, or squatter town, of Rocinha, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's second largest city and a place of notorious social inequities and urban violence. It is early Sunday evening in the summertime and the *baile funk*, as funk dance parties are known, is packed with more than one thousand kids from eight to eighteen years of age dancing amid the swirl of lights and music that permeates the sweaty air of the enormous dance hall. This baile is a *matinê*, a type of baile funk intended for underage children and adolescents at which alcohol is not served. The young people in attendance are dressed in close imitation of the slightly older, drinking-aged crowd that will replace them here later tonight. Girls wear tiny skirts or skin-tight stretchy jeans, with little, colorful bareback tops, while most boys are dressed in Bermuda surfer shorts, Gracie jujitsu shirts, and tennis shoes, many having close-shaved heads tinted a peroxide blond or even light orange. Others are dressed more formally, with long pants and button-up shirts, or even pastel dresses. The bone-rattling volume of the funk music at Emoções limits most conversations to short phrases spoken up close to the ear, hand shaking, and little kisses, as well as a good deal of eye contact and flirting. The music is so loud as to be physical, a sort of sonic massage in which the bass from the amps can be felt in the chest and the tiniest hairs on the body.

Emoções is at the edge of Rocinha, nestled beneath the Morro Dois Irmãos, a mountain easily recognizable from the postcard vistas of the well-known Ipanema Beach in the southern zone of Rio de Janeiro. Even so, many of the young people present are from other favelas as well, such as Vidigal, just across the mountain from Rocinha, and Rio das Pedras, in the nearby district of Jacarepaguá. Other youths present are from the Cidade de Deus (City of God), a low-income housing project made famous in recent years by the novel and film of the same name. People mix about, greeting one another, seeing and being seen, dancing in pairs, small groups, and short lines. Most keep to the large, open space of the middle of the club, either on the dance floor or next to the enormous bar at the far end, though several others move about on the top floor balcony areas, leaning against the railing and watching the crowd below. More stand along the steep ramp leading down from the entrance and the security guards patting down a group of kids just coming through the security gates. Still others crowd around the vending carts outside Emoções in the Estrada da

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the favela where I was born / and be able to be proud and know that poor people have a place, too."

Gávea, Rocinha's busiest thoroughfare, between a line of a hundred or so parked motorcycles and the passing buses, cars, and motorcycle taxis that wind in and out of the favela.

On stage is a singer in a camouflage shirt, sneakers, and baseball hat, with a simple gold chain around his neck, commonly referred to in Rocinha as "the greatest all-time singer of funk," or even "the history of funk."<sup>2</sup> The MC, a black man in his midtwenties, is a local from Rocinha and a familiar presence at Emoções. He moves only very slightly, holding the mike straight out from his mouth, rattling off his rhymes like machine-gun fire in his deep, lightly raspy voice. In his songs, the MC exalts the strength and unity of Rocinha's gang of drug traffickers and praises the residents of Rocinha in general. He sings about gangster friends living and dead and how the people in the favela can avoid getting lost, or even killed, in a hard world of drugs, violence, and poverty. In other songs, the MC commends the local hoodlums and thieves who steal outside the favela (never inside) and pokes fun at the cocaine addicts who sell their Bermuda shorts for drugs. In others he sings about the history of funk, about playing soccer on the beach, and about his beloved city of Rio de Janeiro, a paradise of funk. Toward the center of the stage, next to his DJ, stands his wife, wearing a small, aqua-colored Lycra top, her long hair pulled into a ponytail and reaching all the way down to the top of her tight, form-fitting jeans. The radiant young black woman sways modestly to the music, serenely proud of her famous and talented husband.

The sweatiness and smoke of the air intensify, the lights spin, and electronic sounds pulsate and hum. A long train of teenage boys winds its way through the crowd of dancers in the middle of the hall. In the thick of the mass of fans, the toddler on his father's shoulders moves his little body to the beat, just like his dad, as they both smile contentedly. The little boy makes a gun with his thumb and fingers and continues smiling as he gestures along with the digital gunshots of the MC's song—bang, bang, bang!<sup>3</sup>

### RIO'S FUNK CULTURE

As the result of funk's reputation for explicitly sexual dance moves and its association with Rio's criminal factions, it is sometimes criticized as a violent and socially irresponsible musical form. Nonetheless, the funk music culture of Rio de Janeiro has undeniable significance for the hun-

2. To protect this MC from reprisals from police or rival gangs, his name has been omitted.

3. Although this scene contains elements that would be typical of bailes funk in Rocinha to this day, especially those held at Emoções, I observed the little boy on his father's shoulders making a gun with his hand at that club on January 13, 2002.

dreds of thousands of poor young people in the city who listen to funk music and attend bailes funk each week. At the core of funk culture is a utopian impulse, a desire to be lifted above the scarcity, vulnerability, and dreariness of poverty and transported to a place of abundance, power, and excitement through the experience of the music in the baile funk. This utopian drive functions in ways specific to the context of funk as a musical culture practiced by young people living on the edge of poverty and in areas marked by intense violence, such as Rio's favelas and other low-income neighborhoods. At its core, funk music is a transformational and countercultural practice through which these young people experience a sense of unity and find a greater sense of courage to resist the wearying effects of the harsh realities they face on a daily basis. In the space of Rio's bailes funk, a densely significant and complex musical culture is enacted in which social norms are subverted and a politically charged and powerfully moral space is conjured up and sustained. In the moment and space of the funk musical experience in the baile, participants are lifted above the limitations of their daily lives to an emotional state that makes available to them the feeling of what it would be like to live in a better world.

