

# When Rio Was *Black*: Soul Music, National Culture, and the Politics of Racial Comparison in 1970s Brazil

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The press came down hard on me because the attitude of the album was *black* and at the time most journalists were against *black*; not against *negro*, but against *black*, the consciousness that is connected to the international sphere and isn't just Brazilian.

—Musician Gilberto Gil, on the reception of his 1977 album *Refavela*

In July 1976, the *Jornal do Brasil's* Saturday cultural supplement ran four full pages with a troubling subject. Rio de Janeiro was turning “*black*,” journalist Lena Frias told readers. A wave of dance parties playing soul and funk music from the United States had overtaken recreational clubs in Rio's *subúrbios*, the working-class neighborhoods to the north and west of downtown, and was threatening to invade the wealthier (and whiter) neighborhoods of the city's famed Zona Sul. The article described these soul dances and the hundreds of thousands of young people of color who flocked to them as a cultural space, indeed a place, apart from the city mainstream readers thought they knew.

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*Epigraph. Jornegro* 2, no. 7, 1979, translated by Christopher Dunn and cited in Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2001), 184.

A city with its own culture is developing within Rio. A city that grows and assumes very specific characteristics. A city that Rio, generally speaking, does not know or simply ignores . . . A city whose inhabitants call themselves *blacks* or *browns*; whose hymn is a song by James Brown . . . ; whose bible is [the film] *Wattstax*, the *negro* counterpart to *Woodstock*; whose language incorporates words like *brother* and *white* . . . ; whose motto is *I am somebody*; whose model is the *negro* American, whose gestures they copy, although upon this copy they create original meanings.

This parallel city and its inhabitants, who drew apparent inspiration from cultural and racial identities of black North Americans, constituted for Frias “one of the most provocative sociological phenomena” in Brazilian history.<sup>1</sup> She called the parallel city “*Black Rio*,” using the English word *black*.<sup>2</sup>

Frias’s unsettling account sparked a barrage of articles about the soul phenomenon in major national newspapers and magazines, as well as in the city’s alternative press, which represented various groups on the left and in the emerging *movimento negro*, or black movement. Above all, Frias’s article attracted the attention of the secret police of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Along with other right-wing observers allied with the military dictatorship then in power, they closely observed the soul dances and debated whether they might constitute some kind of coherent, subversive “movement.” The soul controversy thus offers an opportunity to investigate how commentators from across the political spectrum understood the relationship among music, national culture, and racial politics in 1970s Brazil.

Despite participants’ diverse positions and shrill tone, all those involved adopted Lena Frias’s name for the phenomenon. All seem to have agreed that the English word *black*—as a word referencing race, identity, politics, and culture in a U.S. context imagined as more racially polarized than Brazil—was untranslatable into Brazilian racial terms yet was suddenly necessary to describe

1. Lena Frias, “Black Rio: O orgulho (importado) de ser negro no Brasil,” *Jornal do Brasil*, caderno B, 17 July 1976.

2. I use *black* (italicized) when quoting the English word as used in the original Portuguese sources. When translating passages that include the Portuguese word *negro*, I leave it in the original (italicized). To talk about Brazilians of African descent who self-identified as *negro*, I use the English word “black” (unitalicized); I reserve this for a discussion of “black activists” or the “black movement.” For Brazilians of African descent who participated in the soul phenomenon but did not clearly identify as *negros*, I use the terms “Brazilians of color” or “Brazilians of African descent” interchangeably.

processes under way in Brazilian society. Being *black* was culturally and politically different from being *preto* or *pardo*, the terms historically used to designate darker- or lighter-complexioned Brazilians of color; it was different, too, from *negro*, the word that many politically active people of color had adopted since the first decades of the century to designate a proudly unified racial group.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of Frias's article, observers and participants from a range of political backgrounds struggled to define the political implications of soul's *blackness*. Did soul's proud echoes of foreign racial gestures make it dangerous, as many right-wing observers initially believed? Or, as many on the left countered, did its imported referents make it culturally inauthentic and politically bankrupt? The stakes were high for all involved, for soul trampled on a long-cherished contrast at the heart of images of Brazilian national identity: racist United States versus racially tolerant Brazil.

The origins of the idea that Brazil was fundamentally different from the United States in terms of race relations and definitions of race itself stretched back at least as far as the early 1900s. Brazilian and foreign intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century commonly posited that a gentler history of slavery and abolition in Brazil, along with extensive racial intermixture, had produced a society free of racial discrimination. In comparison with the United States, which had a sharply bifurcated racial system that excluded blacks from belonging in a white nation, Brazil, many claimed, had a gradated system of racial identification that included people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds in a *mestiço* or mixed nation.<sup>4</sup> By this logic, *blackness*, as a radically oppositional cultural and political identity, was the unfortunate consequence of racism and racial segregation in the United States, but was wholly out of place in the tolerant and *mestiço* nation of Brazil.

Since the 1950s and '60s, however, the favorable comparison with the United States came under increasing attack from a group of intellectuals and activists, many associated with the black movement. In the 1970s, at the height

3. On changing racial terminology among black activists throughout the twentieth century, see George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888–1988* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991).

4. Foremost among these was Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande e senzala: Introdução à história da sociedade patriarcal no Brasil*, 41st ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2000). See also Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1946); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

of the soul phenomenon, these critics began to argue that the nationalist myth of a racially and culturally harmonious Brazil obfuscated an underlying reality that was much more similar to U.S.-style racism than most Brazilians liked to admit.<sup>5</sup> Since then, many scholars have argued that the deceitful nature of Brazilian racism has perhaps been even more pernicious than U.S.-style racism, for it defused possibilities for “racial consciousness” and racial politics in the style of the U.S. civil rights movement, and even today complicates the implementation of U.S.-style affirmative action programs.<sup>6</sup> For several scholars engaged in this critique of Brazilian racism, *Black Rio*, with its U.S.-style racial referents, was a tonic for Brazil’s racial malaise. The oppositional *black* identities that emerged from the soul dances represented a brief moment of racial consciousness in Brazil—a consciousness long hampered by myths of racial democracy and weak racial movements.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s, debates about the comparison with the United States took a sharp turn to the extremes. Some defenders of Brazil’s relative tolerance and fundamental difference from the United States accused their opponents of cultural imperialism, of imposing U.S. categories and politics onto Brazil and thereby erasing its specificity. In response, some supporters of the idea that the United States and Brazil shared similar patterns of racism retorted that the defense of Brazilian difference amounted to a denial of, or an apology for, Brazil’s virulent forms of discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, these well-meaning argu-

5. See especially Abdias do Nascimento, *O negro revoltado* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1982); Abdias do Nascimento, “O genocídio do negro brasileiro,” in *O Brasil na mira do pan-africanismo*, ed. Abdias do Nascimento (Salvador da Bahia: EDUFBA/CEAO, 2002).

6. Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); France Winddance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1998). On affirmative action, see Sérgio da Silva Martins, Carlos Alberto Medeiros, and Elisa Larkin Nascimento, “Paving Paradise: The Road from ‘Racial Democracy’ to Affirmative Action in Brazil,” *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 6 (2004): 787–816.

7. J. Michael Turner, “Brown into Black,” and Michael Mitchell, “Blacks and the *abertura democrática*,” both in *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil*, ed. Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1985), 73–94, 95–119; Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*, 114–20; Helene Monteiro, “O ressurgimento do Movimento Negro no Rio de Janeiro na década de 70” (Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1991).

8. Particularly polemical is the debate sparked by Bourdieu and Wacquant’s reading of Hanchard’s *Orpheus and Power*. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 41–58. For subsequent

ments on behalf of Brazilians of color ended up presenting them alternately as dupes of national myths of racelessness or as victims of imperialist standards of racial consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

A new, more nuanced position on the U.S.-Brazil comparison seems to be emerging from the din of these polemics. Most recently, some scholars have sought to decouple the argument about whether or not Brazil has racism or racial activism from the condition that these phenomena function as they are perceived to do in the United States. Unlike arguments from earlier in the century, these attempts to understand Brazil on its own terms do not bind scholars to a celebratory discourse of racial tolerance and exceptionalism. Rather, they allow scholars to explore the ways that racial politics, identities, and discrimination can exist just as vividly in Brazil as they do in the United States, though with distinct dynamics and manifestations.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the presumption of a wholly bounded Brazilian racial system, with no overlap or exchange with the United States, no longer holds up. Contact and comparison with the United States (and other international flows of ideas and symbols) were always constitutive of Brazil's internal discussions about race.<sup>11</sup>

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defenses of Hanchard, see M. Hanchard, "Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-imperialism, and the Ethnocentrism of P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 20, no. 4 (2003): 5–29; John French, "The Missteps of Anti-Imperialist Reason: Bourdieu, Wacquant and Hanchard's *Orpheus and Power*," *Theory, Culture and Society* 17, no. 1 (2000): 107–28. For a range of Brazilian contributions to this polemic, see the special issue of *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* (Rio de Janeiro) 24, no. 1 (2002).

9. For an overview of these debates, see Peter Wade, "Images of Latin American *Mestizaje* and the Politics of Comparison," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 23, no. 3 (2004): 355–66.

10. See Hebe Maria Mattos de Castro, *Das cores do silêncio: Os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista, Brasil, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995); Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000); Peter Fry, "Politics, Nationality, and the Meanings of 'Race' in Brazil," *Daedalus* 129, no. 2 (2000): 83–118; Tiago de Melo Gomes, *Um espelho no palco: Identidades sociais e massificação da cultura no teatro de revista dos anos 1920* (Campinas: UNICAMP, 2004); Robin E. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2001); Paulina L. Alberto, "Terms of Inclusion: Black Activism and the Cultural Conditions for Citizenship in a Multi-Racial Brazil, 1920–1982" (PhD diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2005).

11. See George Reid Andrews, "Brazilian Racial Democracy, 1900–90: An American Counterpoint," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 3 (1996): 483–507; John French, "Translation, Diasporic Dialogue, and the Errors of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant," *Nepantla* 4, no. 2 (2003): 375–89; and Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review*, no. 91 (2005): 62–90.

The popularity of soul music in Brazil in the 1970s provides a unique opportunity for exploring this complex interplay between international racial referents and national ideologies of race. A few recent studies of the ways Brazilians in this period understood, enjoyed, and produced soul music trace the ways that soul's styles, politics, and racial identities were distinctly Brazilian even when they borrowed consciously from U.S. models.<sup>12</sup> This article shifts outward from the music to the public debates over and police investigations into *Black Rio*, to understand the sense that a range of Brazilians made of these cultural gestures. With exceptional eloquence, these debates not only lay out the opinions of diverse Brazilians about the comparison with the United States in their own time, but they show participants consciously playing with that comparison to define race and national culture in politically expedient ways.

