REIMAGINING RESISTANCE:
AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURE AND THE MYTH OF THE RACIAL DEMOCRACY

By
BRENDA J. LAINEZ

University of Florida
2019
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering support, even in the midst of all my spontaneous decision-making. They have always believed in me and my abilities. I cannot adequately express in words everything that they have done for me and continue to do. I would also like to thank my siblings for pushing me to be the best big sister possible. Everything I do is in the hopes of inspiring their own dreams.

I owe an immense amount of gratitude to my advisor Dr. Rosana Resende. I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet various academic role models during my college career, but Dr. Resende has been the most influential in my life as a source of wisdom and inspiration for my work. She has challenged me to think critically and be outspoken about my thoughts and beliefs. I would like to thank her for her guidance and patience throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the Afro-Brazilian students I met while studying abroad in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil. Tatiana, Rubens, Victória, and Kaya shared their experiences as Afro-Brazilian students and their own trials and tribulations. I am grateful for their insight, which allowed me to become more educated and informed. Their dedication to the work of promoting Afro-Brazilian visibility is inspiring and an influence for this thesis.
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Depiction of Palmares</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Capoeiristas</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Zumbi Dos Palmares</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Black Orpheus Theatrical Release Poster</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Picture of Steve Biko in the Steve Biko Institute</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Afro-Brazilian Woman Wearing a Turbante</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Gilberto Gil in 1972</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Filhos de Gandhi</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Illustration of the Orixas in Candomblé</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Terreiro de Bale Folha</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Performance of an Orixa in the Bale Folclórico</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 BACKGROUND</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE POWER OF RESISTANCE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 AWAKENING OF THE MIND</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 THE SOUND OF RESISTANCE</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 TURNING TO THE SPIRITS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Oppression of Black individuals in Brazil begins with the enslavement of millions of Africans and permeates to this day. Afro-Brazilian resistance has been critical in countering hegemonic narratives in Brazil. This thesis seeks to uncover the cultural expressions through which Afro-Brazilians have historically resisted domination in order to gain a greater understanding of the concept of resistance and how it can be applied elsewhere. The importance of examining these relations between oppression and domination in Brazil is paramount because of the continued discrimination and racism that plagues the country. By conducting archival work, this thesis argues that Afro-Brazilian resistance has been a conduit for the preservation and promotion of Afro-Brazilian culture. The sources within this thesis have been obtained through library databases and online searches. They were further examined for the inclusion of instances of Afro-Brazilian resistance and its importance to the promotion of black identity in Brazil as a counter to narratives that have served to erase, appropriate, or imitate Afro-Brazilian culture. Although there is an interplay of power between the hegemonic group and other marginalized groups, resistance in forms of cultural expressions have been crucial in creating Afro-Brazilian visibility and challenging oppression.

KEYWORDS: Brazil, Cultural Resilience, Power, Racialization
INTRODUCTION

Outside of Africa, Brazil has the largest number of African descendants, with more than 50 percent of the country’s population identifying as Black or Brown.¹ (BBC 2011) In the state of Bahia, for instance, more than 90 percent of the population identifies as some shade of Black or Brown, and it is a place whose cultural fabric is deeply rooted in West African influence. For example, there is food from Ghana, music from Nigeria and fashion from Senegal. These elements are intrinsically linked to how Afro-Brazilians affirm their heritage, and there is a thriving Afro-Brazilian market and industry that continues to exist even in the midst of erasure, appropriation and imitation. This amalgamation of a variety of cultural aesthetics is a testament to the cultural influences that have shaped black life in Brazil, specifically following the end of the Portuguese slave trade era. It is a reconstruction of knowledge lost during slavery and a celebration of Afro-Brazilian resistance through music, dance, religion, education, fashion among other cultural facets. Dimensions of black life are seen through the practice of capoeira, the practice of the Candomblé religion, the selling of acarajé, etc. Afro-Brazilian culture exists as something that was creatively constructed as a form of expression. The culture occupies an undeniable space, both literally and figuratively, in the larger framework of what it means to be Brazilian. Afro-Brazilian activists have dedicated their lives to resistance and representation to uphold the collective beauty of their shared blackness and to denounce commodification and objectification. It's a commitment rooted in a deep respect and appreciation, something that can never be imitated.

¹ Being black or brown in Brazil is defined as preto (black) and pardo (brown). Most recently, the Brazilian Negro movement has come to identify the term Negro, meaning black, as an umbrella term used to account anyone perceived to be of African origin or Afro-Brazilian. (Bailey, Fialho, and Loveman 2018) The term black in this paper will adopt the meaning of the term Negro as encompassing of the various black experiences in Brazil.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Afro-Brazilian resistance is a counternarrative from that promoted by the dominant nationalistic habitus in Brazil. The historic narrative of race is one that focuses on tolerance and celebration. During the colonial era, the relationship between slaves and the Portuguese was seen as relatively more benign in comparison to other North American counterparts. However, the existence of brutality, torture, and violence was present and rampant in colonial Brazil. The miscegenation of black and European individuals as a result of a lack of sufficient Portuguese to repopulate in Brazil served as a mask to ignore the underlying cruelty. Many slaves found solace in these circumstances through various cultural expressions.

Brazil has a very interesting racial history and trajectory that differs from that of the United States, for example. Many Africans were brought to the area as slaves to cultivate sugar, tobacco, coffee, etc. It is estimated that up to five million slaves were brought to Brazil alone. (Setti 2015) Slavery in Brazil was abolished on May 13, 1888. By then, racialization and discrimination had already taken a hold. Thereafter, there were many immigration policies aimed at “whitening” the country and only allowing European immigrants to enter. In 1945, the Brazilian government issued a decree that favored the entrance of European immigrants as a way to preserve and develop the ethnic composition of the country, although the majority of the population was mixed. (Stepan 1991) Additionally, many African practices and traditions were banned, and people of color were made to assimilate. For instance, the practice of Capoeira was banned during the time of slavery and this ban was revived in the late 19th century, lasting until the 1930’s. (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008) This generates a racial hegemony that systematically favors certain individuals over others. Even with clear evidence of racial discrimination in the country,
many Brazilians would say that racism does not exist. The country has adopted a color-blind perspective which makes it much harder to confront racism.

In the fabric of time, race is a recently formed idea. Prior to the colonial period, the concept of race did not really exist. The earliest work of race can be traced to Linnaeus’ human taxonomy in *Systema Natura* that was further extended by Blumenbach’s classification of humans into five distinct races. Many of these race models were based on phenotypic differences and the pseudoscience of anatomical measurements, most notably cranial measurements. Many of these measurements were arbitrary, depicting the ambiguity of the concept. (Bhopal 2007) The conceptualization of race in this way gave way to large bodies of work that sought to create distinctions between populations in a hierarchal manner. To understand race in Brazil, specifically, is to understand the complexity of racialization in the country.