To distinguish Brazilian funk from the American funk music of the 1960s and 1970s by artists like James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic, in English Brazilian funk is often referred to as baile funk, after the funk dance parties, or as favela funk, for its association with Rio's numerous favelas. In this article, I shall refer to Brazilian funk simply as *funk*, the term most often used in Portuguese. With its heavy Miami bass or electro-funk beats, throaty vocal delivery, frenetic samplings, and playful, sexualized dancing, funk has much in common with its close cousin, American hip-hop.<sup>4</sup> Although both are largely black, urban, and electronic musical styles, funk is far from being a mere imitation of hip-hop and rather is a uniquely Brazilian cultural practice with its own peculiar dance styles, slang, and modes of dress. Musically, funk is a rich blend of prerecorded beats and diverse samples of everything from machine-gun fire and explosions to Afro-Brazilian beats and musical instruments, digitally enhanced voices, radio sound bites, cowboy calls, and animal noises. Funk is as unashamedly eclectic as the favela culture in which it has arisen and is a paradigmatic expression of the Brazilian anthropophagic spirit, mixing the melodic structures of national musical styles such as *axé*, capoeira, *forró*, and samba with features of international music, like R&B, techno,

4. The similarities between Brazilian funk and Brazilian hip-hop are great enough to tempt many scholars to inaccurately conflate the terms, perhaps because songs of both styles are sometimes referred to as *rap* and because both have DJs and MCs (see Béhague 2000; Herschmann 1997, 2000; and Lurie 2001).

Miami bass, and hip-hop.<sup>5</sup> Funk MCs often perform in duos, singing more than rapping or calling out chants in guttural, hoarse voices.

Funk lyrics, which have been sung in Portuguese since the midnineties, frequently involve playful double entendre and irony, as well as complex rhyme, meter, and melodic structures. Although funk lyrics touch on a range of topics too broad to define, many funk songs are of a romantic, sexual, violent, humorous, or consciousness-raising nature. They are, by and large, written by and for people living in Rio's favelas and the city's other low-income neighborhoods, and they tend to be about such people, representing them as intensely loving, passionate, beautiful, strong, sensual, and creative human beings. Funk lyrics often perform a fundamental inversion of the social geography of Rio de Janeiro, rejecting the traditional value given to rich neighborhoods like Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon, which are often referred to in Portuguese as "noble" neighborhoods, and instead proclaim the favelas as the quintessentially human, and indeed Brazilian, social spaces. This tendency is evident in the frequent inclusion of long, poetically arranged lists of the names of favelas, or even of specific people living in favelas, in the lyrics of many funk songs.

Despite the fact that Brazilian funk music and the famous *bailes* associated with it have been tremendously popular for some time and that funk culture has particular relevance for the growing crisis of social exclusion and violence in Brazil, relatively few scholars have studied funk. The earliest study of funk culture is *O mundo funk carioca*, published by anthropologist Hermano Vianna in 1988, which examines a practice known as the *corredor da morte*, or "corridor of death," a form of semiritualistic fighting that was typical of funk dances from the mideighties through the midnineties. In 1994, George Yúdice published "The Funkification of Rio," which explored the class dimensions of funk and the ways in which fans of funk, known as *funkeiros*, preferred a local, favela identity to the more nationalistic associations of musical styles like samba. In the anthology *Abalando os anos 90—funk e hip-hop: Globalização, violência e estilo cultural*, Brazilian scholar Micael Herschmann suggested that, contrary to the negative vision of funk common in the mainstream media, funk music reflects a rich, creative culture in which MCs expressed pride in their local favela communities. In *O Funk e o Hip-Hop invadem a cena*, published in 2000, Herschmann conducted an extensive examination of the

5. Fluid appropriations of transnational cultural currents have been self-consciously embraced in Brazilian intellectual life and identified as cultural cannibalism since the *modernismo* of the twenties, as is discussed by Charles Perrone in *Seven Faces: Brazilian Poetry since Modernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996). These include Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" from 1928, the antiestablishment *tropicália* movement of the late sixties and early seventies, and Recife's hypereclectic *mangue*-bit musical movement of the midnineties.

vilification of funk in the media and the claims that funk dances were being used as recruiting grounds for gangsters from Rio's criminal factions. Herschmann was also the first scholar to give serious attention to analyzing the lyrics of funk songs. More recently, Silvio Essinger has published a well-written and insightful history of funk, *Batidão: Uma história do funk* (2005). My own study of 2007, "Bandidos de Cristo: Representations of the Power of Criminal Factions in Rio's *Proibidão* Funk," analyzes representations of favela gangsters in funk music.

The merits of all these studies notwithstanding, it is worth noting that none of them, with the exception of the last, involve a significant ethnographic component. More specifically, none of the authors of these studies ever lived for any period in any of Rio's favelas, instead limiting the fieldwork to short visits to favelas to conduct an interview or to attend a dance. This is not to say that these studies have not been groundbreaking and well conceived but rather to underscore the advantages of including extensive fieldwork of living in a favela and interacting with the fans and artists of funk music on the terms of their daily lives in and out of the *bailes funk*. This is especially true because the world of Rio's favelas and the lives of people living there are different from the world of the middle and upper classes in Rio and because, consequently, the aesthetic values of funk and the modes of social interaction taking place within funk are contrary to aspects of mainstream Brazilian society. As a result, funk culture may seem to outsiders, such as most scholars and journalists, as ugly, banal, and lacking in artistic or cultural merit. The social and political terrain of Rio's favelas are extremely complex, and even potentially dangerous, a reality that may further distance these outside observers from the subject and make it even more difficult for them to make sense of funk culture.

In contrast, circumstances were such that it was possible for me to spend some years living in Rocinha, both as a researcher and otherwise. In fact, since the first time I moved to Rocinha in 1990, I have lived there off and on for nearly four years, attending more *bailes funk* than I can count, as well as many other forms of social, religious, and cultural events on the Rocinha scene. Although I actually began researching funk in Rocinha in the summer of 1996, the majority of the *bailes funk* that I visited took place between 2001 and 2003, the period in which I conducted the fieldwork for my doctoral thesis on funk. During that period, I went to dozens of *bailes* and interviewed with several MCs, DJs, composers, dancers, club owners, fans, and other residents of Rocinha. More recently, I was able to return to Rocinha to carry out additional research on *bailes funk* in the summer of 2004, the winter of 2005, and the summer of 2006.