Like soul music itself, these contested readings of soul's foreignness in mid-1970s Brazil complicate assumptions often held by scholars on both sides of the comparison debate about the power of U.S. or any foreign racial, cultural, and political models to trump local interpretations, whether positively or adversely. Brazilians on all sides of the soul debate adopted the English word *black*. Despite the protestations of many that *black* was a foreign word used to describe a foreign influence, the English word actually helped to explain the shifting terrain of local culture and politics. And again, despite concerns that dancers' enthusiastic adoption of the term *black* to describe themselves and their styles would destroy or contaminate local racial terminology, Brazilians of all stripes had no trouble adopting the term without substituting it for the Brazilian word *negro*. In their untranslated use of this foreign "gesture," as Frias put it, all those involved "create[d] original meanings."

### **Blacks under Surveillance**

The Departamento Geral de Investigações Especiais (DGIE) political intelligence wing began its investigations into the soul phenomenon as early as April 1975, over a year before Frias's article "discovered" soul for a broader reading public. The DGIE was a newly reformed branch of the entities commonly known as the "secret" or "political" police, which had existed under several

12. Bryan McCann, "Black Pau: Uncovering the History of Brazilian Soul," in *Rockin' Las Américas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latin/o America*, ed. Deborah Pacini Hernández, Héctor Fernández-L'Hoeste, and Eric Zolov (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 177–80; Lívio Sansone, "Global Funk in Bahia and Rio," in *Blackness without Ethnicity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 115–16.

guises in Brazil since the early twentieth century. Though their goal of preserving social and political order remained constant, the secret police's ideals of order and their methods for achieving it changed with the times. Unsurprisingly, the scope and intensity of political policing peaked under repressive governments, like Getúlio Vargas's Estado Novo (1937–45) or the post-1964 military dictatorship. From the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, at the height of the dictatorship's political repression, Rio de Janeiro's secret police forces (then known as the Departamento Autônomo de Ordem Política e Social, DOPS/RJ) worked closely with federal intelligence agencies to assist in the repression of the organized left and urban guerrillas.<sup>13</sup>

When the soul phenomenon came to their attention, Rio's secret police were in transition, in more ways than one. In 1975, the secret police were restructured as the DGIE, with a Departamento de Polícia Política e Social that would act as "police intelligence," collecting information on people and institutions deemed dangerous to national security.<sup>14</sup> This institutional reorganization coincided with a shift in the nation's political atmosphere that would change the nature of both political activism and political policing. By the second half of the 1970s, having successfully disarmed the institutional left, and in response to growing opposition from moderate political sectors, the dictatorship entered a phase of decompression (*distensão*), in which opposition to the regime was less strictly defined, investigated, and punished. The attenuation of state repression allowed for the emergence of new social and political movements articulated around notions of identity like race, gender, or sexual orientation.<sup>15</sup> On one hand, this made the political police's tasks easier; these movements worked through peaceful means, unlike the urban guerrillas of previous years. Yet they also presented new problems for the DGIE. As elsewhere in Latin America, these new social movements challenged established political parties organized around traditional left and right ideologies and reconfigured notions of "the political" more broadly.

13. On Rio's political police, see Darien J. Davis, "The Arquivos das Polícias Policiais [sic] of the State of Rio de Janeiro," in *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 1 (1996): 99–104; and Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, *Os arquivos das polícias políticas: Reflexos de nossa história contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 1996).

14. This followed the fusion of the states of Rio de Janeiro and Guanabara. Davis, "The Arquivos," 101.

15. Sonia E. Alvarez, *Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); Maria Paula Nascimento Araujo, *A utopia fragmentada: As novas esquerdas no Brasil e no mundo na década de 1970* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2000).

This diffusion of the “political,” which became at once all-pervasive and difficult to pin down, confounded the categories of political subversion (“terrorism,” “communism,” “Cuba”) with which the police were accustomed to working. The police faced precisely this challenge with the soul dances, their first major encounter with the black associations and movements that would begin to flourish in the second half of the 1970s. Black organizations, like the Frente Negra of the early 1930s or the Teatro Experimental do Negro of the 1940s and ’50s, had previously earned the attention of Rio’s secret police, yet only on an ad hoc basis; there was no formal category for black activism on the police’s lists. Their initial reports on the soul phenomenon, before the watershed publication of Lena Frias’s exposé, reveal the police recognizing soul as a potential threat to public order and safety but struggling to categorize the nature of that threat.

On April 19, 1975, DGIE agents infiltrated a large soul dance cohosted by music groups (*conjuntos*) named Black Power and Soul Grand Prix at the Portela Samba School. The resulting report, whose subject heading (*assunto*) “Black Power” conflated the name of the group with suggestions of black radicalism, reveals the police’s primary concern with the preferential treatment organizers showed to people of color:

The show was attended by close to six thousand people of color, and the entrance tickets were sold under the following conditions: white person, 15 cruzeiros; person of color, 10 cruzeiros. During the dance, . . . dancers shouted the names of famous *negro* figures, such as Luther King [*sic*] and Jimmy Hendrix. It was also observed that the few whites present were treated with hostility, through the application of a “cold war” against them, and that the dancers made use of great quantities of marijuana.

The group Black Power, the report alleged, had been banned from holding dances in another social club, the Gremio Recreativo Rocha Miranda, “because they [Black Power] did not want to grant entrance to white people.”<sup>16</sup> Racial discrimination of this sort was technically a crime in Brazil, for it violated the Afonso Arinos Law (passed in 1951 in response to racism against people of

16. Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Fundo Polícias Políticas no Rio de Janeiro, sector DGIE, folder 241 (hereafter cited as DGIE followed by folder number), pp. 245–44, 29 Aug. 1975. The descending order of pagination in all cited DGIE documents reflects that of the originals.



color). Yet police in Brazil had never consistently prosecuted the many violations of this law when people of color were the victims of discrimination.<sup>17</sup>

In subsequent reports, the officials who discussed antiwhite discrimination in these soul dances were at odds about whether that form of discrimination was equivalent to or worse than the antiblack discrimination much more prevalent in Brazilian society. A year into the investigation, for instance, a police investigator submitted a report describing as “radicalism” the processes whereby soul dance producers “sought to hamper the entrance of . . . whites,” but he explained that such radicalism merely echoed the practices of rock clubs in the whiter Zona Sul, which routinely did the same thing to “*negros*.”<sup>18</sup> In their marginal notes on this report, officials debated the question of racial discrimination in ways that reveal a lopsided vision of what it meant to defend Brazil’s racial democracy. Police delegate Nahli Jorge Hauat pressed the investigator to specify “in detail to what extent the organizers [of black and white parties] impose difficulties.”<sup>19</sup> He received no responses regarding the soul dances, suggesting that the police still had no firm leads on the issue over a year after their initial investigations. But another high-ranking officer, Deuteronomio Rocha dos Santos, apparently felt compelled to respond to the passages in the report accusing white clubs of “radicalism” (passages someone marked with a bold “*não*” in the margins): “Such radicalism . . . consists in the practice, utilized in some associations and clubs of the Zona Norte and Zona Sul, of not permitting the entrance of people who are not members, or who are not conveniently dressed. This creates a series of scuffles between the clubs’ doormen and visitors. This occurs in clubs considered of the elite, such as the Iate Clube [Yacht Club] do Rio de Janeiro, Hípico Brasileiro [Riding Club], Clube Militar, etc.”<sup>20</sup> His dismissal of any distinctions made in admissions to “elite” white clubs as a matter of class or “membership” rather than race was a common trope in conservative defenses of Brazil’s racial democracy.

Even without much concrete evidence of antiwhite discrimination, the police’s initial investigations evince a sense that new forms of racial identification, unsavory and un-Brazilian, were at work among the soul dancers. The first

17. George Reid Andrews found one single successful instance of conviction for antiblack racism under the Afonso Arinos Law in the period between 1951 and 1988. Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil*, 318 n. 11.

18. DGIE 252, pp. 8–7, 23 Aug. 1976.

19. DGIE 252, p. 9v, 24 Aug. 1976.

20. *Ibid.*

report on the party at Portela went on to describe another dance in late April 1975, in which “the ‘Blacks’ promoted the concentration of four thousand people of color on the grounds of the Cascadura Tennis Club.” The police interpreted as suspicious what they saw as the *blacks*’ explicit attempts to concentrate people of color around a particular form of style and leisure. Their distinction between partygoers in general (*peçoas de cor*) and those they saw as instigators of racially organized styles and identities (*blacks*) suggests their sense of the fundamental political difference between diffuse local racial identities and defined imported ones. The report ends by raising a suspicion that frequently accompanied investigations into soul dances in this period: the possibility that a “*negro americano*” was involved in the Grupo Black (Black Power’s business division) or that the Grupo Black was being financed from abroad.<sup>21</sup> Troubled by the blackness of soul, but unwilling to consider how Brazilians of color might have developed such oppositional ideas of race on their own, the police looked (in vain) for a foreign infiltrator who might be their source.

In fact, soul music had been an important part of Brazilian music and of Rio’s social scene at least since the beginning of the decade. Historian Bryan McCann traces the emergence of a Brazilian soul style from the transnational experimentation of musicians like Tim Maia, Tony Tornado, Gerson King Combo, and the band Abolição since the early 1970s. The soul dances in Rio’s suburbs, he argues, emerged somewhat independently of these musical trends, as part of the leisure activities of neighborhood soccer clubs (frequented by working-class people of color) or clubs for the middle classes of color, like the Clube Renascença. Though the exact origins of the soul dances are difficult to determine, McCann writes that by 1972, DJs in these recreational clubs were hosting dances that played U.S. soul music, and by 1974 dance promoters had begun to adopt a wider array of symbols denoting and affirming the styles and fashions of U.S. blackness.<sup>22</sup>

By the middle of the 1970s, when the secret police began their investigations, the dances had become large-scale, well-organized affairs. The group Black Power had risen to fame among hundreds of soul groups in Rio, which, as McCann notes, increasingly took over from the social clubs as organizers and underwriters of the dances.<sup>23</sup> Members passed out flyers at dances or posted them on walls all over Rio’s suburbs and Zona Norte, advertising parties almost

21. DGIE 241, pp. 245–44, 29 Aug. 1975. See also DGIE 252, p. 10, 22 July 1976, and DGIE 250, pp. 728–27, 23 Aug. 1976.

22. McCann, “Black Pau,” 69–70, 77–82.

23. *Ibid.*, 82.