Through Frantz Fanon’s racial optic, race is understood as an organizing principle of society. The early models of race, such as Blumenbach’s, established a hierarchy in which Caucasian or European individuals were placed higher than other “races.” This transcended into Brazilian way of life and the way the country formed. Because of its history with enslavement, Brazilian society upheld the ideas that were preestablished by race models in which Europeans were placed on top of the hierarchy and Africans at the bottom. Brazil is unique in the way it handled miscegenation, however. Since Brazil allowed racial mixing, the idea that there was no racialization gradually became a cornerstone of the country. Instead, the belief that people were stratified through class, not race, became salient. Race and class are dialectically co-reproduced, however, because of their hierarchal nature. (Fanon 1968) The position of the wealthy colonizer and poor enslaved demarcates the differences in which racialization begins to occur, laying down the foundation for racism and discrimination.
After the abolition of slavery and the end of the republic, Brazilian politics were centered on nationalism and finding a mechanism that would unite the nation. A critical political issue of the day was that of addressing race in a way that was both nationalistic and unifying. By then many people recognized the nation for its mestiçagem, or the blending of different races/ethnicities. The early social theorists of race relations and formation in Brazil were not academic scholars, but rather politicians. (Cleary 1998) This illustrates the importance of creating definitions and parameters of what race was on a large-scale. Brazil continued to find itself within the narrative of syncretic celebration when Gilberto Freyre came along.

This nationalist ideology was catapulted in 1933 after Gilberto Freyre published the book Casa Grande e Senzala. Freyre’s approach in the book romanticized life on the sugarcane plantations, celebrating the miscegenation of European, African, and Native cultures. One of the core takeaways from the book was the idea that miscegenation was evidence of a successful adaptation to the new tropical environment. (Cleary 1998) Following this time, the idea of Brazil as a racial democracy dominated the conversations about race relations in the country. Through its political efforts to blur the color lines, Brazil portrayed itself to the world as a sort of racial paradise where there were no barriers for people of color and everyone had equal opportunity. (Souza and Sinder 2007) This view was problematic in a country that had long persecuted non-European customs and traditions.

It is in the climate of the myth of the racial democracy, that many Afro-Brazilians have had to fight for equal rights and representation. This is a difficult task as Brazil has made it a political mission to create the false image of a country that lacks racial prejudice and discrimination. This idea pervades Brazilian thought and is the dominant discourse. Although racism was criminalized in the constitution of 1988, it is still a phenomenon that continues to
affect many Afro-Brazilians today. Many activists, however, have worked hard to dispel the
notions of this myth and work beyond the ideas of syncretic racial celebration in order to uncover
the true conditions of people of color in Brazil and combat racism at its core. This, in and of
itself, is the ultimate resistance in a country that has been built on the myth of a racial
democracy. Since this idea permeates Brazilian social, political, and cultural thought, it has been
a challenge to overcome. This is a challenge that activists and advocates have undergone in order
to create better conditions and establish equal rights in Brazil.
CHAPTER 2: THE POWER OF RESISTANCE

Afro-Brazilian resistance has been a counter to the dominant ideas of race and racism in Brazil. Since the colonial period, Afro-Brazilians have had to fight against the oppressive conditions under which they lived. This continual push against repression and control has been a cornerstone of resistance in Brazil. But what is resistance? The conceptualization of resistance may seem simple as it has come to be understood as a part of everyday life. Resistance is seen through acts of protests, marches, strikes, etc. as a way to challenge inequality and demand rights. Scholarship on resistance has rapidly been brought to the forefront, but there is not much consensus on its definition, much less how to approach it. (Hollander and Einwohner 2004) Various anthropological work has sought to understand resistance and its relation to power, an approach that will be taken in this paper. Resistance can also be understood through the lens of individual and collective action to subvert the hegemonic structures and authorities that seek to subjugate certain groups. In its most basic sense, resistance is a lack of compliance toward something. In the context of this paper, it is further extended to a lack of compliance toward the overarching hegemonic powers.

Power is not a measurable quantity of how much a person has, but rather an understanding of types of relations and how power is exerted within these interactions. (Zagan 2015) In Discipline and Punishment, Foucault asserts that power is everywhere, but there is always resistance to it. (Driver 1985) So, what then is resistance to power if they are constantly occurring? This has been a troubling question to tackle in social science. On the one hand, social scientists call into question the outcomes of acts and movements of resistance. On the other hand, the idea of unintentional forms of resistance are questioned as being resistance at all. (Wright 2018) The work of psychological anthropologists’ challenges whether these questions
are relevant at all. Considering action and thought do not have to be conscious, or directly motivated, it is important to account for the subconscious responses to certain situations that can also be attributed to resistance. (Seymour 2006) This is especially true when accounting for the nature of power as a relationship and interplay.

Hannah Arendt describes power as product of action arising from the collaborative efforts of a plurality of agents. This plurality is what legitimizes power, as it is reaffirmed and upheld by a collective group. (Peeters 2008) In this sense, power is relational and dependent on the getting together of a group in the first place. The manifestations and materialization of institutions is dependent on the existence of power that is contributed by the interaction of individual agents. Dorrine Kondo further extends this describing power as creative, coercive, and coextensive with meaning. (Kondo 1990) Power is not merely created and embedded within structural forces. It is also a product of language, discourse, and everyday practices. The exposition of power is relational and contingent on the actions of people on a day to day basis. Through this lens, power is not fundamentally a negative phenomenon, but something people naturally do.

Although it may be true that power is not inherently bad, the way in which it is utilized as a weapon in social institutions to oppress people is certainly wrong. Power, in this paper, is seen as a manifestation of hegemonic forces. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the political dominance of one state over another. (Smith 2004) The concept can also encompass the domination of one group over the other. In this sense, power is only one aspect of a larger system of domination which serves to oppress others. Hegemony is the magnified control of groups by another through their exertion of power. Through the praxis of hegemony, dominance is constituted through a sphere of influence by which a status quo is routinely maintained. (Bush 2016) During the colonial era, the dominant or hegemonic group were the slaveowners and, to an
extent, the crown. This group held the political control and exercised their power through various means that stretched into the political, social, and cultural dimensions in order to repress slaves. Slaves were repressed through punishment, torture, and brutality. Slaveowners did anything possible to limit the power of slaves and quell any possibilities of rebellion. Although slaveowners were not the majority in terms of population, they were able to exert domination through fear. Most slaves resisted more subtly like breaking tools, feigning illness, dragging their feet, etc. (Rout 1976) More covert forms of resistance such as rebellions or running away were dangerous because they would be met with fierce punishment if caught.

Post-colonially, this hegemony transitioned into the new form of government whose various policies and political promotions served to uphold these previously established power structures in order to maintain a hierarchy of influence over oppressed groups. Repression of Afro-Brazilians can be seen through bans of cultural expressions like capoeira or candomblé, for example. During the new political era after the abolition of slavery, this repression was streamlined through false notions of fraternal unity among the nation, discrediting the identification to a racial group and replacing it with that of brasilidade or miscegenation. (Bailey 2004) It is under these circumstances of erasure that Afro-Brazilian resistance to counter these ideals has cemented itself as a challenge to these notions. Since the myth of racial democracy is implanted in Brazilian nationalism, activists have had to work intensely against this and establish an environment where they can assert their heritage and traditions in the political, social, and cultural spheres.
CHAPTER 3: AWAKENING THE MIND

According to the Merrian-Webster dictionary, consciousness can be defined as the state of being aware, especially of something within oneself. The Black Consciousness movement in Brazil has served as an awakening within a group of people about something that had continually been swept under the rug—their blackness. There is an inner relationship between consciousness and the social context from which it arises. (Fanon 1967) As Brazil is a highly racialized society within a colorblind framework, it is difficult for Afro-Brazilians to navigate the complexities of race within their society. In spite of this, educational efforts have long served as a starting point of resistance to mitigate this complex web, especially in the social, political, and cultural realms.