Perhaps of equal importance to my understanding of funk culture has been the background information on Rocinha I have acquired outside of my formal research visits. Prior to carrying out the fieldwork for my dissertation (Sneed 2003), I had been a resident of that favela for ex-

tended periods in 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996. In 1998, I began my work as the cofounder and director of a small, volunteer-run educational organization in Rocinha called the Instituto Dois Irmãos. In 1999, after returning to the United States, I helped create the Two Brothers Foundation, a U.S.-based organization working to support its Brazilian partner, and began traveling back and forth between the two countries to assist in the development of these organizations. The intense community activity surrounding this work has kept me deeply involved in Rocinha. Not surprisingly, I have developed a deep personal connection with the community over these many years, as well as an enormous sense of gratitude for the way in which my friends and neighbors in Rocinha have so generously shared their lives with me and accepted me into the community. Although I will always be a foreigner in Brazil and do not equate my experiences there with those of a person born and raised there, the opportunity to spend so much time in that favela has afforded me a deeper understanding of the complexities of life in the neighborhood that has been vital to my appreciation and understanding of funk culture. Furthermore, as the result of these years of contact with the musical culture of funk and exposure to the importance it holds for so many young people in Rocinha, my view on funk has evolved and, besides being a scholar who researches funk, I have come to see myself as something of a fan.

Besides the baile at Emoções described at the outset of this article, I visited a great variety of bailes funks in Rocinha on different occasions, in different locations, and on different days of the week, including those briefly described in the passage that follows. On Sunday afternoon, there is a matinê dance for teenagers at Emoções Club at the foot of Rocinha on the Estrada da Gávea. No alcohol is served at this baile, but in most other respects it is identical to other bailes at the club for adults. Later that evening, Emoções hosts a much larger, traditional baile funk, which is put on by the Curtissom Rio sound team. Even though artists such as Galo, Dolores, Cacau, and Fornalha perform at Emoções, often singing the same sort of gangster funk songs they sing at adult dances, with lyrics making reference to a favela's drug traffickers, no armed gangsters actually attend the party and it is one of the few that the favela gangsters do not pay for. On Saturdays there is a large baile in the old dance hall of Rocinha's samba school Acadêmicos da Rocinha, on the Rua Um at the top of the favela, which is put on by DJ Marlboro's sound team, Bix Mix.

Most of the other bailes taking place in Rocinha are considered *bailes de comunidade*, or community dances, which tend to be paid for and attended by heavily armed drug traffickers. On Fridays, there is a smaller baile in the Valão area of the favela, along the open sewage channel that runs along its main street. Often on Saturdays and holidays there is a huge dance in the Via Ápia, one of the busiest commercial streets in the favela, located near Rocinha's entrance on the São Conrado side. Other dances

come and go around the community, such as the baile put on by the mini sound team A Criatura in the soccer *quadra* of Cachopa, about halfway up the hill, or the matinê in Rua Dois. Occasionally there are large dances featuring contests between sound teams in the garage of the Amigos Unidos bus company along the Curva do S that entail competitions among sound teams like Escorpião, Pipo's, Furacão 2000, and Curtissom Rio. Each of these bailes has its own unique personality, setting, and loyal *funkeiros*, and even the same baile may be different in ways from week to week.

#### MUSICAL SURVIVAL TACTICS IN FUNK

Despite the importance of funk songs in the practice of funk culture, and the fact that funk lyrics often reflect and support the utopian dimensions of the bailes funk, the most intensely utopian experience of funk culture is the one that occurs live and in full color in the space of the baile. In using the term *utopian* here, I do not mean to invoke the notion of theoretical plans for the creation of an ideal world, or even of a specific, conscious plan of how to transform society for the better. I am thinking instead of utopia as the creation of a temporary, collective space that makes available the feeling of what it would be like to live in an ideal world. The work of two cultural theorists has been of particular importance to me in my understanding of the utopian dimensions of Brazilian funk. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy (1993) points to the underlying moral, spiritual, and political dimensions of the cultural practices of the African diaspora, especially musical ones, and the feeling of hope and power that they evoke. In important ways, I see the funk culture of Rio's favelas as quintessential examples of such practices. At the same time, Richard Dyer's (1999) discussion of the utopian and entertainment offers further insights regarding the experience of Rio's bailes funk, as I shall explore below. In any case, the complexity and uniqueness of funk as a cultural form of Rio's favelas is such that it is necessary to considerably adapt and expand upon their ideas to explore the utopian dimensions of funk.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993) argues convincingly that the tremendous disjuncture between the emphasis on liberty and equality in the political ideology of the Enlightenment and the horrific collective experience of slavery, a form of double consciousness developed among diasporic peoples as they struggled for survival in their transatlantic and international journeys. On the one hand, they adopted much of the belief in the fundamental dignity of each individual human being and the necessity for society to progress into a socially just political order. On the other hand, they in some ways rejected the rationalistic impulse of Western thought and instead came to privilege other nonrationalist modes of



self-realization, such as collective musical and emotional experiences and spirituality. In the face of the terror of slavery and its legacy in social inequity, these diasporic communities adapted, reshaped, and ironically reinterpreted Western cultural forms and practices into a utopian vision that fortified them with courage and energy as they struggled to thrive and survive. For Gilroy, the sharply countercultural tendency of such black Atlantic cultures intensifies the utopianism of their activities and blurs together categories such as music and politics, playing and fighting, and the religious and the everyday.

Although he never directly engages Brazilian funk, Gilroy (1993) dedicates large portions of his study to the discussion of Brazilian funk's close cousin, American hip-hop, especially in the use made in hip-hop of diverse musical, linguistic, and cultural elements, or "found sounds," and their reinterpretation by hip-hop artists. In any case, his work focuses more upon the music and song of hip-hop culture, or its cultural artifacts, instead of the performance and participation in hip-hop street parties and nightclubs. Although Gilroy's views on the nature of utopia in African diasporic cultures, summarized previously, are directly applicable to funk in Rio, especially to funk songs and music, to fully explore the utopianism of funk one must take into account the creation of a musical community in the space of the *bailes funk* themselves. Although Richard Dyer's (1999) discussion of utopia and entertainment also focuses attention on the cultural artifacts that are the subject of his work, namely American musical films, the great originality of his work, and its usefulness for the discussion of the *bailes funk*, consists in the rubric he suggests for the specific ways in which the dystopian aspects of the lives of fans are emotionally and psychologically resolved in the entertainment experience.