**MAGNATAS FUTEBOL DE SALÃO**  
 Rua General Belford, 336 - Rocha  
 apresenta  
 O lançamento do LP Equipe **BLACK POWER**



**BLACK POWER**  
 Apresenta o máximo em  
 Soul e Qualidade

**SOU GRAND PRIX**  
**CASH BOX**  
**A D E M I R**

**Sabado 4 Setembro - 19 hs.**

Dia 18 de Setembro - No **SOCIAL CLUBE 18 DE JULHO** em Olaria  
 A volta espetacular de "BLACK POWER"

Figure 1. Flyer from 1976 advertising a soul dance in a Rio suburb featuring the group Black Power, among others. From the collection of the Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Fundo Políticas Políticas no Rio de Janeiro, sector DGIE, folder 252, p. 03. Reprinted with permission.

nightly. The flyers highlighted featured bands and sought to entice dancers by promising prizes for best outfits, raffles for newly released LPs, and the possibility of appearing on local radio and TV stations.<sup>24</sup> Venues ranged from smaller neighborhood social clubs to the spacious rehearsal halls of Rio's samba schools. At their height in the mid to late seventies, the soul dances drew audiences of up to 15 thousand people at a time, from an estimated total of one and a half million soul dancers.<sup>25</sup> Brazilian and multinational recording companies rushed

24. Some of these flyers appear in DGIE 252, pp. 6–2.

25. Hermano Vianna estimates that there were up to 15,000 dancers per event, held daily from Monday to Sunday. Hermano Vianna, *O mundo funk carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1988), 21, 26. Frias estimated about 300 *conjuntos* in Rio, with almost nightly dances ranging in attendance from 5,000 to 15,000 people. The cultural supplement *Um e Meio* of Rio's *Jornal do Commercio* placed the total number of dancers in the "millions" ("Black Rio," *Um e Meio*, 20–21 Nov. 1977), while a DJ in Frias's article estimated between one and two million.

to tap into this lucrative market, issuing compilation albums of foreign songs as well as records by homegrown soul artists.<sup>26</sup>

Soul's growing popularity and Black Power's rising visibility as a leading music group fed the secret police's fears that the dances might constitute the beginnings of a mass racial movement with organized backing. In August of 1975, the DGIE brought in for interrogation the members of Black Power—Paulo Santos Filho, Emilson Moreira dos Santos, and Adilson Francisco dos Santos. Confronted with the police's accusations and suspicions, the youths "denied the practice of any kind of racial discrimination, as well as the prohibition against performing at the 'Gremio Recreativo Rocha Miranda,'" and "claimed no knowledge of the presence of a *negro* American in the Grupo Black."<sup>27</sup> That the police called the suspects "*jovens de cor*" (youth of color) while referring to the potential U.S. ally as a "*negro*" once again suggests their sense of the difference that ought to exist between Brazilian and U.S. racial systems. The term *negro*, while not calling attention to itself as dramatically as *black*, still denoted a stronger, American-style group identity than "of color."

While the police's interrogation of Black Power members centered on relatively new concerns about racial movements and "racial discrimination," their archives still mostly held material relating to the longer-standing repression of the organized left. When the police ran the suspects' names through their files, they found, for instance, that Paulo dos Santos (the owner of Black Power) had previously signed a petition in favor of the legalization of the Communist Party, and that João Batista do Nascimento (a member of the Grupo Black) had promoted "subversive propaganda" during the left-center government of João Goulart in the early 1960s.<sup>28</sup> In an interview with historian Hermano Vianna several years later, another DJ named Nirto explained that he and his cousin Dom Filó (both of Soul Grand Prix) ended up in jail "because the political police believed that behind those music groups there were clandestine leftist groups."<sup>29</sup> In the context of shifting definitions of the political, the police tried to make sense of soul by adapting their established practices and knowledge base (surveillance of the left, links with foreign agitators) to the less familiar identity politics of soul.

The police's relatively narrow measures of "subversion" rendered them unable, at times, to fully articulate some of soul's culturally oppositional

26. Frias, "Black Rio." For more on the soul recording industry, see Ana Maria Bahiana, "Enlatando Black Rio," in *Nada será como antes: MPB nos anos 70* (Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1980); and McCann, "Black Pau," 83–84.

27. DGIE 241, pp. 245–44, 29 Aug. 1975.

28. DGIE 241, p. 247, 29 Aug. 1975.

29. Vianna, *O mundo funk carioca*, 27–28.

aspects. This seems to have been at work in a report on a major soul party, the Third Soul Caravan, held in June 1976 at the Império Serrano club. The party's organizers, according to police records, screened the film *Wattstax* for the first time in Brazil.<sup>30</sup> *Wattstax* was the documentary of a soul and funk music festival sponsored by the Stax record label, held in 1972 in the iconic African American neighborhood of Watts (Los Angeles) to commemorate the racial uprisings that took place there in 1965. The film interspersed scenes from everyday life in the neighborhood (such as interviews with residents on issues of race and politics) with commentary from comedian Richard Pryor and clips from the music festival, where Jesse Jackson served as MC. In 1970s Brazil, the military government strictly censored films (particularly American ones) that dealt with racially explicit subjects. Censors were to be on the alert for any movies that, among other things, "depict racial problems in Brazil" or "deal with black power in the United States."<sup>31</sup> Yet the secret police saw little to fear in the screening of *Wattstax* at soul dances. Their report on the Third Soul Caravan noted that "[the] exhibition of the film Watts Tax [*sic*] was completely truncated, with only some scenes being shown, without any kind of audio system working, in a merely visual presentation that was devoid of any demagoguery."<sup>32</sup>

For the secret police to dismiss *Wattstax*'s political potential on the grounds of soundlessness suggests their limited abilities, at that point in their investigations, to perceive the power of visual images to inspire and communicate new kinds of racial and political identities. *Wattstax*—with its vibrant shots of almost a hundred thousand black Americans sporting Afros, dashikis, and distinctive soul and funk styles, and filling the LA Coliseum for a majority black community event during which Jesse Jackson led the audience (fists held high) in a rousing rendition of his poem "I am somebody" (its words flashing across the stadium ticker) and the Black National Anthem—communicates an affirmation of blackness and racial pride for which no soundtrack or political oration would have been necessary. Across Rio, soul dance organizers projected soundless slides with scenes from U.S. black movies like *Shaft* (1971), *Wattstax* (1972), and *Claudine* (1974) as a way of underscoring the theme of "black is beautiful." In the famous "Shaft Night" parties at the Clube Renascença, for instance, organizers

30. DGIE 250, p. 731, 2 July 1976. It is unlikely that this was actually the first screening of *Wattstax*. Lena Frias's article, published only a month after the Soul Caravan party, claimed that the film was already a classic among soul dancers.

31. James H. Kennedy, "Political Liberalization, Black Consciousness, and Recent Afro-Brazilian Literature," *Phylon* 47, no. 3 (1986): 203.

32. DGIE 250, pp. 731–29, 2 July 1976.

interspersed those images with pictures of dancers from previous weeks in order to create a proud identification between dancers and famous, beautiful people of color.<sup>33</sup> Having the soundtrack available, however, did appear to intensify the film's power. Just a month after the Soul Caravan, Lena Frias described a screening of *Wattstax* in Rio's Museu de Arte Moderna, where, she claimed, just as in similar screenings across Rio's Zona Norte, members of the audience followed Jesse Jackson, fists raised, as they intoned in unison, "I am somebody."<sup>34</sup> Frias added that phrases from the film "are memorized, repeated, embroidered onto clothing, sung, hummed, danced, whistled."<sup>35</sup>

Yet the police, during their first viewing of *Wattstax* at the Third Soul Caravan, were less concerned with the potential politics of style than with the reassuring fact that "a climate of tranquility" seemed to characterize this and other dances, "without any kind of discrimination or animosity between people of any race, all of them enjoying the same privileges." Even the disproportionate presence of people of color at the dances was "admissible," since the music was from "North American ghettos," and therefore logically appealed primarily to people of color.<sup>36</sup> The police, in other words, were searching for concrete evidence of racial discrimination or organized racial movements, not symbolic threats. During their infiltration of the Soul Caravan, the secret police took Tony Tornado, a leading soul singer, at his word when he declared to the public that (as the police paraphrased it) "the movement had no political or social angle, aiming only to integrate people into the musical environment." They found additional confirmation when Tornado, "questioned by one of the observers, who identified himself as a student just arrived from Recife to see him (which satisfied [Tornado] very much), added nothing to what he had already said" about the movement's politics.<sup>37</sup>

It is not clear whether the "observer" in question was a partygoer or one of the agents themselves, posing as an avid soul dancer. This was a technique the secret police in Rio and elsewhere used to infiltrate the meetings of a range

33. For more on the "Shaft Night" soul dances at the Renascença in the 1970s, see Sonia Maria Giacomini, *A alma da festa: Família, etnicidade e projetos num clube social da zona Norte do Rio de Janeiro, o Renascença Clube* (Belo Horizonte: UFMG / Rio de Janeiro: IUPERJ, 2006), 195–96.

34. The Museu de Arte Moderna was a site of cultural innovation and opposition to the regime, also closely watched by the police for its "subversive" activities. DGIE 252, pp. 125–22, 30.

35. Frias, "Black Rio."

36. DGIE 250, pp. 731–29, 2 July 1976.

37. Ibid.

of social and political organizations they deemed suspicious or subversive.<sup>38</sup> The likelihood that agents posed as dancers raises the question of the class and racial identity of the investigators. It would make sense for the agents selected to infiltrate the dances to be relatively dark skinned, given the conspicuousness of the few whites in attendance. It is also likely that the lower-level officers sent out to investigate events like the dances were of similar class backgrounds as the soul dancers—inhabitants not of *favelas* but of working- or lower-middle-class neighborhoods. Perhaps the agents' sense of the relative harmlessness of musical styles and fashions—as long as they remained within the boundaries of the law—stemmed from their close contacts with soul dancers they knew from their neighborhoods or families. Whether because of a blindness to the politics of style, then, or a sense of their relative harmlessness, it seems that by early July 1976, on the eve of the publication of Frias's article, investigators were willing to temper their vigilance of soul. It simply did not constitute a threat to what the police then imagined national security to be.

