Latin American Interdisciplinary Studies

Forró and Redemptive Regionalism from the Brazilian Northeast

Popular Music in a Culture of Migration

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Introduction

Forrobodó For All

The Brazilian popular musical genre of *forró* has always been characterized by movement. One can broadly trace the genre's history through flows of cultural production and people throughout Brazil and beyond. Between rural and urban spaces, between regional and national loci of production, between interior and littoral, between cultural marginality and national acclaim, and between home and diaspora, forró and its artists, the *forrozeiros*, have always shuttled between some of the great antinomies of Latin American modernity. On the other hand, various cultural and political agents have often sought to cease these flows and capture forró and other cultural production in one stable space, reducing it to a tamed hybrid or a regional curiosity. As a subaltern genre produced by marginalized Northeastern workers, forró has always had to deal with such forms of cooptation by groups as diverse as Northeastern landed elites, national populist demagogues and dictators, and cultural critics within academia and without. Despite these continued brushes with various hegemonic interpellations, forrozeiros have managed to continue the vital movement that leads to diachronic innovation in, and increasingly complex allegorization of, the genre—at the same time that a synchronic, redemptive imaginary is maintained that envisions an alternative Brazil in which rural workers might no longer be marginalized and forgotten.

The analytical framework for my study of forró is primarily grounded in literary and cultural studies, subaltern studies and history. Thus the reader should not expect to find an ethnomusicological analysis of the genre. My own unique theoretical approach, as outlined in this introduction, is best at revealing the broad historical development of forró and its evolving efforts to represent the Brazilian Northeast, its people, and their large-scale migration. The genre's efforts in this vein are illustrated through analyses of lyrics, instrumentation, performance styles and performance spaces. These discourses and practices are contextualized with an array of secondary literature on the Northeastern region and the migratory experiences of Northeasterners. I also emphasize the manner in which all of these elements of representation have strategically engaged the modern Brazilian culture

industry from the 1940s to the present. Further, my analysis highlights how forró's subaltern, regionalist standpoint marks the limits of some of Brazil's hegemonic national ideologies (such as the developmentalist celebration of progress qua industrialization and the promotion of Rio de Janeiro as the country's "cultural center").

Chapter Outline

Following the introduction in this study are seven chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One is a history of the development of the Northeastern genre of *forró* over the course of the 20th century to the present day. This chapter traces forró's progression from symbolic to allegorical representation of the Brazilian Northeast as the genre matures under the aegis of Luiz Gonzaga, the King of Baião. Utilizing Walter Benjamin's distinction between symbol and allegory, I analyze the progression from the early, symbolic form of forró called *baião*, disseminated primarily by accordionist/singer Luiz Gonzaga in the forties and fifties, to the later expansion and allegorization of the genre as forró by the generation of musicians that rose to fame in the seventies. Gonzaga himself, in his *cangaceiro* (Northeastern bandit) attire, was the national symbol of the Northeast in the early years, whereas more recently the genre has developed enough complexity to boast three main branches divided largely along class lines: *forró tradicional* (traditional), *forró eletrônico* (electronic), and *forró universitário* (university). I argue that this progression from symbolic to allegorical representation was a necessary one due to the hegemonic position of the Rio de Janeiro culture industry in the forties, which at that time could only accept forró as a fad and only later would open up to forró as a genre that more holistically represents the Northeast and Northeastern cultural production.

After examining forró's insertion into the national culture industry and its development as a genre, in Chapter Two I explore its continued loyalty to a redemptive imaginary for Northeasterners, based in a profound diasporic attachment (*saudade*) to the social and ecological environment of the *sertão* or rural interior. In general terms, saudade is the Portuguese word used to describe a profound, bittersweet nostalgia for a person, place, time or other memory from which one has been separated. Thus this concept was easily appropriated by forrozeiros for their own purposes of remembering the

Northeast and its people. I examine numerous lyrics and music written and performed since the forties that demonstrate saudade's characteristic telescoping of time and space and the related irony of celebrating and "making present" a desired place, person or lifeworld through music and dance while simultaneously recalling one's real separation from that object of desire.

In forró, saudade is uniquely developed as a collective diasporic affect. Desire is collectivized most commonly through the imaginary of a rural idyll which is a repository of traditional culture and values as well as the place in which Northeasterners' lovers, families and communities await their return. These are constant themes which are present in the genre to this day, although in electronic forró there is more and more emphasis on interpersonal romance over collective diasporic affect. I suggest that this is due to an increasing discursive convergence of electronic forró with the melodrama of urban popular culture, most famously present in telenovelas. On the other hand, university forró has developed its own unique collective saudade—in this case a middle-class nostalgia for popular authenticity.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the redemptive imaginary of saudade finds its negative corollary outside of the Northeast in forrozeiros' common resistance to cognitively mapping the social space of the Southeastern (or even coastal Northeastern) cities in which many Northeasterners now live for economic reasons. In the latter part of this introduction, I will further elaborate on my framing of this resistance and its potential as part of a negative dialectic which questions the hegemony of urban industrialization.