Another aspect of Dyer's (1999, 373) work that makes it applicable to the study of funk is his insistence that music is the most "felt" performance medium and therefore the mode of cultural production most closely related to utopian practices. The musical dimensions of practices like American musicals and Brazilian funk involve participants in extrarational, intensely emotional experiences that embody utopian feelings through a series of nonrepresentational signs. For Dyer, signs like "colors, texture, movement, rhythm, [and] melody" are even more fundamental to the utopian impulse of entertainment than the formal, representational ones, such as song lyrics and movie scripts. The utopianism of entertainment is, according to Dyer's argument, a sort of escapist flight from the stark inadequacies of real day-to-day life, inadequacies that correspond to the failed promises of patriarchal capitalism in America. Dyer does not condemn this fugitive aspect of entertainment as a thing that necessarily breeds apathy but instead suggests that the flight from reality itself stems from some unconscious, revolutionary urge.

Still, Dyer's (1999) view on utopia and entertainment are of somewhat limited relevance to the case of funk, because there is a much higher degree of co-participation between the performers and the audience in the experience of Rio's bailes funk than in Dyer's musicals. Because of this, and because in funk the experience of the audience is, unlike that of the film audience, an inseparable part of the actual spectacle, it is necessary to considerably expand his notion of entertainment for this case. Dyer considers entertainment a commercial mode of cultural production and contrasts it with performances in other contexts, such as tribal, feudal, or socialist. Entertainment, he states, is "a type of performance produced for profit, performed before a generalized audience (the 'public') by a trained, paid group who do nothing else but produce performances which have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure" (Dyer 1999, 372). Such a division between production and consumption, however, does not exist in the baile funk. Instead, an intensely participatory and highly interactive play occurs between the audience and the performance through which the baile is enacted as a series of sounds, signs, movements, and behaviors involving artists and fans alike. The melding of audience and performance in the staging of a baile funk, along with the importance of improvisation, call-and-response, and the tendency to borrow and reinterpret signs and sounds from other cultures, make the performance dimension of funk similar to those of other less professionalized, more folkloric, and carnivalesque forms of entertainment in Brazil, as well as to many Afro-Caribbean and African American musical practices.<sup>6</sup>

It is also important to consider differences between the ideological and sociohistorical contexts relevant to Dyer's (1999) American musicals and the culture of the bailes funk. In his study of American musicals, Dyer points to the failed promises of patriarchal capitalism and what he refers to as the "America Dream." Although the failings of capitalism are relevant to Brazil, the promises of what could be called the "Brazilian Dream" involve an understanding of what it means to be Brazilian, often called *brasilidade*, which makes it different from American ideology. Of course, it is difficult to define exactly what constitutes such *brasilidade*. Nevertheless, certain characteristics can be named that are commonly identified with the Brazilian national personality, including cultural cannibalism, or the open spirit of appropriation of cultural artifacts and practices from foreign civilizations (referred to as *antropofagia* in the Brazilian context); carnivalesque popular cultural practices (involving euphoric gleefulness, playful inversion of gender and class roles, and social contestation); play-

6. These characteristics of funk culture make it similar to what Ángel Quintero Rivera (1998) refers to as *músicas mulatas*, a concept he develops in chapter 1 of his book, *¡Salsa, sabor y control! Sociología de la música tropical*, pages 35–92.

ful sensuality (sometimes involving androgyny); nostalgia (expressed by the ambivalent and ubiquitous Portuguese term *saudade*) and deep emotional affect more generally; friendliness; musicality; and *malandragem*, a term denoting the art of the resourceful rogue capable of using a mixture of qualities such as charm, street smarts, friendship ties, and a hint of dangerousness to maneuver between formal and informal social spheres and to survive in the face of corruption and disparity. One of the most controversial attributes associated with Brazilianness is a characteristically optimistic vision of racial harmony, often referred to in the Brazilian context as “racial democracy.”

In many ways, these attributes of the Brazilian national personality have their origins in the cultural practices of the same sort of ordinary, working-class poor people as the ones from Rio’s favelas that make up the funk scene. Ironically, however, even as the traits of this Brazilianness have been gradually appropriated by the middle and upper classes in the evolution of the Brazilian nationalist identity since before independence, the harsh conditions of everyday life facing many of the country’s poor make it extremely difficult for them to experience the sort of racial equality, sensuality, humor, and friendliness associated with *brasilidade* outside of the utopian spaces they create for themselves in cultural practices like funk. Such practices, especially funk, allow everyday people to reappropriate and to reaffirm these qualities, even as they exaggerate and intensify them in new ways, making it possible for them to continue to use such strategies for their own survival. In an effort to coin a term to encompass the processes of ideological reappropriation occurring in popular practices like funk, I offer *re-brasilidade*, a term that can be taken to convey the meaning of a reaffirmation of the sort of qualities associated with *brasilidade* mentioned previously, and one that can denote an expansion of Brazilianness to include greater space for the aesthetics of poor communities like the favelas in the postmodern, globalized context of contemporary Brazil.

#### A STREET BAILE IN A FAVELA

It is Saturday at two o’clock in the morning on a hot night, and the local gangsters of Rocinha are sponsoring an enormous outdoor funk dance party, or baile de comunidade, in the middle of a long street called the Via Ápia, located at the bottom of the favela. Twelve-foot-high speaker stacks running more than a hundred feet long line one side of the narrow street. Several thousand young people crowd the Via Ápia, circling to and fro in long trains, moving up and down the strip as the speakers blast music loud enough to rattle the glass out of some nearby windows. Just in front of us, by the speaker columns, kids as young as ten and eleven perform choreographed dance moves in small groups.

The Via Ápia is one of the busiest streets in Rocinha and there is a high level of activity here twenty-four hours a day. Buildings as many as five and six stories tall overlook the street, which gently slopes up the base of the Morro Dois Irmãos, or Two Brothers Mountain. By day, hundreds of motorcycles, taxis, trucks, and cars speedily squeeze past one another along the Via Ápia as hundreds of people enter and leave the favela on foot and dozens more stand off to the sides, conversing with friends and neighbors. The street, which is roughly thirty feet across and two hundred yards long, runs slightly uphill from the entrance of Rocinha past the numerous bars, restaurants, and other businesses that line the street, including small furniture stores, bingo halls, hair salons, and stands selling hot dogs, corn on the cob, and pirated CDs and DVDs. When there are not dances here in the street, skinny, unarmed teenage drug dealers talk in small groups, keeping a look out for customers and the police.