### **Black Rio: Lena Frias Takes the Pulse of the Nation**

Lena Frias's article of July 17, 1976, alerted an array of Brazilian thinkers, including a few members of the secret police, to the possibility that Rio's soul culture had deeper political implications. Specifically, Frias's article spelled out the ways that the racial imaginary encoded in soul styles endangered cherished images of Brazilian national identity. Displaying an eye for the sensational, Frias opened her article on soul in the register of fear: soul was separatist in character and was gaining popularity. She wrote about soul with an almost anthropological eye, as if describing a truly different culture (or even a cult) that had dangerously infiltrated a "proper" Rio. The "initiates of soul," she explained, are "inhabitants of the *negro* city of Rio, an almost secret city, to the extent that it is unknown, but whose inhabitants know each other very well. They know and recognize each other through their own signs, their own ways of greeting, their ways of dressing and self-presentation." To illustrate this, Frias's article included multiple large photographs (by Almir Veiga) of the "types" that made up *Black* Rio—close-ups of young men and women wearing berets, Lennon specs, narrow-legged pants, platform shoes, and Afros. (In a clear example of

38. See, for instance, Antonio Luigi Negro and Paulo Fontes, "Trabalhadores em São Paulo: Ainda um caso de polícia," in *No coração das trevas: O DEOPS/SP visto por dentro*, ed. Maria Aparecida de Aquino, Marco Aurélio Vannucchi Leme de Mattos, and Walter Cruz Swensson (São Paulo: Arquivo do Estado / Imprensa Oficial, 2001), 166.

the ways that cultural and political symbolism blended, this hairstyle was sometimes called “*cabelo black-power*” in Portuguese). Another series of photos captured young men executing what Frias, in her exoticizing caption, called “stages of the complicated *Black* greeting ritual.”<sup>39</sup>

*Black* Rio, Frias showed, was not just black in its separatist U.S. cultural references and practices; it was literally a black or majority nonwhite urban space. For Frias, as for many others who wrote about the soul movement after her, the category of physical space best captured the nature and troubling implications of soul’s racial separateness. The soul phenomenon took root in Rio’s working-class peripheral neighborhoods (the Zona Norte and Greater Rio), characterized by a greater percentage of inhabitants of color than the whiter, middle- and upper-class Zona Sul. In Frias’s and others’ treatments, the fact that mostly black and mulatto *cariocas* (natives of Rio) attended these dances reinforced images of those neighborhoods as primarily nonwhite (despite the actual ethnic diversity of their inhabitants), literally a black Rio. The comparison with the United States served to make a point about the foreignness to Brazil of such racial segregation. The neighborhoods in Rio’s Zona Norte were developing “an air of Harlem,” Frias wrote, describing a picture of walls covered in graffiti advertising soul bands with English names.<sup>40</sup>

It would be difficult to argue that the soul dances had created Rio’s well-known patterns of spatial segregation, which dated at least to the early twentieth century. What observers like Frias implicitly lamented when they described the spatial separatism of *Black* Rio was its explicit reconfiguration of Rio’s popular culture—long imagined as unified and shared across social divisions—to match the city’s prevalent spatial segregation. Frias added musical taste to this schematic association between geography and racial identity to argue that it was soul that was dividing her city: “Today, in Greater Rio, soul is a synonym for *negro*, just like rock is a synonym for white.”<sup>41</sup> A segregated city and a segregated musical landscape thus posed a direct danger to Rio’s (and by extension, Brazil’s) *mestiço* identity. Like the police captain who saw discrimination by people of color as a bigger threat than discrimination toward people of color, Frias worried less about white rockers’ imitation of foreign culture than about African descendants’ apparent alienation from the established symbols of an Afro-Brazilian national culture. *Black* Rio, she pronounced, was a “population that does not have *samba* [the national, African-derived music] and *feijoada* [the

39. Frias, “Black Rio.”

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*



national, African-derived bean dish] among its quotidian and folkloric manifestations. Although they might even like samba and feijoada the way any foreigner would. A population whose eyes and whose interests turn toward models that are entirely un-Brazilian.”<sup>42</sup>

The underlying assumptions about national identity that informed Lena Frias’s distrust of soul were widely shared among Brazilians in her time. Since the 1930s, Brazilian intellectuals and the state had promoted a national identity based on ideas of cultural and racial mixture. Most famously, Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre argued that a long history of intimate family relations dating back to the colonial period had softened Brazilian slavery, laying the foundation for a society with greater racial intermixture (*mestiçagem*), greater acceptance of African cultural influences, and greater racial tolerance than the United States—an attitude he would later call “racial democracy.”<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1930s and 40s, populist leader Getúlio Vargas drew upon these ideas of a mixed cultural identity and racial harmony for his project of national unification. Under Vargas’s government, certain African-inflected cultural products—like the musical form samba or the staple of slave cuisine feijoada—became icons of a mixed, harmonious Brazilian identity.<sup>44</sup> As samba in particular rose to the status of national symbol, the city of Rio (samba’s birthplace) became increasingly identified with the ideals of *mestiçagem* and racial harmony. In official discourses, Rio’s samba became the musical form that Brazilians of all classes and colors shared; the proof that, despite the social inequalities embodied in Rio’s landscapes, Brazil’s culture was essentially democratic.<sup>45</sup> In the 1930s and ’40s, then, the contrast between a hybrid, racially democratic Brazil and a racially

42. Ibid.

43. Though Freyre most famously laid out his ideas concerning Brazil’s racial mixture and harmony in his classic 1933 *Casa-grande e senzala*, he did not coin the term “racial democracy” until his post-WWII publications, such as Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in Brazilian Civilization*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1946). See Antônio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, *Classes, raças e democracia* (São Paulo: Editora 34; Fundação de Apoio à Universidade de São Paulo, 2002), chap. 5.

44. Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004); Peter Fry, “Feijoada e ‘soul food’: Notas sobre a manipulação de símbolos étnicos e nacionais,” in *Para Inglês Ver: Identidade e política na cultura brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982); Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999); Dain Borges, “The Recognition of Afro-Brazilian Symbols and Ideas, 1890–1940,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 32, no. 2 (1995): 59–78.

45. McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil*; Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*.

dysfunctional United States was consolidated as one of the foundational tenets of *brasildade*, Brazil's unique national character.<sup>46</sup>

Over the next few decades, these ideals and icons of a unified national identity gained strength, permeating the nationalist thought of the left and the right. From the late 1950s until the coup of 1964, leftist academics at the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB) developed a discourse of “authenticity” versus “alienation” that set the standards for assessing contemporary cultural production. Their theories of an authentic Brazilian culture drew upon ideas of colonized cultures and mentalities from the writings of contemporary leftist intellectuals (like Frantz Fanon, Octave Mannoni, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Georges Balandier) as well as previous ones (especially Hegel and the young Marx). As interpreted by the ISEB, much of Brazilian culture was “alienated.” In other words, Brazilians—driven by a sense of inferiority produced by a peripheral position in a neocolonial world system—relied excessively on foreign models in their attempts to create a national culture. An authentic Brazilian “self” could only be recovered through a celebration of cultural products that emerged from Brazil's particular sociohistorical conditions and not, as in the case of soul, by copying the culture of the colonial center.<sup>47</sup> The work of leftist intellectuals in the 1950s and early '60s, then, added to the Vargas-era definition of *brasildade* the imperative of defending this nationalist vision against foreign, imperialist cultural penetration.

Under the military dictatorship that began in 1964, ideologies of *brasildade* and racial democracy took on an even more totalizing, indeed suffocating character. The military governments sought to enforce the image of a racially harmonious, Africanized Brazil at home and abroad, while preempting the development of homegrown or U.S.- or African-inspired, racially oppositional politics. These objectives led them to emphasize Brazil's Africanness in terms of a folkloric, ancient, and depoliticized African presence, heavily mediated by cultural and racial mixture and contained by processes of nationalization. In 1977, for instance, Itamaraty, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, sent a delegation of diplomats, intellectuals, artists, filmmakers, and dancers to represent Brazil at the Second World Festival of Black Arts (FESTAC II) in Lagos, Nigeria. Itamaraty's official publication on Brazil's participation in the festival lauded (for Brazilian and African audiences) Brazil's harmonious incorporation of African traits, which the delegation displayed primarily through manifestations like

46. Andrews, “Brazilian Racial Democracy,” 487–89.

47. Renato Ortiz, *Cultura brasileira e identidade nacional* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985), 47.

samba and Candomblé. But this publication, titled *The Impact of African Culture on Brazil*, portrayed African culture as a thing of the past, no longer physically linked to Africa or even necessarily to people of African descent in Brazil. For its author, conservative art critic Clarival do Prado Valladares, the African “impact” was a sort of historical collision among cultures that bequeathed Brazil a mystical, intangible cultural sensibility: he wrote of “African prototypes” in Brazilian cultural forms and hailed the “heritage of the ur-culture of African origin.”<sup>48</sup> Even as the Brazilian government proclaimed its nation’s (disembodied) African heritage abroad, it continued to uphold laws (passed in 1968) prohibiting the discussion of racial issues in political, academic, or artistic mediums.<sup>49</sup> By the time of Frias’s writing, then, ideas about Brazilian culture, race, and national identity had congealed within a narrow mold of “national authenticity” shaped by the extreme (though unexpectedly overlapping) ideological concerns of the left and the right.

### Conservative Nationalism and Soul’s Challenge to Brazilian Mestiçagem

Until Frias published her exposé, the police had never considered whether the soul dances might be a threat to this official cultural policy, contenting themselves with the conclusion that the dances fit none of their established categories of subversion. Just five days after Frias’s sensational report appeared in the *Jornal do Brasil*, however, military police delegate Antonio Viçoso Cotta Gomes sent a concerned letter to the DGIE asking them to investigate soul, a matter he considered “of supreme importance.” He attached Frias’s article, which, he explained, “shocked me for the sense of *opposition* that, in the future, might be created [by soul]. It provides an incentive for separation, through the emergence of several *exclusivist* social activities, beginning with the dances where ‘SOUL’ music (the favorite of *negros*) is played, whereas ‘rock’ is cited as [the favorite] of whites.” Gomes urged the DGIE to organize its investigation around a series of key questions. Who, for instance, was financing the visit to Brazil of black Americans, “whose ideology we do not know?” Could not, he continued, the music’s “exclusivity,” the “uniformity of dress and footwear,” give rise to “a political group, oriented toward racial prejudice?” Finally, Gomes—no doubt

48. Clarival do Prado Valladares, *The Impact of African Culture on Brazil* (Brasília: Ministério das Relações Exteriores / Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1976), 39, 58.