Blackness in Brazil dates to the first slaves arriving in the country. Undoubtedly, Afro-Brazilians have been central to the development of the country but have had to endure harsh and cruel conditions. Thomas Ewbank, a visitor to Brazil during the 1850s, recounted various tortures experienced by slaves. He described witnessing slaves with face masks that were heavy and restrictive, hearing about a slave owner who boiled a slave to death, the long, and arduous work in the fields, among other travesties. (Levine 1999) It is evident that Afro-Brazilians lived tragic lives, particularly during the enslavement period. The conditions were horrible enough that the crown had to intervene on two occasions in order for slaves to be given food, illustrating the magnitude of the cruelty. (Schwartz 1970) From the calamity, however, various social movements emerged to alleviate the conditions in which black people in Brazil lived.

Prior to the abolishment of slavery, social movements were perceived as highly radical because they threatened the social order. Brazil’s economy, like other economies dependent on slaves, required a labor force in order to sustain itself. Rebel movements during this time, known as Quilombagem, sought to go against the repression of the ruling class. (Moura 1994) Some of
these manifestations consisted of slave insurrections, bandoleirismo, a guerilla tactic where escaped slaves would organize and attack travelers on roads and pathways, among other techniques employed by slaves to challenge the power authority of the time. An important aspect of these movements was the collective understanding that the conditions slaves had to undergo were demoralizing and unjust. This represents consciousness raising within a group that was highly marginalized and silenced and the emergence of power through resistance. At the heart of quilombagem were quilombos. Quilombos were runaway slave communities, but they also accepted individuals who were relegated to the margins of society. (Levine 1999) The most notable of the Quilombos united into a single overarching entity, known as Palmares (Figure 1.1), although each quilombo maintained its own order and structure. These organizational models were based on African ones, a depiction of the ties to the slaves’ native heritage and the desire to preserve their cultural roots. Palmares is the most notable of the quilombos because it was self-sustaining, long-lasting, and presented a threat to the Portuguese power elite. They feared that the presence of quilombos, like Palmares, would lead to an overall slave rebellion that would depose their dominance.

Despite attempts by the Portuguese to overthrow Palmares, they faced strong resistance. The inhabitants of Palmares were experts in capoeira and used it as a tool to prevent Portuguese penetration into the settlement. Capoeira is presently known as a mixed-martial art and is practiced all over the world. Originally, Capoeira was born out of the repressive conditions that African slaves faced, illuminating a sort of silent resistance in the midst of enslavement. Its history is a subject of much debate because of its mysterious and secretive nature. This is also reflective of the lack of early social science research of marginal groups like Afro-Brazilians. It is widely believed that slaves were prohibited from practicing any form of martial arts as a way to quench possible rebellions. Consequently, in order to bypass these restrictive laws, slaves would use music to disguise the fighting as dancing. (Talmon-Chvaicer 2008) The aerobic movements in capoeira can also be seen as fluid dance-like motions. Due to this, slave masters dismissed the practice as merely cultural. In doing so, they allowed slaves to develop a tool of resistance and refine a strategic martial art that played a strong role in the longevity of Palmares.

![Figure 1.2: Capoeiristas](https://www.todamateria.com.br/capoeira/)

A pioneer of the resistance and an important leader of Palmares was Zumbi (Figure 1.3). The elusive figure has characterized a key emblem for Afro-Brazilian identity and its construction. At six years old he was captured by the Portuguese in a raid. He was then handed to a Portuguese missionary as a slave where he learned to read and write. At the age of fifteen, he
returned to Palmares where he was revered as a military strategist. Zumbi has been described as
diligent, wise, and courageous, even by his enemies. (Diggs 1953) As a military leader, Zumbi is
known for leading one of the most important battles of resistance against the Portuguese forces
in Palmares. Even as Palmares began to fall, Zumbi continued the rebellion until he was found.
Zumbi died fighting, choosing to give his life rather than surrender, showing his integrity to his
people and the cause they were fighting for. Zumbi’s history illustrates the importance of
tradition and the Afro-Brazilian roots for slaves. He chose to return to Palmares because he
recognized that slave life was not an adequate or humane way of life for his counterparts. As a
result of his commitment and valiancy, Zumbi has been immortalized as a symbol of Afro-
Brazilian mobilization and consciousness. Although Zumbi and Palmares were defeated, the
fight did not end there.

Figure 1.3: Zumbi Dos Palmares. Bezerra, Juliana. "Zumbi Dos Palmares: Quem Foi, Resumo E
palmares/.

An important aspect of this consciousness was its ability to transcend the changing social
and political environments that Brazil has undergone since the abolition of slavery. November
20th has been established as Black Awareness Day in Brazil, or Dia da Consciência Negra, and
has been celebrated since the 1960s. (Selka 2005) The day also specifically honors Zumbi’s role
as a freedom fighter and is also called Zumbi day. The day serves as a commemoration of Zumbi’s legacy and the continued work of black activists in Brazil to confront racism in Brazil. Inclusively, it is a homage to all the black individuals that have fought since the colonization of Brazil and who continue to fight today for rights. Through consciousness-raising, activists have been able to tackle and confront many of the problems in Brazil that lead to discrimination and marginalization of Black Brazilians.

Consciousness-raising has taken the form of artistic expression, especially when trying to reach the larger hegemonic group and outsiders. An important medium to achieve this has been through film. The visual components of film provide a source of communication that is indirect and subtle yet can deliver the message, a strategic way to reach an audience that is sensitive to power. The film Black Orpheus released in 1959 was a retelling of the Greek legend of Orpheus and Eurydice set in a Rio flavela during Carnaval. (Figure 1.4) Although directed by a Frenchman, which is problematic, the film did introduce the world to a new dimension of Brazilian life. The protagonists and leads of the film were both black, and the majority of the supporting cast and extras were also black. In the 1950s, this is a strong departure from the white-washing that is characteristic of entertainment, especially at this time. For many, Black Orpheus was their first introduction to Blacks in Latin America. The film also catapulted the popularity of Carnaval and featured Samba schools. It allowed connections about Brazilian identity as also tied to blackness to be made. Although directed from a foreign lens, Black Orpheus grounded black talent and cemented the performances into the memories of those who watched the film. (Stam 1985) Moreover, the film created a link of African cultural influence to what was the larger view of Brazilian identity and nationality. It is, in part, a reappropriation of
the means of media that were popular at the time to elevate a different view of Brazil, one that promoted its blackness and its essential importance within the dominant cultural framework.