Tonight I am standing shoulder to shoulder with a small group of friends from around the neighborhood who are well known on the Rocinha social scene—Orlando, Vítor, and Cícero, all in their early twenties. They smile as they sway gently to the beat, scanning the crowd for other friends and neighbors. The music of the baile of the Via Ápia is so loud that it forces the people at the dance to speak from a very close distance, as they hug, exchange *beijinhos*, as the little kisses often used by women and members of the opposite sex are called, and clasp one another's hands enthusiastically. The crowd mixes along the narrow strip in two currents; one heading up to the Estrada da Gávea, where Planet Pizza and the Cabaré do Barata are doing a booming business, and the other down toward the entrance of the favela. The dense masses of people moving in either direction make it difficult to breathe, let alone dance, and yet people off in the small spaces to the sides and on either end of the baile dance in pairs or small groups, facing the line of stacked amplifiers on the side of the street. Although most actual fans of funk are young, this type of street baile is a sort of community festival that attracts people of all ages, including many who would never consider themselves funkeiros, as such. Older folks crowd the openings of the bars facing the street and adjacent alleys and street kids barely seven or eight years old press up against the speakers.

The heavily armed *soldados*, as the armed favela gangsters are called, of the local drug cartel can be seen wading through the crowd or standing in the openings of alleyways, dressed as the other funkeiros but brandishing weapons such as AK-47s, AR-15s, shotguns, pistols, and Uzis. One gangster wearing a rubber Bin Laden mask accepts a fat, smoky marijuana joint from another, taking care to balance his assault rifle straight up in the air with his other arm. Adhesive stickers of the Flamengo soccer club are visible against the silver plating of many of the gangsters' weapons. They talk in groups as they eye the crowd, keeping watch and swaying to the

thudding beat of the funk music. Fighting is uncommon at the baile funk in the Via Ápia, because to cause trouble of any kind would be an offense to the gangster hosts throwing the party. Still, one never knows what can happen at any baile funk, and my friends and I pay close attention to the multitudes of people pressing against us in the ever-shifting crowd.

The baile is hot and humid in the summer night, despite being outdoors, and the air hangs thick on the crowd, filled with smoke, gasoline exhaust, and the smell of sweaty bodies. I am filled with a sense of joy and expectation as people with smiling faces pass by shouting the words to the music, chanting, and swaying sensually to the songs. On the small stage by the speaker stacks, fireworks explode in flaming fountains as the stage lights flash and a smoke machine pours out columns of smoke. The MCs have not yet arrived and a DJ is playing a montage titled "5 Caras" by the Bonde do Vinho. Another of my friends, Josivaldo, from the Cachopa area of Rocinha, appears in the crowd in front of me and clasps my hand enthusiastically, slapping me on the back several times. He came upon the dance by accident on his way over to his girlfriend's house across town in Taquara and has been lingering in the street, taking in the scene and talking with friends.

The baile funk is its own kind of high. Drinking and smoking marijuana might heighten the experience for some of the people in attendance, but one need not be drunk or high to feel the energy of the masses of squirming bodies and the barrage of bass pulling the crowd back and forth to the beat. Despite the enormous volume of the music and the crowd of thousands that is jammed into the proportionally small street, the baile in the Via Ápia is beautiful, and I begin to feel a sense of great peace and belonging overtaking me. The music of the baile and the crowd itself are so loud that they somehow drown everything else out, leaving me with a quiet sense of awe. The sound of the heavy bass and electronic beats of the music echo across the slopes of the favela as the crowd blissfully swims in the sonic waves of a favela funk utopia.<sup>7</sup>

#### FAVELA UTOPIAS IN THE BAILES FUNK

Many aspects of Dyer's (1999) views on the utopian dimensions of entertainment are readily identifiable in bailes such as the one depicted in the preceding section and the other described at the outset of this article. Dyer suggests specific categories of utopian dimensions in entertainment, first in terms of social inadequacies such as scarcity, exhaustion, dreari-

7. This description of a baile in the Via Ápia is offered both as one of an actual dance occurring on February 8, 2002, in which I saw the gangster in a Bin Laden mask, and as a synthesis of other bailes de comunidade taking place in Rocinha over the years.

ness, manipulation, fragmentation, then in terms of the utopian solutions for these inadequacies that fans feel in entertainment experiences, such as abundance, energy, intensity, transparency, and community (1999, 376). In the following pages I will consider the practice of funk culture as experienced in the bailes according to the terms of Dyer's rubric. Additionally, I will suggest two additional categories not specified in Dyer's list, hinted at by Gilroy's (1993) analysis of the moral spaces created in black Atlantic cultural practices, and explore their relevance for the utopianism of the bailes funk: powerlessness and empowerment.

### *Abundance*

The conditions of scarcity experienced by most residents of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, such as inadequate jobs, housing, health care, transportation, educational opportunities, public safety, and access to other goods and services, are well known. At the same time, there is a certain wealth of human community in favelas in areas such as friendship and love, creativity and playfulness, beauty and sensuality, emotion, and humor. In the space and moment of the baile funk, the scarcity and poverty vanish and are replaced by an abundant feast in which food and drink flow, there are plenty of drugs and alcohol, and sex and romance are readily available. In a sense, the space of the baile embraces the ambiguous nature of the favela, elevating it and transforming it into a fantastic, idealized place in which the humanity and personality of the favela are preserved even as the hardships of real poverty it faces are overcome.

### *Energy*

The exhaustion experienced in the everyday lives of many poor people in Rio, who are so often stuck in long lines, bad schools, and low-paying jobs, is left behind in the experience of the baile; instead, the crowd is filled with vigor and energy as people dance sensuously and sing passionately amid the fiercely loud funk music. In contrast to the tiring routine of everyday life, the space of the baile is one of energy and relaxation. Bailes often start late, sometimes after one o'clock in the morning, and can go until dawn. Loud booming music, dancing, flirting, and fighting are all energetic elements of funk dances, and despite the rigors of urban life, it is uncommon to see people yawning or even sitting down at a dance. A good deal of the energy in the funk dance comes from the music itself, not only rhythmically or even emotionally but also from a sonic standpoint. In the music, the constant chaotic and individual sounds of the city and the favela are drowned out by the blaring music of the wall of speakers and replaced by a restful and harmonious flow of pulsing music. It energizes the crowd, as fans are filled with its rhythms and melodies, lifted up, and

swept away in a flood of throbbing bass pouring out of the amps and covering the fans with an irresistibly invigorating collective heartbeat.