In Chapter Four, all of the previous discussion is contextualized in a larger analysis of the migration of Northeasterners throughout Brazil. As noted initially, forró has always been characterized by movement and this reflects the massive internal migration of Northeastern workers. In the past these were rural workers, but increasingly people have been leaving urban areas as well, as the Northeast becomes more and more urbanized. Northeasterners have migrated to all parts of Brazil, however the primary destination has been the Southeast—and within the Southeast the preferred location has been the most dynamic economy in the city and state of São Paulo. Through collections of interviews of migrants to São Paulo, demographic statistics related to internal migration, and related studies in the fields of sociology, social psychology, communication studies, history and ethnography, this chapter emphasizes the powerful accuracy and continued

relevance of forró's discourse on the Northeastern migratory experience. On the other hand, the analysis also broaches some of forró's blind spots from the standpoints of gender difference, life in the diaspora, and alternate forms of nostalgia. These oversights, however, have not diminished forró musicians' key role in vividly imagining a redemptive return to the home region for Northeasterners. I demonstrate how, in recent times, an increasing amount of displaced Northeasterners are making this dream of return a reality as the economy of their home region revives. The chapter concludes with a section addressing forró's perspicacious portrayal of migrant subjectivity, along with the genre's ability to elaborate Northeastern migrants' losses and to celebrate their common cultural patrimony. Studies in the area of social psychology confirm these insights that forrozeiros have shared with, and received from, the Northeastern community since the origins of the genre in the mid-twentieth century.

Chapters Five and Six critique the synthetic urge, a rubric I use to describe the impetus behind the hegemonic international narratives attempting to position forró within some of modernity's major temporal and spatial matrices (i.e. rural-urban, modern-traditional). The synthetic urge is typically driven by a reductive notion of hybrid identity that can be found in diverse overlapping discourses in the field of Latin American cultural studies, including national-popular narratives promulgated by cultural theorists such as Gilberto Freyre and Fernando Ortiz, a related conservative nationalist anti-imperialism, the dominant post-war economic ideologies of developmentalism and urbanization, and the vulgar postcolonial hybridity theory circulating more recently in North American and Brazilian academia. The synthetic urge essentially serves to reify complex and shifting identity positions into one static hybrid. The purpose of this reification is, of course, to capture power for a certain subject position or narrative, in this case by associating said position or narrative with a certain hegemonic discourse like those four mentioned above. The synthetic urge either ignores forró in favor of culture considered more nationally representative or encourages analyses of forró that champion the genre as a synthesis of rural and urban, traditional and modern. As should be clear even from the schematic description of forró provided thus far, dialectical synthesis is a very problematic process with which to identify the antinomian tendencies of forró vis-à-vis rural and urban spaces and forrozeiros' conservation of, and innovations in, their regionally-inspired cultural production. I propose the concept of savage hybridity as one

that marks what Alberto Moreiras calls the "failure of hybrid totalization," and therefore is a more adequate model for representing both forró's subaltern positionality with respect to national culture and its refusal to merge into any static hybrids developed in the aforementioned hegemonic discourses (Moreiras, 2001).

Chapter Seven seeks to explore the dynamic role of tradition in the evolving popular musical form of forró. Central to this section is a consideration of the relationship between notions of the popular and the traditional in Brazil. Romantic notions of the rural continue to define this space as a privileged repository for timeless, unchanging, authentic popular traditions. Rural popular culture can be contrasted with urban popular to reveal that the urban space is largely considered to be one of comparative innovation (with less authenticity), even within genres that have become traditions in their own right such as *carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) samba. The relationship between rural and urban popular culture can fairly accurately be mapped onto that between regional and national, or specifically in the case of forró between Northeastern and Southeastern Brazil. A major goal of Chapter Seven is to argue against the spatial and temporal ghettoization of tradition in the local and the past, using the example of forró as a strong counterexample to disprove the assumptions behind such associations. As various theorists of globalization have argued, the local already assumes and includes the global within itself, and in the case of forró we could say it includes the national as well. Accordingly I call the claim that forró as a cultural tradition is exclusively rooted in the local a *relocalization* of tradition. Such a relocalization serves to purify and thus authenticate tradition by cutting it off from the world and making it seem organic rather than ideologically engaged in a popular-historical field of discursive struggle. With the common, stereotypical spatialization of the past in rural and regional areas comes the assumption that real, authentic forró must have been created in bygone years in the Northeast while more recent production and forró by non-Northeasterners must be either derivative or degraded. Alternatively, some Southeastern musicians imagine that forró produced in the present-day Northeast will never be able to equal the music of Luiz Gonzaga and other famous musicians of the past, or even that it is no longer being produced at all in the Northeast.