![Black Orpheus Theatrical Release Poster](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053146/)


Education has also been an important tool for consciousness-raising. The Steve Biko Cultural Institute (Figure 1.5) located in the historic center of Pelourinho in Salvador, Bahia has prioritized the advancement of black youth in Brazil through education. The institute was founded on July 31st, 1992, creating the first pre-vestibular course for black students in the country. (Steve Biko Website) Vestibular exams are the forms of entrance to universities in Brazil. Many black students, however, have been excluded from these spaces. The institute began with the mission to promote the presence of black students in academic spaces as a way to expand their knowledge and continue the fight against discrimination. The name Steve Biko was based on one of the key figures of Black Consciousness in South Africa who fought fiercely against apartheid and racial segregation. (Steve Biko website) One of the key focuses of the institute is to raise the self-esteem of its students, especially in relation to their blackness. It seeks to change the thinking of black youth to one that honors their heritage and highlights the necessity to fight against inequalities. In this way, the institute not only cultivates academic endeavors, but also social, political, and cultural ones, as well.
This idea of raising self-esteem within Black individuals has been crucial in the Black Consciousness movement of Brazil. Self-esteem is confidence in one’s abilities, self-worth, and self-respect. The reason self-esteem is so important is because many black Brazilians have been systematically stripped of it through discriminatory practices and the inequalities they face on a day to day basis. Raising self-esteem allows positive attitudes and healthy beliefs towards oneself to be created and opens the door for self-actualization. A way these improvements have been accomplished through the black consciousness movement has been by challenging traditional beauty standards. Black beauty has been highly stigmatized and problematized by the dominant majority. Additionally, black features have been greatly politicized, and many times banned, casting a shadow and creating invisibility. (Pinho and Langdon 2010) Historically, Brazil has upheld Eurocentric standards of beauty, generating a dichotomous association of white as good and black as bad.

The Brazilian eugenics movement began early in the 20th century as a response to the “social question” of what to do with the vast majority of poverty-stricken black individuals. (Adams 1992) After the end of slavery, now freed slaves were left to fend on their own without help from the state. Then, in the early 1900s, Brazil promoted a large migratory influx of
Europeans. Although not directly linked to Darwinism and biometrics, like other Eugenics movements around the world at the time, the eugenics movement in Brazil served to highlight hygiene and sanitation in a way that further subjugated poor black individuals because they did not have the means or access to resources in the ways that other groups did. This influence of eugenics created a stratifying hierarchy in Brazilian society whereby physical appearance were indicative of one’s character. (Pinho and Langdon 2010) This led to a negative view of black features and many black people were forced to find ways to assimilate to the white beauty standards in order to fit in.

One way women, in particular, did this was through the straightening processes of hair. The song *Veja Os Cabelos Dela* by Tiririca in 1996 was a direct attack on black women’s hair. At one point the lyrics of the song likened black women’s hair to that of a scouring pad. (Caldwell 2003) This is just one example of the immense pressure for black women to change their hair type because of the highly negative attitudes toward kinky, coiled hair. In Brazil, this type of hair has come to be known as cabelo ruim, or bad hair. Keratin treatments have been widely used by Afro-Brazilian women in an attempt to straighten their hair. These treatments exploded on the market and have been popularized around the world as the Brazilian blowout, meant to reduce frizz and increase the health of hair. (Weathersby and McMichael 2013) From the outset, these treatments are indirectly perpetuating negative stereotypes of curly hair by equating it to being unhealthy and undesirable. These products are also being marketed as safe, although there are various health risks involved as a result to exposure to formaldehyde, creating a hazard and possible causing cancer. A study of formaldehyde levels in various keratin treatments found that all the treatments, even those labeled as formaldehyde-free, have the potential to increase concentrations of the gas at higher than normal levels. (Pierce et al. 2011)
For black women everywhere, who have felt pressures to use keratin treatments consistently in order to manage and mold their hair to Eurocentric beauty standards, this introduces a confounded problem. On the one hand, repeated exposure to the chemicals found in these hair treatments present a health hazard. The insurmountable pressure to fit in to a certain standard of beauty, however, marks a trade-off between health and beauty. In a society consumed by appearance, it can be hard to choose. Nevertheless, many Afro-Brazilian women are now denouncing the use of these treatments and urging women to accept their natural hair. In a Washington Post article, Bruna Aparecida states that she didn’t know herself without straight hair. This is reflective of the loss of self that further strains the identity of women as Afro-Brazilian and a motivation to accept their natural hair. (Lopes 2018) The rise in natural hair has also been linked with the black consciousness movement, as more women are becoming aware of the importance of their hair and finding the beauty within it. It is a resistance of dominant beauty standards established to assimilate Afro-Brazilians.

Another aspect of this resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards has been the adaptation and reclamation of African aesthetics into Afro-Brazilian culture. The reemergence of the turbante (Figure 1.6), also known as a turban or head wrap, has marked another piece of reclamation. Turbantes have become an Afro-Brazilian aesthetic cultural expression deeply rooted in history and religion. Enslaved women brought the tradition of wearing headwraps from Africa and utilized them within their religious practices or simply as protection for their hair, especially in the fierce sun while they worked. Over time, the use of head wraps declined and was relegated to the domestic sphere. (Santos et al. 2017) Today, however, turbantes have taken a different meaning as a symbol of resistance that seeks to encapsulate Afro-Brazilian roots in a visual manner. Turbantes developed as a political statement in the 1970’s when they began to be
incorporated into the fashion and costumes of the Ilê Aiyê carnaval group. Headwraps were a centerpiece for the group as a sign of blackness. This was important because it coincided with the creation of the Afro Bloco, a response to the exclusion of black people during Carnaval.

Ilê Aiyê burst onto the public radar in 1974 because their all black group was the first to desegregate the Salvador Carnaval parade. The difference between the Turbante and other aesthetic accessories is that it markedly signifies an identification as black. This means that the turbante is not merely a fashionable accessory, but a political tool that represents a consciousness-raising among Afro-Brazilians. It is deeply representative of Afro-Brazilian history and marks a bond with that heritage in resistance to the historic erasure of black identity in Brazil.


In the most recent years, the use of the turbante has sparked debates of cultural appropriation in response to the misuse by non-black identifying individuals. This is perceived as imitation and lack of respect for the history and importance of headwraps for Afro-Brazilian culture. This appropriation is something activists have had to counter by raising awareness about the history and significance of turbantes in Afro-Brazilian culture. Many have tried to argue against the claims that wearing a headwrap as a non-black individual is cultural appropriation. They argue, instead, that Afro-Brazilians should be relieved that their culture is being shown to
the mainstream. This is troubling because it begins to mark headwraps, in this case, as an accessory. For Afro-Brazilians, turbantes are not accessories, they are a cultural component of a historically oppressed group. In a dominant group borrowing this deeply important symbol of Afro-Brazilian culture and resistance, the activism and awareness-raising of Afro-Brazilians becomes amplified. It is another act they have to resist against, especially when aspects of their culture become points of commodification and not appreciation and respect. This is reflective of the interplay of power and the overarching hegemonic forces upon oppressed groups, which magnifies the necessity and importance of resisting.