### *Intensity*

There are almost always flashing lights, smoke machines, and pyrotechnics used in bailes funk. The use of alcohol and drugs often further intensifies the ambience, making the funk dances drastically different from the dreariness and predictability of everyday life. Bailes usually begin with a DJ playing prerecorded music, then move on to performances by less-known singers and dance groups, sometimes involving competitions by groups of local nonprofessional dancers, and usually finish with the big-name MCs at the end of the night. Despite these conventions, fans never know exactly what will happen next in the baile as strangers kiss, fights break out, and romance and danger fill the air. In bailes taking place in clubs, where fights are more likely to break out (because armed gangsters are not present prohibiting such behavior), security guards regularly eject hotheaded young men who get into altercations, causing people nearby to stop and pay attention. Every now and then, these fights explode into mob scenes involving dozens of people, or even hundreds, that can bring the music to a halt. More often, the MC keeps singing, telling the people to stop fighting as he or she performs. In short, the intensity of funk dances is very great and even people who hate them seldom list boredom as a factor for not liking the bailes funk.

In dances taking place outside of clubs in the streets of favelas, the presence of armed drug traffickers adds a further element of excitement and danger to the atmosphere of the dance. Favela gangsters often sponsor bailes in the streets and dance halls of their communities, or even in places like bus garages and athletic courts. Furthermore, the lyrics of many funk songs make mention of these criminals, the weapons they possess, and the deeds they carry out, making them, in a sense, as much the stars of the bailes funk as the DJs, MCs, and dancers who officially perform. This association of the bailes funk with favela drug traffickers has given rise to a popular subgenre of funk known as *proibidão*, characterized by songs about gangsters of the criminal factions operating within the favelas of Rio, such as the Comando Vermelho (CV), the Terceiro Comando (TC), and the Amigos dos Amigos (ADA). Because of the laudatory tone regarding criminals and criminal behavior of many songs classified as *proibidão*, such songs are usually not played on the radio or sold in stores but instead performed live at bailes or sold on bootlegs. Often, song lyrics of *proibidão* are versions of popular songs from other genres or even of radio-friendly funk songs that are free of gang references, sometimes released by the same artist. *Proibidão* songs are deeply inscribed in the cultural context in which they are written and performed, often involving complex semantic

layers of insider language, irony, and the reinterpretation of other songs and artifacts borrowed from other cultural practices, making this style one of the most complex and provocative aspects of funk culture.<sup>8</sup>

The following lyrics from the song “Sou da Rocinha” offer a quintessential expression of proibidão and a good example of its tendency to add intensity to the experience of the bailes funk. It is by the anonymous MC described at the outset of this article from the matinê baile at the Emoções Club and is a version of a radio-friendly song that, different from this version, does not make specific mention of gangsters or criminal factions. The excerpt cited here, recorded live at a dance in Rocinha, includes references to the favela’s CV gangsters in 2002 (before the ADA took over in May 2004):

Sou da Rocinha e não dou mole  
Pa Terceiro Comando querer me esculachar  
Vai tomar de AK, pa pum!

Na continuação se liga meu mano não sou simpático a ninguém  
Armamento pesado bote na sua mente, igual à Roça não tem  
Puxa o bonde Bigode, Bill, Buiú, Cavanhaque, 21, Marcelinho, Marino, e o 99  
Não esquecemos de Magu, Domar, Dewilson, Molejo e o Bel  
Os restantes estão no céu,  
Baiano, Batatinha, o meu amigo Serginho, Trola, o braço fiel  
Para finalizar de AK na mão Soldado e o Cabeção, braço Magu, Naiba,  
Se liga Bill não esqueço dos irmãos, Bota o fuzil pra cantar!  
É o bonde que fortalece o Valão, quero ouvir  
Tô cansado de falar mas eu tenho que explicar,  
Se mexer com o Buiú toma tiro de AK  
Tô cansado de falar, mas eu tenho que explicar,  
Se mexer com o Lelé toma tiro de AK  
Se mexer com o Buiú toma tiro de AK

I am from Rocinha and I’m not dumb.  
I don’t let the Third Command mess with me.  
I’m gonna shoot ‘em with an AK, bang!

Check out this next part, brother, I don’t kiss nobody’s ass,  
Heavy weapons, check it out, nobody has ‘em like Rocinha.  
At the front of the gang is Bigode, Bill, Buiú, Cavanhaque, 21, Marcelinho, Marino,  
and 99, don’t forget Magu, Domar, Dewilson, Molejo and Bel.  
The others are in Heaven, Baiano, Batatinha.  
My friend Serginho, the loyal Trola,  
Finishing up, armed with AKs, Soldado, and Cabeção, Magu, Naiba.  
See, Bill, I don’t forget my friends. Make the AKs sing!  
It’s the gang that protects the Valão, let’s hear it!

8. This is briefly discussed in Gerard Béhague’s (2000) article “Afro-Brazilian Traditions.” Journalist Silvio Essinger (2005) also dedicates an insightful chapter to the subject in his book, *Batidão: uma história do funk*. See also my article (2007), “*Bandidos de Cristo: Representations of the Power of Criminal Factions in Rio’s Proibidão Funk*,” mentioned previously.



I'm tired of saying it, but I have to explain,  
 If you mess with Buiú you'll take a bullet from an AK.  
 I'm tired of saying it, but I have to explain,  
 If you mess with Lelé you'll take a bullet from an AK.  
 If you mess with Buiú you'll take a bullet from an AK.

The song revolves around the seemingly incongruous construction of the figure of Rio's favela gangsters as social bandits and righteous protectors of the poor communities, a portrayal common to many proibidão lyrics and one tremendously revealing of the utopian impulse at its core. The figures of the crime boss and his gangsters are very ambiguous in favela culture and, despite much criminological evidence to the contrary, many residents of Rio's favelas perceive their local drug traffickers in the mold of the social bandit. At the time "Sou da Rocinha" was recorded, the enormously popular Luciano Barbosa da Silva, known by the nicknames Lulu, Bigode, and Magro, was in charge of the faction in Rocinha, before police shot him to death in April 2004. He was particularly successful in promoting a positive image for himself and his gang within the community, and indeed attained a level of popularity and support among the residents rarely matched in the history of Rocinha.