From these perspectives, contemporary forró cannot be understood in its full, tripartite and transregional complexity as a genre. Forrozeiros prove

through their music that subalternity, as an unstable multitudinous condition of being, resists ontological spatialization within hybrid totalizations such as the local-traditional synthesis. Out of this subalternity comes a spatially and temporally dynamic conception of tradition. Forró achieves this dynamism through its redemptive regionalism based in the epistemologies of a subaltern people rather than a hegemonic national-popular narrative. Nevertheless, the genre has at times been in danger of losing its redemptive-regionalist orientation, and has in these instances been susceptible to cooptation by regional-popular narratives championed by Northeastern elites.

The concluding chapter examines the transformation of cultural hierarchies that has taken place since forró's early days due to the global integration of capitalist markets, led by dominant capitalist countries like those which comprise the G8: i.e. the US, Europe/the EU, and Japan. In the case of Brazil, at the time of forró's birth into the national culture industry Rio de Janeiro controlled the distribution and hierarchization of cultural flows and the resultant formation of a Brazilian national cultural identity. This carioca hegemony had been established since Getúlio Vargas's rise to power and his privileging of Rio de Janeiro's samba as the representative cultural expression of the popular classes in Brazil. Vis-à-vis the international market, samba, and later bossa nova, were chosen by various cultural agents to represent Brazil's cultural riches, "poetries for export" (to paraphrase Oswald de Andrade) that played the role of counterpart to the country's industrial products and natural resources. But since trade liberalization during and after the dictatorship years of the seventies, the national product has become less privileged as representative of the people and a wave of regional cultural production has come to the fore in answer to the omnipresent influx of North American cultural flows. Successive waves of national popularity for forró, and related hagiographies of its major proponents such as Luiz Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro, are symptoms of this larger rise of regionalism. Regional production need no longer be mediated through the cultural arbitration of Rio de Janeiro for the purposes of strategic representation of the nation-state in foreign markets.

Nevertheless, the concept of a direct communicational link between local realities in Brazil and those elsewhere in the world must be problematized with an analysis of the new cultural hierarchies that have replaced the old national-popular variety. One of Luiz Gonzaga's own monikers, "The Ambassador of the Sertão," provides the figure for my own analysis of

Brazilian cultural flows on the global market. In the present world economy, many flows from subordinate capitalist countries to other countries (be they subordinate or dominant) tend to be mediated through cultural ambassadors. Typically, these mediators function through personal ties between musicians and entrepeneurs in the subordinate country and musicians in centers of production in other countries. For example, one could cite Jimmy Cliff's relationship with Gilberto Gil where Gil acted very much like a state ambassador in receiving Cliff in Brazil and touring the local music scene with Cliff. A perhaps more unequal relationship would be that between Paul Simon and Airto Moreira or Milton Nascimento, both of whom helped to provide Simon with his introduction to Brazilian music that would end in Simon's 1990 album, *Rhythm of the Saints* and the participation of the Afro-Brazilian, Salvadoran drum troupe Olodum on the record. These collaborative relationships can range from the egalitarian to the extremely hierarchical. As Timothy Taylor outlines in *Global Pop*, in the cases of Simon and other global pop/rock stars like Peter Gabriel who desire to incorporate global influence into their albums (usually considered "world music"), there exists in the very process of producing the music a structural imbalance of power between the global star and the musicians/entrepeneurs from subordinate capitalist countries that is virtually insuperable (Taylor, 1997). Without an influential and persistent cultural ambassador of their own, forrozeiros are left to struggle for limited state funding to attend international music festivals and exhibitions, and to hope their music can find a place among the categories of world music, Latin music, Afro-pop, folk music, etc. on the world market. The conclusion traces the contours of these new global striations of cultural hierarchy, and the potential for alliances among forrozeiros and the multitude of other musicians excluded by the current configuration of global capital flows.

Forró Etimology: Two Tales of Origin

Before further introducing the discourse of forró, I find it imperative to discuss the discourse about forró. The importance of such a beginning was impressed upon me by countless Brazilians, mostly Northeasterners, who found an evidently immense pleasure in sharing with me their knowledge regarding the etymology of the word "forró." This desire to share information about their cultural heritage is representative of the typical

hospitality and generosity of Northeasterners and the rightful pride they take in their own cultural history. As can be expected, not everyone tells the same story about where the word comes from. But one can divide these tales of origin into two main categories.

The first is the tale of an Anglicism that entered Portuguese to describe a popular music with thoroughly Brazilian roots in the Northeastern backlands or sertão. To understand this version, one must go back to the turn of the twentieth century when English railroad companies were laying tracks in the Northeast, connecting the isolated region to the rest of the country. These companies, so the story goes, would throw dances for the workers and the surrounding communities. To signal that it was a party with free entry to anyone in the area, the dances would be advertised with a large sign above the door inscribed with the words "For All." Thus the word "forró" is said to be a transcription of the Brazilian manner of pronouncing two English words. A variation in this version of forró's origin myth has it that those throwing the party were not British railroad companies, but rather American soldiers stationed in Brazil during World War II.