With increased consciousness of blackness in Brazil, the proliferation of resistance within music continued to expand. Like the Tropicália movement, discussed later in this paper, served in part as a musical form of political critique that borrowed from foreign influence, the Hip-Hop movement that surged, particularly in São Paolo, closely mirrored this dynamic. Many of the performers of this Brazilian Hip-Hop movement also serve as educators. Hip-Hop has largely been seen in the mainstream as a product of violence and poverty in the context of black on black hostility. In reality, Hip-Hop has started in some of the most poverty stricken, violence-filled neighborhoods. To understand why, it is important to closely examine the political and social undercurrents. In São Paolo, Hip-Hop surged in the peripheries, mainly occupied by lower class, black Brazilians. Many of the leaders of the Hip-Hop movement in these areas, recognize the influence of the state in producing these realities. (Pardue 2008) In these areas, Hip-Hop has served as a form of expression that vocalizes the identity of those who perform it and the realities in which they live. It has also been integrated with educational endeavors as a way to mobilize and resist the power structures that serve to oppress them. The Negro Power Gang exemplifies
the ways in which Hip-Hop has been formed as a communicative device meant to assert identity and critique power. (Pieterse 2010)

One of the leaders of the gang was Zinho who had become involved in Hip-Hop after being expelled from school. With the help of a professor he met, he began to engage within the larger movement through performances and shows. These encounters not only serve as opportunities to express their feelings about their circumstances, it also allows the youth the time to reflect upon their situations and how they fit within the larger structural context. They study the history of Afro-Brazilian resistance, examine the black struggle in Brazil, and think about the contemporary issues facing their community. Hip-Hop is not merely a musical genre, but also a pedagogical tool for the youth. (Pardue 2007) In a society meant to keep them down, black youth are appropriating the traditional approach to education and resisting oppression by examining their situations from a different vantage point. Music and lyricisms have provided the avenue to begin searching for the true causes of their conditions and the connections to their identity as black youth.

Education has long been marked as a form of resistance against hegemonic power forces. In Brazil, education for Afro-Brazilians is tied to consciousness raising about their identity and their blackness. It is through awareness that Afro-Brazilians have been able to formulate and mobilize their messages. This is critical in the demand for equal rights and representation in a country where the established political ideology of race is one of racial harmony. Educational endeavors have served to challenge these notions and propel black identity into the mainstream.
CHAPTER 4: THE SOUND OF RESISTANCE

In Brazil, music is everywhere. The roots of Afro-Brazilian music can be traced back to their origins on the continent of Africa. Many of these sounds and rhythms were transported by slaves along the journey across the Atlantic. Once in Brazil, the musical expression of African slaves became an outlet from the pain and suffering they experienced as a result of their enslavement. This helped to bound music as an integral part of Afro-Brazilian culture. As the development of Brazilian music began, African styles were naturally adopted and mixed with indigenous and European sounds. The rhythmic patterns and percussive sounds stood out and were firmly established into what would become the concept of Brazilian Popular Music.

The Afro-Brazilian sound of resistance in Brazil is strong. Musical expression has been a form of refusal to comply to the oppressive power majority. Black people in Brazil have long been marginalized. Music, however, has provided an outlet from the harsh realities of being black in Brazil. In many cases, it has transcended the artistic and aesthetic realm and has occupied the social and political. As a bastion of protest, it has served to bring many of the problems that Afro-Brazilians face to the forefront. It has also been catalytic in propelling Afro-Brazilian culture and identity. In a country that has repeatedly engaged in appropriation and erasure, music has served as a way to maintain the integrity of Afro-Brazilian culture.

In 1916, Ernesto Dos Santos, an Afro-Brazilian musician better known as Donga, registered the sheet music for a song called “Pelo Telefone” at the National Library in Rio de Janeiro. (Hertzman 2013) The song, the first samba ever recorded, later became a huge success. This act set off a cultural phenomenon in Brazil, with samba becoming a cornerstone of Carnaval Celebrations and setting in motion a long period of popularity aided by the rise of the radio. This success was not without controversy, however. Soon after registering the music, Donga was
faced with many critics, with one stating that he had sold out his culture and his people by commodifying the song. Other musicians came out asserting that Donga has stolen the song from them. In order to understand this, it is important to analyze the context of samba at the time.

During this time in Rio de Janeiro, many Afro-Brazilian musicians would play at the house of Tia Ciata, a mãe-de-santo of Candomblé. Many Afro-Brazilian composers and musicians in Rio at the time would congregate at her home to play samba. (Napolitano and Wasserman 2000) It was in her home that Pelo Telefone was first developed, giving rise to the accusations that Donga has stolen the music, although he was the first to register it. As Tia Ciata’s house was a cultural hub and social space for the black and poor of urban Rio de Janeiro, it came to be widely known and many people attended the samba parties. This produced a cultural crossroads where many individuals shared and combined cultural components in a familial place. Since these interactions were signs of bonding and expression for many of the attendees, especially since samba was persecuted at the time, registering the sheet music may have been received negatively by those individuals who wished to preserve and confine the musical interchanges. This is pronounced when thinking about the years of suppression in Brazil of Afro-Brazilian culture. Others would argue, on the other hand, that this allowed Afro-Brazilian culture to be propelled to visibility. Regardless, it cannot be denied that the creation of samba at Tia Ciata’s house marked a resistance to the mainstream music of the upper classes at the time characterized as música erudita, or classical music.

To further understand these dynamics as they relate to the popularity of samba, the origins of African music in Bahia have to be closely examined. Samba was not born out of the parties held in Tia Ciata’s House in Rio de Janeiro. Tia Ciata herself had migrated from Salvador to Rio after the end of slavery. She was one of many blacks who were a part of this large
migratory movement and brought with them their customs and traditions, including music. Samba was a product of Bahian music and dance styles like the Lundu, the Jongo, the Batuque, among others, which were all African styles. The word samba comes from the Angolan word Semba and it means to dance and invoke the African spirits. Lundu is a notable style, with its origins held within the Bantu people. The harmonic and tonic style of Lundu is closely reminiscent of traditional West African music. (Naveda and Leman 2009) It gave way to many of the notable genres of Brazilian music like the Choro, the Maxixe, and later the Samba, which are typically considered Brazilian styles of music without consideration for their African roots.

Records show that Lundu was initially considered to be a form of witchcraft. Although it was viewed in this way, slave owners allowed Lundu to be practiced in order to avoid slave rebellions. The nature of the Lundu is flirtatious and has been characterized as sexual to an extent. (Budasz 2007) This allowed the style of music to gain popularity among the European elite. This acceptance of Lundu into the dominant society broke the boundaries that classified the style as strictly African. With the arrival of the Modinha from Portugal, characterized as the typical love song in Brazil, there was a mixture and adaptation of traditional African styles into the European mainstream of the time. This would later blur the lines between what was considered black and what was considered Brazilian.