With the imposing arsenal of weapons listed in the song and the mention of courageous gangsters both living and dead, the song makes a bold declaration of the power of the Rocinha gang and a warning to rival criminal factions, the police, and enemies from within the favela alike. Even so, the sense of fraternal spirit and loyalty underlying the song emphasizes the worth of these gangsters in terms that go beyond their capacity for violence. Given the popularity of Lulu in Rocinha and his image as a social bandit, the power of the gangsters stressed by the song also carries with it the connotation that they are protectors and benefactors of the favela community, willing to help the poor and weak and capable of doing justice for those who have been wronged or injured by their neighbors. Most of the drug traffickers mentioned in the song were, at the time, the soldiers who protected the Valão area of Rocinha, considered the most important *bocade-fumo*, or "drug den," in Rocinha and indeed one of the most important in all of Rio to this day. The song portrays the boca of the Valão as a sort of castle or fortress and its gangsters as the brave and loyal warriors who protect both the drug den and, by extension, the larger social order of the favela of Rocinha.

On still another level, the song suggests a transference of the bravery, cunning, and street smarts associated with the drug traffickers as social bandits onto the other residents of Rocinha. In this sense, the *eu*, or "I" of the refrain, as the MC yells, "I am from Rocinha and I'm tough," represents both the figure of the gangsters of the favela and the figure of the other people who live in Rocinha more generally. This connection is strengthened by the sense of complicity between gangsters and residents

that exists in the paternal relationship between the two in which the gangsters protect the residents in return for the silence of the residents and their refusal to inform rival criminals or the police of the gang's activities. The underlying message of the song is that residents of Rocinha should feel a sense of pride to be members of a CV community and that they are somehow different from and better than residents of favelas elsewhere, especially those controlled by other factions. The implication of the song is that there is power in the lives of people in Rocinha and that its residents all are a part of a legacy of courage and strength in which important decisions are made that affect the lives of thousands of people.

### *Transparency*

Besides being places of abundance, energy, and intensity, the bailes funk are also spaces of very direct, open, and spontaneous sorts of interaction that afford fans a great deal of transparency in communicating and pursuing their desires. The transparent sexuality in funk works against the social controls, or what Dyer (1999) calls manipulation that encourage individuals to veil or curb their needs for sex and romance, to rely upon reason and dialogue, and to control their emotions and impulses in general. Besides being present in many lyrics of funk songs, the forthright and powerful sexuality of funk is apparent in the suggestiveness of the dance moves, courtship practices, and generally sexualized atmosphere of the baile funk. Indeed, there is something almost orgiastic in the funk dances, as crowds of people hug, kiss, and rub up against one another in clothing that is often very tight, shiny, and small. Dance steps and choreographies often imitate sex acts, as lines of people of both sexes grind against one another to the music with their hands on their knees or make other pumping and thrusting gestures. The aggressive style of flirting, with which both women and men approach one another, is another aspect of the prevalence of sexuality in the baile. It is not uncommon for men and women to kiss various partners in one dance, often kissing people they did not previously know, and such behavior on the part of either is not generally considered reprehensible in funk culture.

Not surprisingly, funk lyrics often reflect and promote this high level of sexual transparency in the space of the bailes funk. A subgenre of funk that is particularly relevant for the open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships typical of funk culture is *funk sensual*, sometimes called *putaria*, in reference to activities associated with prostitutes, pejoratively referred to in Portuguese as *putas*. This style, performed by male and female artists alike, involves frequent and explicit pornographic references, thinly veiled innuendo, and sexual plays on words. Because many of the most explicit songs of funk sensual include words that most radio stations would be unwilling to play, there are often alternative ver-

sions of these songs, as is the case of many proibidão songs, and indeed the more risqué versions are sometimes available on bootleg compilations sold under the title “proibidão.”

Tati Quebra-Barraco, whose name translates as something like “Tati Bust-the-Hut,” from the favela Cidade de Deus in the district of Jacarepaguá, has made a name for herself through songs involving highly transparent and playful sexual innuendos. She is perhaps the most enduring and widely known female entertainer in funk, and almost all of her songs play with the objectification of men and the liberation of the female libido. Almost all of Tati’s songs are of the variety known as *montagem*, or montage, relying heavily on stuttering electronic beats and sampled loops, as well as lyrics that are usually minimal and repetitive, almost mantralike. Her repertory of songs from her self-titled debut album in 2000, released by Pipo’s Records, and her 2004 CD *Boladona*, released on Link Records, offer numerous examples of the open, spontaneous sexuality for which she is famous, as can be seen in the following excerpts from songs “Montagem Assadinha” (“Sore and Hot”), “Montagem Cardápio do Amor” (“Menu of Love”), and “Montagem Tchutchuco,” respectively:

69, frango assado, de ladinho a gente gosta.  
Se tu não tá agüentando, pára um pouquinho, ‘tá ardendo, assopra!  
(69, chicken on a spit, we like it lying on our side.  
If you can’t take it, stop a little, it’s burning, blow on it!)

Com chantilly nesse corpinho vou lambe ele todinho,  
na hora da refeição . . . prepara seu espeto e sua lingüiça pra mais tarde.  
(With whipped cream on that little body, I’m going to suck every bit of it,  
at mealtime . . . get your roasting spit ready and your sausage for later on.)

Tira a camisa, bota, tira, entra e sai.  
(Take off your shirt, put it in, take it out, go in and out.)

More than simply appropriating an aggressive sexual posture traditionally considered male, by embracing her own sexuality in this way, Tati enacts an empowering gesture of liberation of female sexuality in which a woman is free to pursue her own pleasure as she desires. At the core of her libidinous point of view is a playful celebration of sexual domination through which she stimulates both her own pleasure and the pleasure of her man by turning the tables on him. Furthermore, by refusing passivity or emotional dependence on men and by negating the need to please them, Tati communicates a powerful sense of being untamable. So when she sings in one song, “I don’t like little dicks,” or “Não gosto de piru pequeno,” and then graphically describes what she does to the men she conquers or catches, Tati not only transforms women into hunters and aggressors who have the same right as a man to view a member of the opposite sex as an object of consumption to be obtained but also heightens the playfully combative nature of sexual relationships and brings about

an intensification of the sensuality of the baile funk experience for all parties. Between songs, as she calmly walks about the stage in tight jeans that cling to her unshapely figure and a midriff that shows her fat stomach, Tati often repeats a catchphrase that has come to define her even as it makes a refusal that a woman's worth be based on good looks: "Sou feia mas tô na moda!" or "I'm ugly but I'm in!" In recent years, a series of other female funk artists, such as Deise da Injeição, also from the Cidade de Deus, and groups like Bonde das Loiras and Gaiola das Poupozudas, have had success performing similar songs, although it is worth noting that, by and large, they are more physically attractive than Tati.