49. Thales de Azevedo, *Democracia racial: Ideologia e realidade* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975), 53.

reacting to the picture of graffitied walls that opened Frias's article—remarked upon the “ostentatiousness” with which the “movement” had overtaken Rio, “blemishing the city's physiognomy, in a way not even permitted for electoral campaigns.”<sup>50</sup> Soul was disfiguring the harmonious face of the city with its bold blackness.

Although it began with a familiar focus on outside agitation, Gomes's letter shows how quickly and clearly he perceived what DGIE officers had not fully glimpsed: soul's potential to provide a basis for the transformation of racial identities and for subsequent racial activism. Gomes's next lines reveal the extent to which Frias's argument about *Black* Rio's separatism had hit its mark, elevating perceptions of soul's threat to a symbolic attack on Brazil's mixed and harmonious identity. “It is fundamental,” Gomes continued, “to remember that in our country there was always harmony among Brazilians, independently of race or religion. The miscegenation of our people—white, *negro*, Indian—is, according to Gylberto [*sic*] Freyre in ‘Casa Grande e Senzala,’ a privilege.”<sup>51</sup> Historians of the dictatorship have long underscored the extent to which its officials embraced, and enforced, national ideals of *mestiçagem* and racial tolerance as outlined by Freyre.<sup>52</sup> But it is rare indeed to get a glimpse of a military police officer citing challenges to those ideals as offenses in a report—literally “policing” these ideas—and holding up Freyre's work as the symbolic foundation of national security.

Gomes was not the only figure on the political right to see Frias's article as a wake-up call. In the year that followed, commentators with a staunchly conservative stance toward national culture continued to express their dismay at the soul phenomenon. In an opinion piece for the Rio daily *O Globo*, titled “‘*Black power*’ in Brazil,” editorialist Ibraim De Leve informed readers that “a group in Brazil's music scene is trying to launch the ‘*black power*’ movement in Brazil.” De Leve, like the DGIE before him, was inclined to see soul as an organized political “movement,” though he took this diagnosis to an absurd level:

The leader is singer Gerson King Combo, and the vice-leader is Tony Tornado. The goal of the movement is to launch racism in this country, as it exists in the *States*. They call each other “*brother*,” and their greeting involves a closed, raised fist. In the shows they are promoting in Rio and São Paulo, they have managed to draw 10,000 people. Whites are

50. DGIE 252, p. 10, 22 July 1976. Emphasis in original.

51. *Ibid.*

52. For instance, Thomas Skidmore, “Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives,” in Fontaine, *Race, Class, and Power*, 12.

avoided, mistreated and even insulted. . . . In these shows, *negros* take the opportunity to engage in agitation, pitting *negros* against whites and preaching racial domination in Brazil, after the example of the *States*.<sup>53</sup>

However exaggerated in his sense of the movement's formal organization (having a "leader" and "vice-leader"), and however reactionary in his distaste for U.S.-inspired black "agitation," De Leve's alarmed intervention suggests that he perceived soul to have the power to seriously destabilize the racial status quo in Brazil—that is, to attack the cherished dominant idea that "racism does not exist." Any existing social differences, De Leve quickly countered in a familiar conservative argument, were caused not by racial discrimination, but by class: "There exist people who reach higher or lower positions in society."<sup>54</sup>

De Leve was not alone in his analysis of soul as a racist movement, fundamentally opposed to the basic Brazilian values of racial unity and harmony. An unnamed author also writing in *O Globo* several months before De Leve declared: "We cannot consider authentic or positive any movement—whether its pretext be music or sports or anything else—that, in the name of an artistic manifestation, or even in the name of simple entertainment, tries to divide Brazilian society with a racial wedge." He titled his article "Racism," suggesting the common conservative idea that any race-based manifestation by Brazilians of color constituted (reverse) racial discrimination, and was therefore an illegitimate and immoral attack on Brazil's racial unity. To make this argument, this writer relied on the leftist notion of alienation, but reconfigured it to speak to racial identities, rather than to fashions or commercialism. "It is typical of youth," he wrote,

to choose their own means of expression; and it is common for those means to be extravagant and eccentric. Thus it is not because of its picturesque aspects—sometimes bordering on the grotesque—that we should condemn this movement dubbed "soul" or, in its carioca version, "*Black Rio*." The problem is not in the clothes, the shoes, or the modes of address. It is, rather, in what hides behind all of that: an alienated vision of reality, artificially stimulated by clearly commercial interests, with an undisguised racism at its base.<sup>55</sup>

The problem with soul lay not in its purported challenge to the autonomy of a uniquely Brazilian culture, political tradition, or national economy;

53. Ibraim De Leve, "'Black power' no Brasil," *O Globo*, 1 Oct. 1977.

54. Ibid.

55. "Racismo," *O Globo*, 26 April 1977.

rather, soul was “alienated” in its very vision of the “reality” of race relations that underlay those constructs. This “alienated” version of race relations, of course, was U.S.-style “racism,” by which the author clearly did not mean the racism that whites practiced against African Americans. Rather, in denouncing Brazilians’ “racist” emulation of black Americans, this author meant to criticize both the suggestion that Brazil’s racial system should be compared with that of the United States, and the related idea that Brazilians of African descent should seek to remedy their (perceived) exclusion by adopting the oppositional racial politics of their U.S. counterparts.

The unnamed writer in *O Globo* further argued that samba was the authentic reflection of Brazil’s racial harmony, in contrast to soul’s alienated, racist mistranslation of a foreign problem. “In the very venues where today we hear the imported rhythms of ‘soul,’” he explained, “there resound, at other times, the drumbeats of samba. This is irrefutable proof that music and fun, in Brazil, know no racial barriers.”<sup>56</sup> It was not long before Gilberto Freyre, the official spokesman for the theory of Brazilian racial exceptionalism, joined the debate on soul. His views resonated most closely with thinkers on the political right, for in his later years Freyre had become increasingly allied to military dictatorships in Brazil, Portugal, and Portuguese Africa. “Do my eyes fool me?” Freyre wrote with mock coyness, “Or did I really read that from the traditionally friendly United States there will arrive in Brazil (if they have not already arrived) Americans of color, deputized (by whom?) to convince Brazilians, also of color, that their African songs and dances should be ones of melancholy and revolt?”<sup>57</sup>

Brazil’s conservative leadership, including Freyre himself, thus made Freyrian ideals of racial and cultural mixture into a tool for questioning the legitimacy of a cultural form that hinted at an independent racial movement or consciousness. In this vision, samba stood for the nation’s harmonious incorporation of African peoples and cultures through *mestiçagem*, in contrast to soul’s foreign, *black* separatist racial consciousness. The secret police, in the wake of Gomes’s alarmed letter, clipped these conservative articles and added them to their growing dossiers on soul. “The police are watching,” as Ibraim De Leve presciently put it, “for this could involve matters of national security.”<sup>58</sup>

56. Ibid.

57. Gilberto Freyre (from “Atenção brasileiros!” *Diário de Pernambuco*, 15 May 1977), cited in “Black Rio,” *Um e Meio*, 20–21 Nov. 1977.

58. De Leve, “‘Black power’ no Brasil.”

### Left Nationalism and Alienated Soul

Frias herself was a woman of color, and there are moments when her article seems poised to use the rise of *Black Rio* to expose racial segregation in Brazil.<sup>59</sup> At times, she reported neutrally or even positively the ideas and attitudes of the dancers, including their contention that *Black Rio* was a natural outgrowth of the social realities of segregation in Brazil, and that the repression of soul was racist. But more broadly, her politics echoed the left-nationalist ideas of the ISEB. Frias spent much of her career as a journalist staunchly defending icons of a mixed *brasilidade* like samba and carnival, and her article returned again and again to the idea that soul music was an alienated cultural form.<sup>60</sup> Frias's subtitle, "The (imported) pride of being *negro* in Brazil," captures her argument that the movement was ultimately derivative and failed to embody an authentic or even recognizable racial politics. She and other writers of a similar political perspective offered an array of articles in this vein, which the secret police also collected and considered in their attempts to sort out the phenomenon's subversive potential.

In consonance with other cultural critics on the left, Frias saw a close tie between the imported nature of soul music and its focus on commercial, and therefore trivial, stylistic symbols. The soul phenomenon, she wrote, was a fad in clothing and music styles, lifted (without its accompanying political context) from the United States. Frias depicted her subjects as obsessed fans who went to great lengths to put together outfits "in American styles," and who, as if by rote, "know everything about *soul* — historical details, dates of record releases, North American groups and singers." Soul dances, she showed, often included contests whose explicit goal was imitation, such as the *Renascença's* "Shaft Night" parties, which promised a prize for the person who most closely resembled Isaac Hayes. For Frias, the unthinking mimicry behind *Black Rio* made it somewhat less dangerous as a divisive racial movement. Its commercialism further undermined any political consciousness. "Operating in the midst of this mass of *blacks*," Frias recounted, were "businessmen, owners of dance venues, record sellers, shoe sellers, . . . record producers," and above all, the cornerstone of the soul phenomenon, the music groups. As white soul DJ and producer Ademir Lemos explained to Frias, the soul groups made up to 200,000 cruzeiros per party, an

59. On Frias, see Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity*, 115.

60. On Frias's political perspective, see the letter she circulated after being fired from the *Jornal do Brasil* in 2001, reprinted in *Opinião: De que morreu Lena Frias?* Web site of Associação de Músicos, Arranjadores e Regentes, [www.amar.art.br/opiniao/opiniao\\_20.htm](http://www.amar.art.br/opiniao/opiniao_20.htm) (accessed 11/12/07).

amount “unheard of even at a soccer game, unless it involves [the teams] Vasco or Flamengo.”<sup>61</sup>

A range of left-leaning writers for mainstream cultural supplements, popular magazines, and music journals immediately picked up and amplified Frias’s critique of soul’s imported commercial nature. The *Jornal do Brasil*, which had published Frias’s introductory report, followed up a couple of weeks later with a piece titled “Soul: Its Sociology and Market.” In it, author Tárík de Souza (a young white journalist who also wrote for the *Jornal da Música* and the leftist humor and politics magazine *Pasquim*) contrasted the complex history of jazz, funk, and soul music in the United States to the commercialized hodgepodge compilations targeted to Brazilian audiences. Souza called the soul records available in Brazil “10 percent soul and 90 percent planned marketing.”<sup>62</sup> Tarlis Batista, writing about soul for the national news magazine *Manchete*, spoke with disdain of the soul public’s sheeplike “fidelity” to “group initiatives,” ensuring multiple “benefits” not just for “recording studios, shoe sellers, and record stores,” but also for makers of the accessories that spruced up the *blacks’* outfits: “walking canes, pipes, hats, glasses, berets, jewelry, and combs, all specially manufactured.”<sup>63</sup> These accounts of the exploits of small to big businessmen cast the soul phenomenon as a huge commercial scam, with young, African-descended working-class cariocas as its innocent (and ignorant) victims.