It is important to keep in mind that this idea of cultural miscegenation is a large extent of Brazilian history and Afro-Brazilian music is not exempt from this. Traveling forward in time during the popularity of samba, it was further thrust into the mainstream by the political agenda of Getulio Vargas, president of Brazil from 1930-1945 and then again from 1951-1954. A large part of Vargas’ politics was the establishment of a national Brazilian identity, or brasilidade. Samba became known as the national music of Brazil, in an attempt to consolidate the various
existing races in Brazil. This was not as idealistic as it sounds and did not do justice to the history and essence of Samba. This type of Samba was known as Samba-exaltacão composed of patriotic verses meant to promote a certain image of Brazil to its people and the international public. (Shaw 1998) Since the state controlled the radio, the means of divulgation at the time, sambas were censored and monitored.

Concurrently, Carmen Miranda was a key figure who helped to popularize samba internationally. Miranda was born in Portugal and was a white woman, problematizing her role in bringing samba to the forefront. This further continued the censorship, not only of music, but also of black Brazilians because it sealed the ability of black artists to participate in the international acclamation of samba during that period. This critique may have been written off by supporters of the regime and, perhaps Vargas himself, since Carmen Miranda could have been seen as a product of the miscegenation that was being politically and ideologically motivated at the time. In any case, it cannot be ignored that Samba is a black sound contributed to Brazil by black artists. The undercurrent of this political agenda produced an erasure of the roots of Samba and Afro-Brazilian music as a form of defiance against the pressure of the dominant white, upper-class mainstream culture, demarcating the importance of Afro-Brazilian resistance.

The 1950’s gave way for a new wave of music that became typical of Brazil- Bossa Nova. The song *Garota de Ipanema* became a worldwide phenomenon of popularity, challenging the Beatles dominance on the charts when it was released in 1963. (Reily 2017) Bossa Nova translates into new wave with the word bossa meaning doing something with natural charm. (Castro 2003) The musical genre was largely built off the Samba template with jazz influences. It delineates from Samba because of its emphasis on melody rather than heavy percussive sounds. Because of its melodic lyricism, Bossa Nova is often referenced as the music that seduced the
Typified as pleasurable and centered on beach culture, it was easy to forget its linkage to Samba and the traditional African styles. In some ways, Bossa Nova can be characterized as an appropriation of the music from which it was influenced. For one, Bossa Nova was a product of the middle class in Brazil. This middle class had different aspirations that can be clearly heard in the melodies of the genre. In 1956, the Brazilian president at the time, Juscelino Kubitschek, asserted that he would squeeze fifty years of progress into five, marking the shift from traditionalism to modernization. (Moreno 1982) Bossa Nova is a representation of this attitude, and it is undeniable that the genre was prolific for Brazil. In forgetting its history, however, and leaving it to purely academic analysis perpetuates an erasure of the Afro-Brazilian arrangement from which Bossa Nova was adopted. This complicates the claim of certain music as Afro-Brazilian music rather than just Brazilian because of the appropriation by the dominant middle class.

In 1968, the Tropicália movement turned the traditionalist view of Brazilian music on its head. Although the movement was short-lived, it left a large impact on Brazilian culture, especially in the musical realm. Tropicália music was a fusion of many musical genres, borrowing from traditional Brazilian genres and more international music like psychedelic rock. (Dunn 2001) Another important attribute to the Tropicália movement, including the musical style, was its opposition to the political happenings of the time. Tropicália heavily critiqued the military dictatorship, with its aesthetic deviancy a manifestation of its anti-authoritarian sentiments. One of the most prolific figures of the movement is Gilberto Gil (Figure 2.1). Born in Bahia, Gil is an Afro-Brazilian presence whose musical and political involvement have had key impacts on Brazil and Brazilian culture. As a result of his political messages challenging the military dictatorship, Gil was arrested and later exiled to London. (Sparks 1992) The view at the
time by the left in Brazil was that tropicália represented a conjecture of Western influence that tainted Brazilian cultural elements. Pointedly, his dismissal of traditionalist notions was his crime, and his disputation of the power structure justified his incarceration.


Upon his return to Brazil, Gil’s musical direction changed, and he also became more involved in advocacy work with his previous participation in the Tropicália movement motivating his ideology. In the 1970’s, Gil participated in the renewal of the Afoxé tradition at carnaval. Afoxé is an Afro-Brazilian musical genre and a secular demonstration of the ijexá rhythm from Candomblé. The most famous Afoxé group at carnaval is the Filhos de Gandhi (Figure 2.2) with which Gil marched in Salvador in 1976. (Sparks 1992) The resurgence of the Afoxé has been seen as a reafricanization of Bahian musical roots. Gil was inspired by the time he spent in Africa. Much like his work in the tropicália movement, Afoxé was a fusion of various African sounds to create a new tradition that would dominate the Salvador carnaval. It was around the same time that Gil first experienced a spiritual possession by an orixa during a Candomblé ceremony. Originally, Gil was a Christian and later delved into Eastern philosophical traditions. It was not until the 1970’s that Gil explored Afro-Brazilian religion, marking a departure from the traditional religion of Brazil based in Christianity. This transition was salient in the creation of his music and his contributions to the Afoxé movement. His participation in the
movement helped propel the genre into the realm of Brazilian Popular Music. This microcosm is reflective of the larger movement of Afoxé at the time.


Afoxé has long been seen as a cultural struggle between the dominant group and Afro-Brazilians. Afoxé was revived in the 1970’s as a political campaign to promote the rights of Afro-Brazilians. The group Filhos de Gandhi began in the 1940s as a peaceful form of expression that delineated from the hostile and discriminatory environment from which it was born out of. These sentiments lay the blueprint for the larger cultural and political movement of the 70s. In Pernambuco, Afoxé was a strong characteristic of the larger Movimento Negro Unificado, serving as a way to raise consciousness about Afro-Brazilian identity and life. (Quemello 2016) On a larger scale, it represented a form of resistance against narratives and practices that were meant to subjugate Afro-descendants and reproduce inequality in a country rife with discrimination. (Costa 2010) Coupling music with Carnaval was strategically important because of Carnaval’s symbolism in Brazil. Many lower-class, blacks were confined to the peripheries during Carnaval and were subject to violence by the upper-class participants and police. Incorporating an African style rooted in a religious history of resistance, it laid a claim of
representation and visibility that could be witnessed by the majority. Increasing visibility in a way that cannot be ignored, forced conversations to spark and action to begin.

Likewise, Funk music has sought to do just that. Funk music originated in Rio during the 1970s. It is a product of the periphery and communities of Afro-Brazilians trying to consolidate and formulate an identity through music that expresses their lived realities. Funk appeared after the tropicália movement, reflecting an amalgamation of several national elements, as well as foreign ones. The music also began during a time when the black consciousness movement was beginning in Brazil. It is important to distinguish the Funk movement in Rio from others that were going on in Brazil at the same time. The Funk music that was being created in Rio represented a less politicized rhythm and style. Funk can be seen as an escape from the harsh realities of daily life and as a way of enjoying despite the struggle of living in the peripheries. (Avelar and Dunn 2011) At the same time, the images of violence, poverty, and crime has increased consciousness of racial polarization and social disparities faced by Afro-Brazilians in the flavelas.