### *Community*

In addition to what might be called the formal aspects of community formation, such as people being together in one place, having communal interests, and engaging in collective activity, a significant aspect of the community formed in funk dances is one of racial and class dynamics. The country's deep-rooted, historical divisions along race and class lines have given rise to a sense of fragmentation in contemporary Brazil, exasperated by the increasing breakdown of traditional forms of social interaction in many of today's postindustrial mass societies around the globe. This fragmentation is overcome in the experience of the baile funk through the creation of an intensely unified and vibrant musical community in which there are no outsiders, no rich and poor, no black and white, but instead individual members of a funk crowd, or *massa funkeira*, an enormous collectivity of fans who sway together to the beat as they dance and sing.

Although it is clear that the baile and indeed funk culture in general are associated with blackness and low-income communities, there is an antiessentialism in them that embraces the characteristically Brazilian dream of racial harmony and democracy to a striking degree. Although the skin tone of the crowd in the baile is likely to be varying shades of brown, MCs, DJs, dancers, and fans of funk are of a variety of colors ranging from black to white. Even the music played is nonessentialist; in most bailes, blocks of other styles of urban music are played in addition to funk, such as hip-hop, *pagode*, and even hard rock, and whatever class and racial connotations these styles might have tend to be ignored. All this is not to say that black racial identity is lost in funk but rather that it eschews any facile dichotomy. In a way, by not making blackness a requisite for participation in the baile funk, funk culture invites all those in attendance, whatever color they are, to share in its essence as an expression of black culture, suggesting a blackening of racial identity that runs counter to the historical tendency of Brazilian society to work to whiten itself.

Furthermore, unlike other social and cultural practices in Brazil, in which the poor are usually given an inferior place, the bailes funk create

a space that inverts conventional social hierarchies and places them at the top. The funk aesthetic projects an understanding of social class in a manner that is similarly nonessentialist in its identity as an expression of Afro-Brazilian culture. People from other social strata are readily welcomed to participate in the funk world of the bailes, as long as they are willing to embrace the baile on its own terms and to hold aloft the vision of the idealized world of the favelas it sustains. This is even true for people from other countries, such as MC Gringo, a German singer of Brazilian funk who has achieved great success in recent years. As a result, the baile is one of the few places in Carioca society where middle-class and rich young people can have extensive contact with young poor people on somewhat equal footing. By inverting the traditional social hierarchies in Brazil that place the rich on top, and by allowing so many wealthier adolescents and young adults who attend bailes to transcend the class and race differences that are so blatantly present in their daily lives, the culture of funk enacts a revolutionary new vision of Brazilianness in which the identity of the poor is central. This is not to say that the poor are revered or significantly included across the spheres of Brazilian society, but in the utopian space and moment of the baile, it seems that way.

### *Power*

It seems appropriate to add one more category of social inadequacies to Dyer's (1999) list denoting the lack of power often experienced by poor people living in places like Rio's favelas, both politically and personally, as well as the sense of fear, frustration, and despair they can sometimes feel. Beyond the problems of the physical scarcity of resources typical of poverty anywhere, the sense of powerlessness felt by poor people in contemporary Brazil is rooted in the country's long-standing racial and class inequities and in the ongoing crisis of violence it faces that frequently involves poor people in traumatizing experiences like gang warfare and police repression. The utopian solution found in the experience of the bailes funk that ameliorates this sense of the powerlessness is a sense of empowerment available to fans in the baile as an emotional state endowing them with feelings of power, courage, and hope. These feelings are accompanied by a sense of inclusion in the larger Brazilian society, not necessarily the Brazil of the middle and upper classes, but a Brazil of everyday people, an intensely Brazilian space of hyper-brasilidade, in all its racial openness, sensual playfulness, musicality, gregariousness, and merriment.

The baile is a space of many forms of power, both collective and individual, starting with the incredibly loud funk music itself and the wattage and technology necessary to sustain it. The sheer, physical size of the crowd of funk fans coming together at the dance provides a sense of the power of the energy, creativity, and soul of a large mass of people unified

in dance and song. There is power in the ability of both women and men to fulfill their emotional and corporal desires sexually and romantically. In the contexts of many baile funks in favelas, there is an underlying sense of the power of the favela gangsters, who often brandish high-powered weaponry such as grenades and firearms as they attend or even sponsor the dances. Perhaps most important, there is also a sense of power in the space of the baile funk as it transmits a sense of inclusion to individuals into the greater society as members of important and vibrant communities like Rio's favelas, exalted in the signs and sounds of the bailes as places of beauty, creativity, love, faith, and culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

I regret that space limitations in this article have left less room for the inclusion of more descriptions of bailes funk, song lyrics, and the voices of everyday fans and residents of the favelas than I would have liked. Still, I hope that I have successfully transmitted something of the energy and creativity of those who are engaged in the practice of funk culture. A baile funk, like the ones described in this article, is more than an expression of the power of the favela community to define and create its own sound, aesthetic, and identity. It is the favela heightened, or the transformation of the favela sounds and realities into music, in which people from favelas come together to lift themselves up emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually in the face of the harshness of the conditions of their lives in a largely informal, socially excluded community, through their own stubborn insistence to keep dancing, loving, and living, to a feeling of what it would be like to live in a better world. This better world of the bailes funk is not just any better world, nor is it simply the better world of the Brazilian middle and upper classes, as such. In the better world of people from favelas, no apologies are made for the color of their skin, their culture, or their poverty. The utopia of the favelas in funk is one in which the people in favelas have power and can be proud of who they are and where they come from, even as they offer a supremely welcoming gesture for all to join them, be they poor or rich, black or white, female or male, gay or straight, in a space that is both intensely Brazilian and universally human.

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