Although I have my own reservations with respect to this story's etymological likelihood (especially concerning the more recent version with American soldiers), these in no way reduce the cultural relevance of the story. In this vein, it will be quite revealing to sketch a few comparisons with the origins of the word samba. Like "samba" originally did, forró first signified a festive gathering with unique and popular-folkloric, if somewhat vaguely defined, musical accompaniment. Also like samba, the word forró has its roots in a foreign language. As opposed to an African language, it is a European one in the latter case. This difference certainly reflects the greater emphasis on African or Afro-Brazilian influence in samba, as opposed to forró's relatively ambiguous racial identifications. Another distinction from samba is that in this version of forró's origins, we can isolate the historical moment at which the neologism entered the language, as opposed to the much cloudier picture of samba's entrance. Perhaps the most important discursive effect of the clearly pinpointed entrance of the word into Brazilian Portuguese is to localize the genre indubitably within the Northeast. The story clearly relates events in this region, but it also involves an international cast. In this case, samba seems more typical of any word entering a language, with its slower, more evolutionary incorporation that is harder to pinpoint historically.

What purpose do the British (or Americans) serve in the story, though? For one, they serve to unify the Northeasterners as one people. There is no question of whether landowners or peons are going to be at the party, it is explicitly "for all." So implicitly, all Northeasterners regardless of class are celebrating together at the railroad companies' dances. The magnanimous British are the hosts, whereas everyone else who attends the event is simply a Northeastern Brazilian. This lack of hierarchy in the story is significant in the light of stories told by Luiz Gonzaga regarding parties held in the Pernambucan sertão during his youth in the teens and twenties. In Sinval Sá's biography, Luiz Gonzaga is quoted as opining:

> But there was something that bothered me about those parties. The separation of the so-called 'whites,' who isolated themselves in a room, while the tenant farmers remained out in the yard. The criterion of color varied with wealth. (Sá 2002, 50)[1]

The poorer, darker-skinned residents of the ranch were typically segregated from those at the top of the racially-inflected class hierarchy, or pigmentocracy. The "for all" origin story directly contradicts this reality in favor of an emphasis on undifferentiated Northeastern community. Thus one important functional role of the British in this scenario is to provide a space devoid of the contemporary power dynamics in Brazilian rural society. Through this deus ex machina enters the specter of a newer ideology of peaceful and harmonious coexistence between the races, known as racial democracy. If this ideology was in fact an influence upon the story, there is some historical revisionism involved here since the ideology did not become hegemonic until several decades after the turn of the century. But racial democracy was a popular ideology for much of the last century and thus may well have influenced the populist, "for all" connotation attributed to forró in this etymology.

As noted above, the presence of the British gives this story an international cast. Foreign characters make this version of forró's roots seem all the more universal. In a spatial sense, the inclusion of foreigners and Brazilians in the event is a meeting of the global and the local, transforming the Northeastern region into a microcosm of the then British-dominated

[1] All foreign language texts here and below, unless otherwise noted, are translated by the author.

geopolitical state of affairs. In a temporal sense, the British involvement in the Northeastern infrastructure recalls the ever-present desire for modernity, while the Brazilian attendees are a reminder of the living tradition of the local communities. The amicable fraternization between the two groups hints that Brazil, and especially the Northeast, are ready for modernization and will participate in it on their own terms. Such autonomy combined with partnership brings us back to the Brazilian translation of the English words "for all" into one word, "forró."

But of course there is an alternative history of the genre's name. This origin myth goes back to at least the nineteenth century, when the word "forrobodó" used to appear in the Recifense press (Albin 2006, 289). The word was typically used in a rather disparaging manner to refer to popular festivities, often with connotations of violence. Such festivities would include dancing and music, but were not really "for all" like the British parties. It was precisely due to the lower-class attendees that the bourgeois press looked upon the gatherings with suspicion or even disdain. This type of attitude was common among the middle class towards any popular gathering (and its associated music) where there was no clear space for mixture between classes nor deferential inclusion of wealthier Brazilians.

So according to this version, the word forró is an abbreviation of the older forrobodó, of clear origin in Brazilian Portuguese. This etymology is a favorite with more traditionalist musicians, as well as Brazilian scholars studying forró and folk music more generally. It is the preferred etymology of the *Dicionário Houaiss* of Brazilian popular music. As is the case in this dictionary's entry and others like that of the *Enciclopédia Musical Brasileira*, the "for all" etimology is not seen as a legitimate alternative origin story. The word forró is reclaimed for the Portuguese language from its supposed association with English. Thus in making the case for the word forrobodó, we can detect a nationalist or regionalist pride that fuels the desire to dispel myths around the influence of foreign languages.