Beyond criticizing soul as commercialized, these articles explicitly cast its commercialism as evidence against any possible political or racial consciousness among soul dancers. Samba composer Candeia (like Frias, a person of color), then one of the leaders of an alternative samba school (Quilombo) that famously struggled to avoid commercialization and links with the state, expressed this view of soul in an interview with the *Jornal do Commercio’s* Sunday cultural supplement, *Um e Meio*: “Behind all of it, there is a real driving force; the *negros* who are part of the movement are what we might call useful innocents. I have even found out that the owners of the sound groups are in their majority well-off kids from the Zona Sul.”<sup>64</sup> The reference to the Zona Sul, whether intended simply as a reference to economic status (as Candeia explicitly stated) or as an encoded

61. Frias, “Black Rio.”

62. Tárík de Souza, “Soul: Sociologia e mercado,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 27 Aug. 1976. This echoes several contemporary articles in the *Jornal da Música* in which authors sought to distinguish between “real” soul and inauthentic deformations; for example, “O que é Soul de verdade?” *Jornal da Música*, 11 Nov. 1976.

63. Tarlis Batista, “Os Blacks no embalo do soul,” *Manchete*, 11 Sept. 1976.

64. “Black Rio,” *Um e Meio*, 20–21 Nov. 1977.



reference to whiteness, clearly calls into question the legitimacy of soul as a genuine form of black cultural or political expression. For Tarlis Batista, soul was an “adhesion to musical formulas produced in an assembly line, abroad,” and “could hardly suggest anything beyond the mere conformity of a simple people, unprepared perhaps to resist being bombarded with fads by the media.” Batista concluded this after a conversation with a young *black*, who reportedly “barely knew the meaning of some of the English expressions he repeats to everyone: ‘I’m somebody,’ ‘White Power,’ ‘The Beautiful Black’” —which Batista called “mere repetition of foreign words, with an incorrect pronunciation.” Similarly, Lélia Gonzalez, a feminist and Marxist thinker and a woman of color, told Batista in 1976, “I am sure that this does not represent a clear position on the part of *negros*, but simply an identification provoked by the phenomenon of mass culture, which Americans do very well.”<sup>65</sup> For people of color like Frias, Candeia, or Gonzalez in the mid-1970s, leftist cultural nationalism still seemed a promising path for addressing issues of race, though this would begin to change in the second half of the decade.

The most scathing accusations of soul’s inauthenticity came in the irreverent semi-underground leftist magazine *O Pasquim*. In one article, music critic Roberto M. Moura wrote that “what we are dealing with is an insidious, neo-colonialist publicity campaign that aims simply to create subjects who will consume the excess of what is produced abroad. . . . It is clear that this social group is not thinking: it is being thought, from the outside in. If there suddenly came an order calling for a different kind of clothing, they would get rid of their jackets and take off their platform shoes.”<sup>66</sup> Another *Pasquim* article, titled “Safari,” described the author’s visit to a soul party as a trek into darkest Africa (echoing Frias’s ethnographic theme). He described the soul dancers he met as being in the thrall of a tyrannical tribal leader (speaking pidgin Portuguese interspersed with English phrases, like “oh yeah”), who in turn idolized the supreme white gods of soul, the record executives.<sup>67</sup> If right-wing commentators worried that soul was dangerous for the ways that it might inspire social revolution, especially racial revolution, left-wing commentators lamented soul for the ways that its commercial nature distracted from authentic class-based revolutionary activity.

As with conservative critics, left-leaning writers articulated their rejection

65. Batista, “Os Blacks no embalo do soul.” See also J. R. Tinhorão, “Protesto ‘Black’ é fonte de renda ‘White,’” *Jornal do Brasil*, 14 June 1977.

66. Roberto M. Moura, “Carta aberta ao Black-Rio,” *Pasquim*, 2–8 Sept. 1977.

67. Aldir Blanc, “Safari,” *Pasquim*, 5–11 Aug. 1977.

of soul most clearly in the contrast with samba. While right-wing critics saw samba as an expression of Brazilian social stability, many on the left saw it as the only true, progressive expression of an African-inflected national identity. Moura, the writer for the leftist *Pasquim*, followed his invective against soul with the assertion that if, rather than being “swept along by a collective unconscious,” these masses of people actually thought for themselves, they would turn the energies they were wasting on soul to the task of revitalizing true black values and cultures in Brazil. That is, they “would have to turn once more toward samba.”<sup>68</sup> Many left-wing writers, like nationalist proponents of folk culture across Latin America, believed in samba’s political power as an authentic popular form of expression. Even those who might have imagined a specifically black politics or cultural position within the Brazilian *povo* (people) dismissed soul as an imported commercial fad, an inauthentic artifact of U.S. cultural imperialism. At best, therefore, they argued that the phenomenon known as *Black Rio* was buffoonish and politically toothless; at worst, it represented a betrayal of Brazil’s true cultural patrimony by people of color who, embracing foreign soul instead of national samba, were shirking their duties as cheerful caretakers of an appropriate, authentic Afro-Brazilian heritage.

#### **From Danger to Derision: The Secret Police Channels the Left**

Ironically, it was these writers’ derision (rather than conservative cultural nationalists’ alarm) that ended up influencing the secret police’s investigations on soul. As they read Frias and other left-leaning writers, police investigators initially balanced the two ideas: that soul’s foreign origin made it a threat as a racial movement, and that its commercial nature and foreign origin made it politically toothless. In September of 1976, a *pedido de busca* or investigation request summed up the “known facts” on soul. Citing articles by Frias, Souza, and Batista, the document explained that soul “seems to be a movement centered around elements of the *raça negra*, with apparently commercial interests, after the example of what occurs in the United States, from where it seeks inspiration.” Despite the reference to commercialism in this report, the symbolic threat still loomed. In the language of the police investigators, soul dancers were no longer people of color but *negro* racial activists. Soul, the report literally underlined, “explores, in a certain way, pride in ‘blackness’ [negritude], the confrontation between whites and pretos, and social and economic rivalries between the North Zone and the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro.” Echoing military police delegate Cotta

68. Moura, “Carta aberta ao Black-Rio.” The end of Gonzales’s quote to Batista also suggests a return to samba. Batista, “Os Blacks no embalo do soul.”

Gomes, the writer concluded that soul “could easily be exploited for ends other than those until now presented.”<sup>69</sup>

The secret police’s files in this period show a renewed flurry of activity. They assiduously searched their archives for information on anyone linked to the movement—from DJs and singers like Monsieur Lima, Tony Tornado, Big Boy, and members of their teams; to journalists like Tárík de Sousa, Lena Frias, Tarlis Batista, and photographer Almir Veiga; to producers like Ademir Lemos. Despite the fact that several of their searches on these individuals turned up links to communist groups, investigators no longer identified these connections as the principal threat.<sup>70</sup> Instead, following the lead of right-wing commentators, they focused on soul’s “psychosocial” implications and potential class and racial rivalries, as well as on unspecified implications that the movement targeted “police corruption.”<sup>71</sup>

Yet the police increasingly dismissed soul’s racial overtones as mere market manipulation, ultimately reflecting the influence of the left-wing writers whose articles they had also read and collected. In a report from October of 1976, for instance, they explained that “Though our ‘*Black Power*’ movement assumes a certain racially oppositional and discriminatory character . . . , the primary objective of these groups is to make money; they don’t really care about the ethnic type of their followers.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, black DJs drew a black audience because they knew how to exploit the lucrative commercial niche of soul music. Marketing, rather than an explicit racial politics, accounted for the dances’ almost all-black character. This kind of commercialism, a report from late August 1976 explained, was not even specific to black entrepreneurs; it happened in the discos of the Zona Sul as well. “The goal, for these DJs, is to create entertainment sites where only the privileged [by race] would be able to organize dances and obtain a select public, thereby using whites as well as *negros* as objects of consumption, and using music to centralize their control over a specific sector of the public.”<sup>73</sup> Leftist nationalists could not have said it better.

The police report that closed investigations into soul further echoed the language of left-wing commentators. It not only concluded that any confrontation between black and white Brazilians was ultimately a matter of music and fashion marketing, rather than of a conscious politics, but it also translated the

69. DGIE 250, p. 734, 13 Sept. 1976.

70. They called one member of an unspecified *conjunto* a “communist from Belo Horizonte” and accused another of links to “communist peasant” groups in Minas Gerais. DGIE 252, pp. 66–64, 9 Nov. 1976.

71. DGIE 252, pp. 72–70, 19 Oct. 1976.

72. DGIE 250, pp. 69–67, 5 Oct. 1976; see also DGIE 250, pp. 8–7, 23 Aug. 1976.

73. DGIE 250, pp. 728–27, 23 Aug. 1976.

left's regret that soul displaced real revolutionary consciousness into a sort of smug relief that soul dancers were never able to constitute a real threat to the state. The report declared that despite soul's "oppositional and racist cast," it had "not yet managed to achieve greatness or depth, for it has failed to achieve a sociopolitical character." What the police earlier saw as a potential musical and cultural link with Black Power styles they now explained in condescending terms:

Soul music originates in black North American neighborhoods, with roots in the period of slavery in the United States. Corrupted by diverse factors such as the influence of other rhythms, it maintains an intimate relationship with the American "*Black Power*" movement, out of fidelity to a common ethnological origin, and is deliriously applauded by its followers . . . all of color. . . . *Negro* Brazilians, due to atavism, display remarkable sensitivity to said "soul" music. Here in Rio many of them—in part out of emulation, in part out of snobbery, but always aiming to make a profit—have organized themselves into musical groups to which they give picturesque or bombastic names.<sup>74</sup>

To the left's critiques of soul's buffoonish commercialism and mimicry, this author added a new explanation—atavism—drawn from the toolbox of nineteenth-century criminal anthropology, suggesting some kind of primal response among people of African descent to black music. Policing the image of Brazil's racial democracy, it seems, involved construing any challenges not as just dangerous or illegitimate but ultimately as irrelevant.