During its inception, Funk music was negatively viewed among the middle and upper classes because of its association to the peripheries and the poor, young individuals who were creating the sound. In its beginning, Funk was commercially marginalized and reserved to the flavelas. The genre was not considered a part of Brazilian Popular Music, which is a term used for Brazilian music that becomes widely accepted among the middle and upper classes. (Tinhorão and Souza 2010) The process of legitimization of Funk as a musical genre has been long and is an issue that continues to this day. Although funk is not considered a part of MPB², it is an immensely successful genre that has found international acclaim. For instance, the 2017

---

² Brazilian Popular Music translates to Musica Popular Brasileira in Portuguese. The abbreviation MPB comes from the Portuguese translation.
song *Bum Bum Tam Tam* is the most viewed Brazilian music video on YouTube with over one billion views. (Redação 2018) In December 2017, the song *Vai Malandra* broke the spotify record for the most streams received in a day in Brazil. (Redação 2017)

Despite the success of the genre, its legitimacy continues to be affected by the interplay of power between the dominant middle and upper classes of Brazil, who have traditionally defined what MPB is, and the marginalized groups of the flavellas that continue to create Funk music. Despite the pushback and hesitancy to consider funk as MPB, artists have continued to resist these notions and create music that is successful. With this continued artistry and success there has been an increase in the promotion of Afro-Brazilian experiences, not only in Brazil but internationally, as well. (Treece 2000) This portrays the refusal to participate in dominant culture and create something that is authentic and unique of an identity that has long been oppressed and marginalized.
CHAPTER 5: INVOKING THE SPIRITS

Religion is a strong cultural component that provides insight into the beliefs and traditions of people. Although a hallmark of anthropology, religion has long eluded scholars because its subtleties and nuances (Segal 1985). These complexities, however, are the cornerstone of religion and provide us key knowledge about the people who practice them. This is markedly important in the study of Afro-Brazilian religion. An amalgamation and salvaging of religious traditions traced back to Africa, this coalescence found in Brazil is central to the development of Afro-Brazilian religions. Candomblé is principally what comes to mind when exploring Afro-Brazilian religion, although Umbanda is also an important Afro-Brazilian religion. Both traditions originated among the slaves that were brought to Brazil. Originally, slaves were forced to cut ties with their religions, especially because of the missionary importance of the Catholic Church to convert everyone within their dominion. Not all slaves converted, resisting through the preservation and adaptation of religious traditions that would later give birth to important aspects of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Once isolated religions viewed with preconception and prejudice, they are now growing in following and popularity. The Pew Research Center found in a 2013 study that only 2 million people belonged to Afro-Brazilian religions in 1970, but by 2010, that number was up to 10 million people, or approximately 5% of the total Brazilian population. (Liu 2014) It is evident in this statistic that Afro-Brazilian religions have grown and are becoming more accepted. In order to understand this growth, it is crucial to examine the history of resistance and years of cultivation that have allowed these religions to thrive in a place that has continually attempted to suppress the practice and expression of Afro-Brazilian religions.
Candomblé is a syncretic religion originating from Yoruba, Fon, and Bantu beliefs along with incorporation of catholic elements. The term Candomblé comes from the Bantu word Kandombele. Beliefs and traditions were brought to Brazil by slaves from West Africa centuries ago. (Matory 2009) Candomblé is characterized as a spirit-possession religion, with the word Candomblé meaning “dance in honor of the gods” (Figure 3.1). Practitioners of the religion believe in one all-powerful God called Oludumaré, who is served by lesser deities called orixas. Although the proliferation of African beliefs is present, so too is the influence of catholic aesthetics. The incorporation of catholic elements into Candomblé was a form of diversion at a time where the practice of African religions was prohibited.


Originally, worship was held in the homes of enslaved people to keep the ceremonies hidden and private. Over time, terreiros, or worship temples (Figure 3.2), began to be established, but the secrecy of the ceremonies remained because of the instilled fear of persecution. Practitioners had to disguise their traditions from authorities and utilized a variety of different strategies to do so. One of these strategies was the adoption of catholic symbolism into ceremonies as a form of appropriation that would make the practice of Afro-Brazilian religion
safer. Many worship centers would include an altar full of catholic saints. Hidden in the alter, however, would be the orixa shrines that were used in worship. (Fusion 2014) Another mechanism was the practice of prayer to catholic saints in public, but secretly praying to Candomblé deities. Enslaved people also began to incorporate crosses into their attire to feign their faith in Catholicism and deflect authorities. (Harding 2003) Although there are aspects of syncretism with Catholic symbols, the beliefs of Candomblé are not syncretic and maintain the authenticity of its African predecessors.

Figure 3.2: Terreiro De Bate Folha. "Terreiro Do Bate Folha Completa 100 Anos; Conheça História.". March 02, 2017. http://www2.correio24horas.com.br/detalhe/bem-estar/noticia/terreiro-do-bate-folha-completa-100-anos-conheca-historia/?cHash=f4f5725fa59ea4ee5a76c90fa9d9e4a6.

The religion of Candomblé is both a cultural and historical reclamation of identity. The combination of various African elements and beliefs is reflective of the mixture of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas from different African regions and their attempt to preserve the beliefs they brought with them. The pan-African essence of Candomblé is what affirms its inclusiveness to all people. This inclusiveness is also the result of historic and continued marginalization and the reconsolidation of power through religious means. (Matory 2009) In cultivating the axé, or forces, an identity other than that of slave was strengthened and a different form of power was manifested. (Harding 2003) The colonial environment for slaves was
physically degrading and the intense labor enslaved people had to carry out was taxing on the body. Brazil was the largest importer of slaves and the average life span of a slave once brought to the new world was six years. (Levine 1999) This limited time reduced the body to something that could easily be replaced. Candomblé ceremonies were a spiritual resistance to this whereby enslaved people could reclaim their body and use it as a vessel for a different form of power. Therefore, terreiros were safe spaces for enslaved people from the cruel injustices they faced on a day to day basis.

This form of resistance was much more potent and tangible for enslaved people at the time. Rebellions and insurrections were not viable forms of resistance because there was no meaningful sense of power that could be gained. (Harding 2003) This was a time were slaves were considered property and no legal defense for enslaved people existed. Participating in rebellions and insurrections meant risking one’s life and receiving harsh punishments. Elements of slave life pervaded symbols in Candomblé that continue to this day. For example, the straw sleeping mats found in many terreiros are reminiscent of the palettes that slaves slept on. This is an embodied sense of memory for enslaved ancestors. A key cornerstone in Candomblé is the concept of ancestry, with Egum serving as the ancestral spirit. (Caputo 2011) This idea of ancestry is central to the preservation of Afro-Brazilian identity because it provides an origin and something to relate to. This was especially important to enslaved people who had been stripped of their familial ties. As Valdina Oliveira Pinto put it, Candomblé was a way of “reconstructing a family that was dispersed through the slave trade.” (Pinto and Harding 2017) The ancestral practices in Candomblé created an environment where enslaved people could feel more unified with each other.
After the abolition of slavery and the adoption of Marxist principles, many black activists began to lose their connection to Candomblé. (Matory 2009) This was in part attributed to the large number of non-Afro-Brazilians that were participating in the religion. Activists felt a sense of appropriation of Candomblé, beginning to lose touch with it. These sentiments, however, changed in the 1970s when Candomblé was again seen as a strong political tool for resistance. This resurgence pointedly reflects the black consciousness movement. Black activists began to practice candomblé because it was a reaffirmation to the heritage they wished to become closer to. This is a recognition of the tie Candomblé has to the African diaspora overall. The decrease of participation in Candomblé is also reactionary to the widespread persecution it faced up until the 1970s. After Candomblé was condemned by the Catholic church, followers of the religion were violently persecuted. Additionally, state-sponsored campaigns to stop the practice did not alleviate the fears of practicing the religion. (Gonçalves da Silva 2014) Until the 1970s, for instance, there was a law that required permission from the police to hold public candomblé ceremonies in Rio de Janeiro.