During the 1960s, there was a movement among university-educated musicians to valorize the cultural production of the lower classes as a sign of solidarity with proletarian struggles (Draper 2003, Dunn 2001). It was easy to imagine this as a common struggle since the military dictatorship had been cracking down on both the freedom to organize and the freedom of speech of all classes (although much less so, in the beginning, on university intellectuals (Schwarz 1996)). I see the forrobodó etymology as a discourse

within this tradition of politicizing popular music. This history of forró gives credit for the creation of the genre entirely to poor Northeasterners, who gathered together to play and dance music they had developed over the centuries with little commercial influence. The mode of production emphasized in this history, above all else, lends an aura of ethnic authenticity to the music. Adding to the aura is the long-held belief (at least since European Romanticism) that the poor, especially the rural poor, are a pure archive of any ethnicity's primitive (and thus natural) artistic development.

To begin a comparison of the "for all" and the "forrobodó" etymologies, it seems fitting to note that the former has far greater circulation. One is much more likely to hear this story than the forrobodó story, and one hears it even from people who are not forró fans and have no great knowledge of the genre. Does this mean that the Anglo-Brazilian etymology is more "popular"? Perhaps. Or perhaps this is simply a better story. A Brazilian word (especially a Northeastern word) no longer in common usage hardly makes for a fascinating tale. From a historical perspective, there is no identitarian specificity to the word forrobodó as opposed to "For All," which evokes a specific type of party with universal attendance of railroad workers, their families, their employers and their larger community.

It is also easier to relate this imaginary to the present-day status of forró as a genre of Brazilian popular music. As discussed in several of the following chapters, the present-day categories of university, electronic and traditional forró span a wide variety of musicians in terms of region, race, class and gender. This variety approaches the diversity of the Brazilian nation as a whole, thanks to the national scope forró has managed to achieve over the past sixty years. An all-inclusive party with international corporate sponsors is an origin story that certainly resonates with major contemporary forró performances throughout the country. On the other hand, recalling the word forrobodó emphasizes that forró originated from the peasant and working classes of the Northeast, and continues to trace its strong identitarian roots back to them. Here we come up against conflicting definitions of the popular. In the case of "for all," the underlying understanding of the popular is based in the acceptance of a broad national audience and wide distribution by the music industry, whereas in the alternative case it is a music considered to be "of the people," authentically produced by poor people who do not necessarily gain any commercial advantage or widespread personal recognition for their work. Defining the

popular is a discursive struggle which has wider reverberations throughout the sphere of popular culture in Brazil and elsewhere, which I discuss in Chapter Seven.

(Re)Defining Tradition and the Popular

While theorists such as George Yúdice have called for a reevaluation of cultural production through the lense of expediency (Yúdice 2003), Chapter Seven broaches some of the ethical and epistemological questions that such approaches avoid. From Yúdice or even Néstor García Canclini's perspective, forrozeiros might be using their traditional patrimony primarily for profit or to make claims for recognition from the state. They certainly do make use of culture in these ways, but forrozeiros are first and foremost performing collective affect and writing history such that they can guarantee continued psychological, social and cultural survival in the Northeastern diaspora and even within the Northeast itself. I understand this constitution of traditional culture to be something akin to Paul Gilroy's concept of the "living memory of the changing same," according to which there exists a direct relationship between a community of listeners, in this case Northeasterners, and the production of traditional music like forró, "even when the network used to communicate its volatile contents has been an adjunct to the sale of [...] popular music" (Gilroy 1993, 198). While expediency or resource management are not adequate characterizations of forró's emphasis on a collective ethos or worldview, one must also avoid the ethnomusicological tendency to marginalize or ghettoize tradition through a discourse of authenticity (involving the tracing of origins and/or sources) that chains tradition to specific localities or bygone eras. This tendency is a relocalization which purifies tradition by cutting it off from the world and making it seem organic and natural to a certain locale rather than ideologically engaged, as it is, in a popular-historical field of dialogue, debate, and performance stretching across and even beyond the Brazilian nation. In other words, forró's subalternity cannot and should not be definitively spatialized by the cultural analyst. Expediency and authenticity discourses can, of course, go hand in hand, since a reified notion of tradition qua authentic folklore (even if recognized as a commodity within a (trans)national culture industry) can easily be accommodated within a grander theory concerning the increasing usage of culture as a politico-

economic resource. While forrozeiros certainly use Northeastern culture as a resource for creative inspiration and to attract state and private funding, theirs is a historical project akin to Walter Benjamin's critique of the concept of historical progress in his *Passagenwerk* [The Arcades Project] (Benjamin 1991, Vol. 5) as well as his "Über den Begriff der Geschichte [Theses on the Philosophy of History]" (Benjamin 1991, 691-704). Outside of the hegemonic ideology of national progress, forró is produced in the fullness of a "now time" that draws the meaning of the present constellation of Northeastern popular culture out of its relationship with the diasporic history of subaltern Northeasterners. While this conception of popular tradition and related cultural production goes far beyond resource management, one must also recognize, with Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr., that "the invention of tradition" has been a favorite occupation of the Northeastern elite, who have certainly found Northeastern culture expedient for the purposes of consolidating their own power base (Albuquerque Jr. 1999). With respect to forró, such resource management involves the elite's melodramatic identification with subaltern populations and their self-representations in popular music, for its own purposes of masking its domination and exploitation of these same populations.