### **Soul Power? Activists, DJs, and Dancers Assess Soul's Politics**

As journalists and policemen investigated the phenomenon of soul, they interviewed and quoted dozens of participants in the movement. Their voices emerge with remarkable clarity from among the dense ideological debates. Promoters, DJs, dancers, black activists, and intellectuals often suggested, directly or indirectly, that soul was a productive site through which to challenge the narrow ideas of black citizenship encoded in dominant views of national culture—and particularly in samba.

In their comments to the press, soul enthusiasts were quick to point out the

74. DGIE 252, pp. 69–67, 5 Oct. 1976. Though police investigations into soul continued (albeit less intensely) until mid-November, this report reappears on 25 November 1976 as the police's final word on the movement (DGIE 252, pp. 63–61).

racist presuppositions behind views of soul as antithetical to “authentic” Afro-Brazilian culture. In an interview with the weekly news magazine *Veja*, DJ Dom Filó of Soul Grand Prix asked:

Why is it accepted as completely natural for the youth of the Zona Sul to wear jeans, dance rock, go to discos, and revere Mick Jagger, while *negros* can't dress up in lively colors, dance soul, and revere James Brown? . . . Why must *negros* from the Zona Norte accept white people from the Zona Sul (or from the Zona Norte) telling them what is authentic and autochthonous to *negro* Brazilians? After all, we *negros* never took an interest in determining what is authentic and autochthonous to white Brazilians.<sup>75</sup>

Dom Filó, as these sharp comments suggest, was a particularly eloquent and educated defender of soul. An engineer by profession, Filó had spent much of the '70s involved in black cultural activism, primarily theater and dance groups.<sup>76</sup> But young soul dancers, from a range of social backgrounds and with varying levels of education, frequently made similar critiques of the racial double standards governing soul in their interviews with the national press. José Alberto Carneiro, a 19-year-old mechanic from Rio, told Lena Frias: “Man, they start with us over everything we do. Even over the name of the group *Black Power*, which is my favorite, they start with us. If it were ‘*White Power*,’ they would think everything was fine.”<sup>77</sup> In this light, even dancers’ and DJs’ frequent insistence that soul was not political reveals an astute political criticism of their society’s inconsistencies on race. As DJ Nirto of Soul Grand Prix told Lena Frias, “That business is very delicate. There is nothing political in it. It’s just people who aren’t a part of soul and happened to walk by and saw, so to speak, a lot of black people together, and got scared. They get scared and stay that way, without knowing the how or why of it. So they start talking about political movements. But it’s none of that. . . . It’s just people enjoying themselves and having fun.”<sup>78</sup> By manipulating the meanings of the political (in Nirto’s case, intentionally defining politics in the narrow sense that the secret police originally did), soul participants were able simultaneously to deflect criticism or police attention, while making a political point about the workings of Brazilian racism.<sup>79</sup>

75. “Black Rio,” *Veja*, 24 Nov. 1976.

76. Ibid.

77. Frias, “Black Rio.”

78. Ibid.

79. For instance, though the secret police cited soul star Tony Tornado on the apolitical nature of soul, in another report, they mention picking him up for having

Some of the most vocal denunciations of racism in public reactions to soul came from members of the budding black movement. In Rio de Janeiro, as in other major Brazilian cities during the period of *distensão*, young people of color (increasingly represented among university students by the mid-1970s) organized associations aimed at developing a politics that, unlike the traditional left, dealt specifically with the problem of race. Groups like the Society for African-Brazilian Exchange (SINBA) or the Institute for Research in Black Cultures (IPCN), both linked to Rio's private Cândido Mendes University, drew up reading lists, staged teach-ins and rallies, and published newsletters expressing their oppositional politics of race.<sup>80</sup> As the left and the right maintained equally totalizing ideas of national culture and "authenticity" based on a hybrid Afro-European past, activists and intellectuals in the emerging black movement began to criticize ideas of racial democracy and *mestiçagem* as oppressive "myths" obfuscating a racist reality. Many also spent their weekend nights at soul dances.<sup>81</sup>

The young people in SINBA and IPCN were thus ideally situated to provide critical analyses of society's widespread rejection of soul. Writers for SINBA's activist newspaper, for instance, asked why critics were so quick to dismiss soul, a specifically black form of leisure, as "alienated," while mainstream U.S. movies and music freely inundated the Brazilian media. The idea that soul dancers suffered alienation, they argued, masked discrimination against a black cultural form by the left as well as the right.<sup>82</sup> Without arguing that soul was an authentic movement toward racial consciousness, writers in the emerging black movement also pointed out the political value in soul's challenges to the cultural expectations of nationalists. If the "zealous defenders of 'Brazilian racial democracy'" had "attempted through all means to ridicule the movement, accusing the youth of racism," SINBA writers explained in another of several articles on soul, it was precisely because soul dancers "audacious[ly], spontaneous[ly], and unconscious[ly] . . . threw Brazil's deep problems of race relations in the face of 'respectable society.'"<sup>83</sup>

Some activists further argued that critics' dual discourses of authenticity

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"performed in the Teatro Copacabana, where he took the opportunity to air some ideas about racial discrimination in Brazil." DGIE 252, p. 66, 9 Nov. 1976.

80. See Turner, "Brown into Black"; Mitchell, "Blacks and the *abertura democrática*"; Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*; Lélia Gonzalez, "O Movimento Negro na última década," in *Lugar de negro*, ed. Lélia Gonzalez and Carlos Hasenbalg (Rio de Janeiro: Marco Zero, 1982).

81. Gonzalez, "O Movimento Negro na última década," 34.

82. "Por que o Black-Rio incomoda?" *Jornal SINBA*, July 1977.

83. "Descansem em paz," *Jornal SINBA*, April 1979.

and alienation served specifically to police upwardly mobile people of color. In his interview with *Veja*, for instance, Dom Filó rhetorically asked, “Why do *negros* have to be the last strongholds of national identity, or of Brazilian musical purity? Might this not be a backlash against their having abandoned the *morro* [the hillside shantytowns that figure prominently in the lyrics and symbolism of samba]? Against their eventual competition in the labor market?”<sup>84</sup> For Filó, the commercialism that suggested to Frias or the police that soul was apolitical was in fact its most politically challenging aspect. Frias’s and others’ extensive accounts of the exploits of black fashion suppliers, DJ groups, and music entrepreneurs revealed a thriving and well-organized economy by and for Brazilians of color. The entrepreneurs who created this economy resented the argument that their success, unlike the success of whites in the mainstream entertainment industry, represented an unhealthy deviation from their proper folkloric role of samba dancing in the *favelas*. Indeed, several scholars have suggested that this visible and successful entrance of working-class Brazilians of color into a market for leisure goods and services (as entrepreneurs and consumers) was one of the characteristics that made soul so shocking to mainstream Brazilians, who typically saw people of color primarily as poor and outside such a market.<sup>85</sup>

Though less successful than DJs and promoters, soul dancers were also not from the radically poor *favelas* of Rio; instead, they hailed from the city’s working-class neighborhoods. Frias described the *blacks* as people with somewhat stable, if humble, employment: they were domestic employees, baggage carriers, errand boys, messengers, salespeople, itinerant vendors, and workers in odd jobs (and students, others have noted).<sup>86</sup> Given their limited resources, soul dancers used a combination of consumption and creativity to achieve their style. Though “the great expense of the [platform] shoes leaves Rio’s *black* population . . . with little margin for additional luxuries,” soul aficionados managed to complete their desired “exotic” look with homemade objects like “T-shirts roughly painted by hand” or “old jackets embroidered with key phrases from soul music.”<sup>87</sup> Viewed as a black commercial endeavor supported by enthusias-

84. “Black Rio,” *Veja*, 24 Nov. 1976.

85. McCann, “Black Pau,” 84; Monteiro, “O ressurgimento do Movimento Negro,” 71-72. For an analysis of contemporary advertisements and their complete exclusion of blacks as consumers or businesspeople, see Carlos Hasenbalg, “O negro na publicidade,” in *Lugar de negro*, ed. Lélia Gonzalez and Carlos Hasenbalg (Rio de Janeiro: Marco Zero, 1982), 103-14.

86. Frias, “Black Rio,” and Gonzalez, “O Movimento Negro na última década.”

87. Frias, “Black Rio.” For more on homemade soul clothing, see Giacomini, *A alma da festa*, 193-94.

tic black consumers, *Black Rio*—far from being apolitical—might be read as a significant and meaningful form of politics, in which the freedom to consume was linked to claims for a modern form of citizenship.<sup>88</sup> As Bryan McCann has shown, participating in soul festivities allowed youth of color from Rio's periphery at least to invade the chic nightclubs and respectable cultural institutions of the South Zone, transgressing social and spatial boundaries.<sup>89</sup>

Participants in the dances also expressed a sense that their new shared identity as consumers of *black* culture was attractive because it allowed them to embrace their African heritage in a way that communicated distinctiveness and pride rather than mixture.<sup>90</sup> As one dancer explained to Lena Frias, when asked why he danced soul: "I don't know how to explain it. It's mine. It's *black*. It comes from the blood and from the heart."<sup>91</sup> Though not an articulate politics of race, this kind of response (common among many soul dancers) suggests that soul was meaningful to many dancers as a source of racial and personal identification. It also suggests that soul resonated with dancers' positive feelings of connectedness with the peoples and cultures of the African diaspora (a connection this young dancer phrased as coming from shared "blood," but which the secret police had interpreted as "atavism").<sup>92</sup>

Young activists in the black movement were generally optimistic that the positive feelings of connectedness generated through soul might help unite people around an oppositional black identity. For Carlos Alberto Medeiros, an activist at IPCN, soul provided "a fertile area for cultural work . . . that will contribute to the emergence of a black Brazilian identity that was attempted . . . through samba, but without success." Echoing the opinions of commentators on the right (though giving them the opposite political valence), Medeiros identified samba as a cultural form that stood for racial and cultural assimilation. He saw soul as a form whose distinct style could eventually provide the touchstone for a solidly black identity, untainted by internalized shame or the lure of individual whitening:

88. Cf. Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2001), and George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003).

89. McCann, "Black Pau," 84–85.

90. See Turner, "Brown into Black," and Mitchell, "Blacks and the *abertura democrática*."

91. Frias, "Black Rio."

92. It is worth noting that the Brazilian soul craze took place against a backdrop of the "proliferation of commodified forms of African American popular culture throughout the Third World, with especially strong resonance in postcolonial African and Caribbean nations." Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 178.