Although the resurgence of Candomblé as form of Afro-Brazilian cultural preservation and as a political tool has increased its following, activists still face various challenges. One of the biggest challenges for the revival of the 1970s was the idea of reafricanizing the religion. By then, many black activists believed that the increased syncretism with Catholicism, in particular, was a sign of assimilation and an absorption of hegemonic control. This gave rise to the Nagô purity seeking to establish a more authentic form of Candomblé by decatholizing religious symbols. (Parés 2012) These sentiments were not widespread among all Candomblé practitioners, but it marked an important point for Afro-Brazilian activism. It amplified the desire
to increase consciousness of black identity and create spaces that celebrated African roots while challenging power structures that were continuing to oppress black Brazilians.

The efforts of activists to raise awareness about Candomblé have had profound impacts. This is seen in the increase of practitioners mentioned earlier in this chapter. Awareness has spiked through the incorporation of Candomblé elements and symbolism into art. The Balé Folclórico da Bahia (Figure 3.3) is a world-renowned dance company that originated in Salvador. (Mann 2017) The dances have incorporated Candomblé orixas and their performances have helped increase visibility and understanding of the religion around the world. Increased rates of followers of Candomblé can also be attributed to the movement during the 2010 census to claim the religion. Historically, many people who practiced Candomblé would do so in secrecy because of the stigma and danger associated with the religion. Instead, people would claim to be catholic. (Sullivan and Barros 2014) However, many practitioners of Candomblé urged each other to claim their religion during the 2010 census with the “he who is, say that he is” movement. (Garcia-Navarro 2013) This has come at a time where evangelical following is increasing along with attacks on Candomblé by these believers, pegging it as devil worship. One leader of evangelism in Brazil, Edir Macedo, would send preachers to the peripheries of cities in order to gain followers and demonize Afro-Brazilian religions. (Sullivan and Barros 2014)

In 2014, a Brazilian federal judge ruled that Candomblé and Umbanda were not religions, outlining the hostility toward Afro-Brazilian religions. (Greene 2017) One of his reasons for the ruling was that the religions did not contain written text necessary for a religion. Candomblé, in particular, is an oral religion without a sacred text. This does not mean that the lack of scripture delegitimizes its status as a religion. This is an attempt again by hegemonic powers to create an erasure of Afro-Brazilian practices and their importance. In the context of anthropology, the inclusion of script is not necessary in constituting a religion. (Winzeler 2012) Ultimately, the ruling was met with resistance, however, and it was retracted. This is a clear example of why resistance is still critical for Afro-Brazilians. Black people in Brazil continue to face discriminatory practices and racism based in prejudice by larger institutions. Resistance will continue to be a repulsion of this attempted control and erasure.

Religion has served as an important form of resistance among Afro-Brazilians. What began as a silent form of religious expression transformed into a pinnacle of identity and culture. Afro-Brazilian religion has been a tool for Afro-Brazilians to connect to their African heritage and affirm their identity. It has also served as a political instrument against oppression and erasure. The messages and symbols of Afro-Brazilian religion are critical in asserting an identity that could have been lost to historic control and domination. Although there is much more work required to establish its importance in the overarching Brazilian culture, Afro-Brazilian religious resistance is an example of the necessity of identity and heritage.
CONCLUSION

Brazil represents an anomaly in the way it has constructed ideas about race. By framing the country as a racial paradise, narratives that erase years of oppression against marginal groups are promoted and accepted into the larger discourse of what it means to be Brazilian. In a country built from slave labor, these ideas are a myth meant to promote an agenda that is inherently discriminatory and racist. Since colonial times, Afro-Brazilians have had to resist the domination that they have endured through the oppression of the power elite. Afro-Brazilian culture, beliefs, and traditions have continually been demonized and persecuted. It is in this affliction that activists have been able to recognize the importance of their blackness and the necessity to advocate for equal rights while also denouncing the myth of the racial democracy. Afro-Brazilian resistance has taken a wide variety of directions in the cultural, social, and political dimensions of everyday life. It is important to recognize these efforts to understand the ways in which domination operates and how this domination can be resisted.

Even though there is constant interplay between power, resistance from Afro-Brazilians continues to manifest through culture in ways that are not mainstream and that speaks truth to power. Although race serves as an organizing principle that is hierarchal and oppressive, marginalized groups are able to cultivate their powers in ways that deconstruct the notions of the race concept and demystify the institutions that create and uphold it. (Fanon 1968) It is important to dispel the ideas of the myth of the racial democracy in Brazil. Adopting this view creates a colorblind rhetoric that begins to ignore the injustices faced by Afro-Brazilians. The reformulation of race in this way is dangerous because it opens the door for further oppression and subjugation. Although race is not essential or biological, its social construction as real is wielded as a tool to oppress certain groups and impose the standards of the dominant group.
Resistance becomes pronounced in institutions that actively seek to marginalize groups through racist and discriminatory policies and practices that favor certain groups over others. Increasing racial consciousness through collective action allows subordinated groups to counterbalance, transpose, and resist situations of racial asymmetry that lead to racism and discrimination.

The cultural expressions of Afro-Brazilian resistance discussed in this paper emphasize the importance of the visibility of race as a way to begin the process of addressing inequalities and oppression. It is through the acknowledgement of these processes, that the decolonization of institutions can begin. Through music, film, religion, education, among other expressions, Afro-Brazilians have continually resisted against the overarching hegemony as a way to combat the ideas of racial paradise and harmony and to create a space that visualizes their identity as black along with their experiences. The reclamation of their African roots has served as a tool for resistance in a country that has long tried to erase and disregard black individuals. Because power exists as an interchange, it is crucial to acknowledge the ways in which marginalized groups can exert their agency in order to disentangle unequal power dynamics. The acknowledgement of power rooted in race relations is the starting point in challenging the oppression from systems of domination. Addressing race also creates the space for Afro-Brazilian empowerment and the ability to celebrate their cultural heritage as something that is legitimate and uniquely theirs.


Smith, Gavin. "Hegemony: Critical Interpretations in Anthropology and beyond." Focaal 2004,