A Critical Approach to the Synthetic Urge

It is from the perspective of forró's profound rootedness in living tradition, and in some cases the related utopian rural imaginary, that in Chapters Five and Six I critique theories of temporal and spatial synthesis so prevalent in contemporary cultural studies. Urban and rural factors, as well as modernity and tradition, have not been incorporated into new syntheses but rather have much more antinomian tendencies in the context of forró's production. Urban centers of the Southeast and Northeast have been sites of production for forró since its beginnings as a popular-industrial genre. Yet this has not made urban themes enter and influence the discourse of the forró canon. Rural areas, whether in the coastal, agreste, or sertão regions of the Northeast, have remained by far the dominant spatial references for the genre. Likewise, the influence of modernity in the genre—which in this limited context refers to developments in the contemporary music industry—is largely confined to technological, and in some cases performative aspects, but is either attenuated or consciously avoided in lyrical expression. Lyrics

tend to stress ties to the past, or the traditions of a vibrant community that continues to face life throughout Brazil on its own terms. We could call these terms authentic, if by this we mean the collective ownership and the stress on the continuity of the popular nature of forró—"popular" here meaning the preservation and valorization of Northeastern communities and social spheres.

Thus rural and urban, modern and traditional are addressed as antinomies that need to be carefully negotiated and cannot effectively be synthesized. My position here deviates from various forró analyses which seek to prove a synthesis of rural and urban imaginaries in forró through a process of modernization of Northeastern folk music. However, I am confident that my analysis resonates with both of forró's origin myths, which stress rural community and place the modern economy in second place, if they refer to it at all. Unlike many scholarly analyses of forró and culture generally in Latin America, these stories demonstrate no symptoms of the synthetic urge, a phenomenon I analyze at length in Chapters Five and Six.

To expand a bit further on the concept, the synthetic urge can be described as a tendency towards identitarian reification of what remain complex historical processes involving many subaltern tensions. These tensions, which are well exemplified in Brazil by the above-mentioned double negation of rural and urban utopias, are glossed over by the supposition that a synthesis has occurred. The motivating factors behind this analytical urge towards synthesis are multiple in Latin American cultural studies, including the combined hegemonic influence of disciplinary and broader societal discourses. In the case of rural and urban cultural production, and in other spatially-defined production codified as modern or traditional, these hegemonic discourses often involve a focus on hybridity. The concept of hybridity in Latin American cultural studies can be traced back to thinkers such as Gilberto Freyre and Fernando Ortiz, who theorized Brazilian and Cuban national identity, respectively, as hybrids of various local and global cultural and politico-economic influences. In my analysis, their static, reified formulations of the hybrid are proven to lead to hegemonic syntheses that mask certain forms of domination and subalternity. This problematic manifestation of the hybrid still echoes in present-day analyses of Brazilian culture and cultural production, as I demonstrate in my analysis of a recent international polemic on race in Brazil, and thereafter in a survey of some of the important literature on forró and popular music in

rural and urban zones.

Cognitive Mapping and Psychological Resistance

The two etymologies of forró, which are at the same time origin stories or myths, also have some key commonalities which are explored throughout this study. Both are clearly situated within the Brazilian Northeast. Although the term forró came to designate the genre only after it had achieved national acclaim as the baião, no one claims that the Brazilian nation or other regions have anything to do with the origins of forró. The certainty about the regional development of the genre reflects the profound affective attachment of Northeasterners to their region as well as the related dominance of a cognitive mapping of that region in the discourse of forró wherever it is produced and performed.

As discussed in Chapter Three, this cognitive mapping of the Northeast, often the rural Northeast but including urban areas, occurs to the exclusion of incorporating into forró any new discursive themes from the urban-industrial complex of the Southeast. This exclusive focus is surprising since so many Northeasterners migrated to the Southeast that one would expect forró to address the experiences of the diasporic communities of Northeasterners in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. But any detailed portrait of Northeastern migrant communities as such is generally suppressed in favor of preserving and valorizing affective and cultural ties to the home region. No matter what innovations occur musically and lyrically, there remains this profound need to be rooted in the region and its history. Telling stories about the derivation of the word forró is really just another way of sharing and reaffirming these roots.