These teens preferred to adopt as their image one transmitted (obviously exaggerated and distorted) from their Northern brothers. And whoever would express interest in these youths—and not in that diffuse and diversely defined thing that is Brazilian culture (stolen from *negros*)—would not be able to deny the beneficial effects of this new image upon people who, today, are no longer ashamed to look in the mirror. Of course, dancing soul and using certain kinds of clothing, hairdos, and greetings does not, in itself, solve anyone’s problem. But it could provide the necessary amount of emulation for [these youths] to come together and, together, begin to solve their problems.<sup>93</sup>

It was Medeiros’s group, the IPCN, which had hosted the screening of *Wattstax* in the downtown Museu de Arte Moderna as part of its first anniversary celebrations. Members of the group also frequently attempted to give speeches at the soul dances, circulated flyers educating dancers on discrimination in Brazil, and invited revelers to join the black movement.<sup>94</sup> Their hopes that soul would provide the organizational “spark” for the eventual political mobilization of Brazilians of color were thus the mirror image of the right wing’s initial fears. Gilberto Gil, a major musical figure and self-identified *negro* who had also come under media attack for his overtures to “un-Brazilian” diasporic music like reggae, explained his sense of soul dancers’ promise for social change: “At some point, suddenly, they will become conscious of their role in the world and they will begin to look for new paths, better living conditions for themselves and others. Music is like that—it takes you over entirely, and by surprise.”<sup>95</sup> And Lélia Gonzalez, who in her interview with Tarlis Batista had dismissed soul as a foreign imposition, later remembered the dances as an important step in her own transition from traditional leftist to race-based activism.<sup>96</sup>

Like Medeiros, defenders of soul frequently portrayed it as a powerful political alternative to samba. For some, the soul/samba opposition was part of a

93. “Black Rio,” *Um e Meio*, 20–21 Nov. 1977.

94. See *Boletim do IPCN*, July 1976.

95. Batista, “Os Blacks no embalo do soul.” Gil and musician Caetano Veloso openly expressed their support for soul, which in their view shared the goals of their own musical movement, Tropicália: to challenge what Christopher Dunn calls “state-sanctioned forms of national culture.” Tropicália similarly came under attack from both left and right for its foreign references. Dunn, *Brutality Garden*, 178–80.

96. Gonzalez, “O Movimento Negro na última década,” 31–33; Carlos Alberto M. Pereira and Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, eds., *Patrulhas ideológicas, marca reg.: Arte e engajamento em debate* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980), 202–12.

growing critique of the dictatorship's commercialization of samba and carnival as tourist attractions:<sup>97</sup>

“Why don't those kids go and dance samba?” ask the idiots of objectivity. Because the oppositional power of samba has already been completely annulled by its own institutions. It's been a while now since the samba schools lost their swing. As they transformed themselves into businesses that promote shows for foreigners' eyes [*para inglês ver*], even having accepted a shameful contract to provide services for Riotur [the tourism ministry of the state of Rio], whatever was left in terms of “authentic popular expression” has gone down the drain.<sup>98</sup>

This valuation of soul over samba also reflected a generational shift in musical taste among cariocas of color, as in the dance salon of the Clube Renascença, where older members' *rodas de samba* competed for space with the younger crowd's Shaft Nights.<sup>99</sup> But above all, the critique of samba was part of a broader political exposé of the ways that “authentic” forms of national culture in Brazil, and the position they presumed for African-descended people in the nation, masked a racism more insidious than that of the United States or even South Africa. As a graduate student living in Brazil during the dictatorship, the English anthropologist Peter Fry developed a classic version of this comparative analysis of race relations, tracing the fate of African-derived cookery in post-slavery Brazil and the United States. Because of the United States' violent history of racial discrimination, he argued, soul food had largely remained the culinary heritage of African Americans. In post-abolition Brazil, the absence of legal discrimination and the Freyrean celebration of cultural mixture had promoted feijoada to the status of national dish. Despite appearances of inclusiveness, “the conversion of ethnic symbols into national symbols not only hides a situation of racial domination [in Brazil], but makes the task of denouncing it much more difficult [than in the United States].”<sup>100</sup>

It is important, however, to situate this perspective in the particular racial politics of the late 1970s rather than to see it as an instance of Brazilians awakening to the reality that samba or feijoada bred false consciousness and that

97. See “Candeia, agora no Orum,” *Jornegro*, Nov. 1978; “E o povo não viu o carnaval! (o samba não é para quem o faz),” *Jornegro*, Mar. 1978.

98. *Última Hora*, 27 May 1976, cited in *Boletim do IPCN*, July 1976.

99. Giacomini, *A alma da festa*, 207–42.

100. Fry, “Feijoada e ‘soul food,’” 53. See also Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*, 82.

soul was a revolutionary alternative.<sup>101</sup> There is no doubt that the soul episode reveals the ways that nationalist intellectuals used samba and ideas of racial harmony both to construct soul as a threat and, eventually, to discount it as alienated. It is also clear that some in the soul marketplace and some in black movements used soul's U.S. referents as a way to expose the discord within Brazil's presumed racial harmony. But if commentators were wrong to overlook the ways that *black* resonated better with local social arrangements (such as spatial segregation) than national ideas of *mestiçagem*, we should also not assume that soul's U.S. racial referents could wholly explain, replace, or triumphantly fix the complex dynamics of racism in Brazil. As Bryan McCann has shown, some soul participants embraced its styles even as they defended the idea of the relative absence of race or racism in Brazil.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps Dom Filó best captured many soul dancers' attitudes toward the African Americans they so openly admired: "We feel we are their brothers, but as Brazilians. Conditions here are different from those there."<sup>103</sup>

Indeed, despite the enthusiasm of many contemporary black activists toward soul, a few expressed the belief that in order to have their claims understood and taken seriously, Brazilians of color needed to develop an oppositional cultural politics in a homegrown rather than imported language. The most eloquent of these was a self-styled "Afro-Reporter" who wrote under the pseudonym Jamu Minka. Through a letter to the editor of IPCN's newsletter, he sent the following "message to the soul crowd":

I've heard that you guys are only into African Americans, right? . . . Why only privilege the folks up there? If they're better off than us, you can believe none of that happened by accident. Everything they accomplished was through lots of hard work and mutual support. Look, just consuming what they're doing over there isn't going to create the conditions for us to get to where we need to get. . . . Only by valorizing [national African-derived cultural forms] can we have an art that is a vibrant and up-to-date expression of the Afro-Brazilian experience.<sup>104</sup>

101. Peter Fry offers historical perspective on his early interpretation of soul in "Feijoada e soul food" 25 anos depois," in *A persistência da raça: ensaios antropológicos sobre o Brasil e a África austral* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005), 147–66.

102. McCann, "Black Pau," 85–86.

103. "Black Rio," *Veja*, 24 Nov. 1976.

104. Jamu Minka, "Recado para a turma do soul," in *Boletim IPCN*, July 1977.

For Jamu Minka, the ideal form of Afro-Brazilian music was the one composed by Jorge Ben, who updated samba with other African and diasporic beats (including soul and funk) and whose lyrics sought to celebrate national black heroes like soccer star Pelé or the seventeenth-century warrior Zumbi dos Palmares. To adopt cultural poses from the United States as the basis of a Brazilian racial liberation struggle was to stand wholly outside the local conversation about race. To really pose a threat to Brazilian racial ideologies, he argued, activists should attack them at their very base by challenging folkloric ideas about Africa that lay at the heart of notions of *mestiçagem* and by redefining Africa as a model for modern political and racial action.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, despite contemporary and subsequent claims that African-based politics were backward-looking and ineffectual, activism built around the redefinition of Africa in Brazilian public life (a staple of groups like SINBA and IPCN) was one of the dominant concerns for secret police officials who spied on black organizations in the late 1970s.<sup>106</sup> Whereas the secret police ultimately dismissed soul, they maintained intense interest in activists' campaigns of solidarity with antiapartheid or Marxist pro-independence movements in Africa into the early 1980s.<sup>107</sup> Without making the secret police's attention the litmus test for the political effectiveness of varying forms of activism, this discrepancy suggests that, in the suffocating political climate of the dictatorship, Jamu Minka may have had a point.

The debates about *Black Rio* in mid-1970s Brazil reveal the narrow and rigid spaces of "national authenticity" to which Brazilians of African descent and their cultural manifestations were confined during the dictatorship. In part, the ultimate inability of commentators across the political spectrum to "read" soul as a political phenomenon, even when they initially perceived it as a threat, sheds light on the particular conjuncture of the *distensão* and its shifting definitions of politics. Faced with a vigorous and independent commercial and cultural scene run by young people of color who claimed modern, internationally inflected identities, as well as with a much smaller new political movement based on racial identities, both the right and the left voiced totalizing and at times overlapping

105. Jamu Minka was a contributor to the socialist magazine *Versus* (São Paulo), whose "Afro-Latino-América" column regularly covered developments in Brazil's emerging black movement alongside decolonization struggles in Africa.

106. For criticism of African-oriented black politics by activists in the early 1980s and by the author himself, see Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*.

107. For more on the African-oriented politics of these groups (and the secret police's surveillance of them), see Alberto, "Terms of Inclusion," chap. 6.

visions of national culture that sought to keep black cultural expressions within the boundaries of established folkloric representations. In this sense, rejections of soul's political content by both the left and the right should not be interpreted as a diagnosis of its nature, but as a symptom of the struggle to define legitimate spaces of political contestation toward the end of the dictatorship. Participants in the dances and in the emerging black movement emphasized this point, making the defense of soul an explicitly political gesture.

More importantly, however, the *Black* Rio episode provides an opportunity to rethink a long history of U.S.-Brazil comparisons through the varied perspectives of Brazilian actors themselves. It allows us to consider the ways that these actors used comparison (or contrast) as a political tool for a range of purposes, and cautions us against equating expressions of similarity with similarity itself. In soul dancers' and activists' critiques of Brazil's racial situation, *black* was a useful term to borrow from the U.S. context. But its untranslated use—the fact that people understood its difference from the Portuguese word *negro* and kept the two separate—shows that *black* could not explain everything about the Brazilian context. Rather, *black* and *negro* coexisted in the attempts of politically active people of color to analyze, communicate, and contest the particular outlines of race and national identity in 1970s Brazil, just as an awareness of Brazil's similarities to the U.S. in terms of racial dynamics coexisted with a clear sense of their differences. In their creative use of *black* to reshape national discussions of race, Brazilians of color show themselves to have been “duped” neither by U.S. standards of racial consciousness nor by hegemonic Brazilian ideas about racelessness and harmony. By the same token, despite *black*'s powerful international connotations, it was the local context of 1970s Brazil that shaped the possibilities and limitations of its political meanings.