Vis-á-vis the social space of the city, the researcher enters the difficult realm of political representation when faced with the task of labeling the lack of cognitive mapping in forró. Is it a failure, a resistance, or something else? The academics and artists I spoke with throughout Brazil typically rejected the word "resistance," which is very politically charged and does not seem to correspond to the subtler ways in which forró avoids representation of life in the city. When analyzing what I call the "forró canon"[2], one is certainly not

[2]The forró canon can be described as the general discourse of forró as mediated by and through its most influential producers, such as Luiz Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro. I

faced with a conscious political project or "forró movement" against the progress of urban industrialization and the related fall in political and social status of rural areas and their residents. Of course, to call the lack of representation of the city a "cognitive failure" would be accurate in some respects but is perhaps too close to the hegemonic narrative of progress. According to this narrative, championed by both the democratically elected Juscelino Kubitschek and the later military dictatorship, Brazil's bright future depended upon rapid industrialization and urbanization (along with the national transformation of farming according to the dictates of industrial agribusiness), in accordance with the developmentalist projects of global capital and the International Monetary Fund. In terms of the psychology of the migrant worker, this narrative of progress would likely deem forró's attachment to rural life and its cognitive resistance to mapping the Northeastern worker within the urban economy as unhealthy and unproductive. For this reason it is important to emphasize that the terminology of cognitive failure need not connote that there is some kind of "successful" cognition that could have effectively integrated the migrant worker into the urban society of the Southeast. The fact remains that upon being displaced from urban and rural economies in crisis in the Northeast, Northeasterners were incorporated into the surplus labor pool of São Paulo and other industrial centers. This placed them, and continues to place millions, in a very marginal position within the national economy. Since this marginality is a systemic problem, it should hardly be designated as the responsibility of the migrant workers.

Ultimately, I have found that the hermeneutical approach that best suits the history of Northeastern migration is to frame the migrant standpoint as one characterized by some degree of psychological resistance or repression. One advantage of this approach is to avoid a verdict on whether forró's championing of the rural roots of Northeasterners in the city is conservative or progressive. Although forró discourse has certain qualities critical of hegemonic developmentalist policies, it would be difficult to regard the nostalgic visions of forró as calling for significant political change, especially not within the industrial core. What might have been considered conservative within the confines of the Northeastern communities where

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discuss the development of the canon further in Chapter One.

forró first flourished as folk music, however, cannot be so easily categorized in the new, national context into which forró entered upon its first commodification as baião. In Chapter Three, I discuss the rural idyll of forró discourse as a utopian critique of urban modernity which "discloses the complacency of the urban celebration" and forms half of a negative dialectic (Jameson 2004, 50). The other half is, of course, the urban utopia which celebrates the city and, in Fredric Jameson's words, "exposes everything nostalgic and impoverished in the embrace of nature" (Ibid.). Therefore, although forró does not present a political program, it functions as a dialectical counterpoint to the hegemonic utopia of urban development and thereby serves as a continual reminder of rural subalternity. This reminder is all the more striking when produced by means of the technology of the culture industry, within the Southeastern urban, politico-economic core, or even within the larger coastal cities of the Northeast. Returning to the context of the psyche, if in forró's discourse we can find a psychological repression of the economic violence of urbanization, then we must also recognize that this repression acutely reveals its opposite number in urban consciousness. In this way, forró is a symptom within popular music, a return of the repressed for the urban core—the repressed being the core's reliance upon massive levels of surplus labor, displaced from more rural regions on the periphery like the Northeast.

Forró Transcends the Synthetic Urge

As noted earlier, in Chapter One I sketch out a history of the genre of forró, which I theorize as progressing from a symbolic to an allegorical representation of the Northeast. This analysis draws from Benjamin's discussion of allegory in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* [Origin of German Tragic Drama] (Benjamin 1991, 203-430). Three historical phases can be traced in forró's development: first, the apogees of Luiz Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro's careers followed by a decline after the rise of bossa nova; second, a reemergence in the seventies with a second generation of artists including Dominguinhos, Elba Ramalho and Alceu Valença; and third, a splintering of forró into three subgenres after Gonzaga's retirement and death. These three genres reflect contradictions always present in forró along class and regional lines but which did not produce subgenres as long as Gonzaga's formidable presence united all forrozeiros. These phases can be

periodized historically as corresponding roughly with three eras: firstly, post-war modernization/urbanization and import substitution; secondly, trade liberalization in the 1970s with a build-up of foreign debt and the transnationalization of the music industry; and finally, the post-dictatorship era in which cultural renationalization occurred through the production of regional and subaltern groups like Northeasterners and *favelados* (slum dwellers).

These periods themselves can all be related to specific synthetic urges. In the fifties we find the state's desire to at least appear to be synthesizing all regions into national development. Luiz Gonzaga helped to give the appearance of an incorporation of the marginal Northeast, at least on the cultural level. In this context synthetic symbols, like those of the rhythm called baião and the folk figure called the cangaceiro, are what most easily represented Northeastern culture and what sold in the Southeast. In the seventies, with the transnationalization of the economy and cultural industry, a space opened up for a more diverse, allegorical representation of the Northeast which incorporated some of the region's contradictions. The second generation arrived on stage and began to develop forró in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília and also in the Northeast (which before had been unable to support Gonzaga and Jackson's national careers). But forró really came into its own with the return to democracy when the forces of cultural integration from the state were reduced, while at the same time a widespread regionalist cultural response to North American penetration of the national music market was on the rise. Also, as noted above, the departure of Gonzaga as a major presence defining the canon relieved the genre of his strong personal synthetic pressure, opening it up to the tripartite division of today.

Forró's Multitude: Transregional and Global Connections

What we now have under the genre of forró is a diverse group of immaterial laborers throughout Brazil whose future coherence might best be gauged through Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004). To what degree do these groups collaborate democratically for the purposes of creatively disseminating Northeastern popular culture? Any sign of a departure from the horizontally-networking, egalitarian biopolitics of the multitude, that is, of the wielding of a synthetic sovereignty for the purposes

of establishing a new hegemonic canonization of forró, would likely entail a decisive atomization of the genre along class and/or regional lines and the subsequent formation of new genres or mergers of certain subgenres with other pop music genres like *brega* or *música sertaneja*. (The political concept of sovereignty here is intended to resonate with Benjamin's description of the allegorical play as one in which the sovereign is absent from the stage and thus there is no one referent unifying the narrative.) There is some lack of communication between Southeast and Northeast that might threaten to result in an attempted synthetic move towards sovereignty on the part of artists in the economically dominant Southeastern industrial corridor, but presently there is enough immigration of Northeastern artists to the region, and demand among transplanted poor and working-class Northeasterners for a variety of forró styles, to maintain a transregional dialogue and a recognition of the continued flourishing of forró in diverse forms throughout the country.

Finally, the conclusion will demonstrate how synthesis is most heavily at work in the transnational flows of culture which commodify cultural production into various broad categories like Latin or World music, Afro-pop or folklore. This synthetic commodification may be a function of the lack of a destabilizing particular context, or rather the subalternization and constitutive exclusion of the particular Brazilian cultural contexts. At times music is commodified secondarily by nationality, especially in compilations, in which case a synthetic representation of a society can be presented as an introduction or background to the music. Here expediency is the perfect concept to capture the logic by which foreign, sometimes unintelligible sounds are made relevant to a listener in one of the dominant capitalist countries. The cultural imaginary of the other (nation, region, people) is used to sell its music, especially to further the consumer's incipient interest such that he or she will become conscious of the vast array of cultural production emanating from other parts of the globe, or at least aware of the other international offerings at the record store. Whatever struggles occur on the intranational level to define forró as a genre are always already elided on the world market. This state of affairs suggests a parallel between the national music market in 1950s Brazil and the present-day world market. Yet rather than the synthesizing force upon subaltern culture exercised by state-managed industrial development, in the present world market there is only the force of global musical categories as defined by the handful of

megacorporations comprising the transnational entertain-ment industry. But foreign categories for forró like Latin and Brazilian, or even "Music for Maids and Taxi Drivers," do not have any noticeable effect upon the actually-existing genre in Brazil, unlike the categories of rap and rock which tend to offer up many more international comparisons and possible influences from foreign models. Not to mention that, with respect to the world market, forró is probably the least-circulated of the genres of national significance in Brazil, perhaps because it does not easily fit in with the hegemonic samba-bossa nova-MPB[3] constellation, nor does it have a famous ambassador like Paul Simon, who featured Olodum on one of his albums (thus shedding a spotlight more generally upon the Afro-Brazilian music of Salvador).

In the wake of dependency theory and recent theories of globalization, one has to recognize that, if a genre like forró does not seem to have relatively large global distribution, *by no means does this signify that it is not globally significant*. Its very absence, in fact, represents its global subalternity along with countless other genres. Indeed, we should always remember that there are many more poor musicians than artists with platinum records. From this vantage point we can recognize the danger inherent in cultural theory like that of Franco Moretti which relies excessively upon the concept of evolution (Moretti 1996). Evolutionary theory attempts to explain the lack of distribution in terms of the innate qualities of the work itself. From my study of forró in the context of Brazilian popular culture more generally, it appears that the qualities of this genre of music have very little to do with whether or not it is incorporated into global cultural flows. Sales are much more related to marketing, which is most skillfully achieved not by the musicians themselves, especially on the global level, but by cultural ambassadors and the categories of world music which provide space on the shelves at the record store and on websites. Much like Gonzaga partnered with professionals in the economically-dominant sector of Brazil to achieve national prominence, a partnership with a cultural entrepreneur or musician situated in a dominant capitalist country like David Byrne or Ry Cooder is necessary for genres produced by subaltern groups in subordinate regions to achieve any global recognition. This is a highly hierarchical relationship which raises the question of whether

[3] MPB is the acronym for *música popular brasileira*, or Brazilian pop music.

a global multitude of cultural "content producers" is presently possible. It is certainly conceivable as a utopian project, but what if we refer back to the national history of forró (discussed in Chapter One) as a test case for a real transregional, transclass alliance of musicians, one that utilizes but is not limited to the logic of the dominant economic paradigm? It appears that the possibility, if faint and living by the double-edged sword of creative freedom (which can yield both autonomous collaboration and isolation), does exist.