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# Bitches Unleashed: Women in Rio's Funk Movement, Performances of Heterosexual Femininity, and Possibilities of Resistance

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Bitches Unleashed: Women in Rio's Funk Movement, Performances of Heterosexual  
Femininity, and Possibilities of Resistance

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Social Sciences

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Raquel Moreira

June 2014

Advisor: Bernadette Marie Calafell

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Title: Bitches Unleashed: Women in Rio's Funk Movement, Performances of Heterosexual Femininity, and Possibilities of Resistance  
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## **Abstract**

Rio de Janeiro's funk movement is one of Brazil's most important contemporary cultural and musical expressions. Emerged in the 1970s, Rio's funk was consolidated in the favelas during the 1980s, establishing an ambiguous and tense relationship with local government and media: at times, being legitimized as a cultural form, but also being frequently criminalized. The music is a hybrid combination of diverse Afro rhythms and a heavy bass line, and it is performed in aggressive ways, as well as with mockery and sensuality. Women in Rio's funk, the *funkeiras*, joined the movement in the late 1990s performing about sex, relationships, and female competition. Accordingly, they have been responsible for a lot of the media attention the movement enjoys especially since the mid-2000s. Thus, even though they are popular, academia has not picked up on their success, as they have been consistently understudied in comparison to general research done in the movement, usually about men. The few studies about the *funkeiras* focus on the analysis of lyrics, generating conclusions that are unsurprisingly binary: the women either merely conform to patriarchy or they are solely resisting it. In order to offer a distinct understanding of the *funkeiras*, this project proposes an analysis dedicated to their on and off stage performances, specifically as they relate to femininity. Using in performance ethnography as a method, we have completed a series of interviews with the

women, along with the observation of live shows. This approach enables a more complex understanding of the *funkeiras*' performances of femininity and heterosexuality, as they negotiate their identities in non-linear and often contradictory ways—simultaneously conforming and resisting dominant culture. We conclude that it is in the ambiguities of their acts of heterosexual femininity that we find possibilities for transgression of and resistance to traditional feminine behavior, while possibly queering heterosexuality and femininity. This study hopes to highlight the importance of performance in the understanding of complex and contradictory acts of femininity, which can ultimately contribute to the queering of feminist studies as an intersectional strategy.

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## Chapter One: Why The *Funkeiras*?

In a newly released single the *funkeira*<sup>1</sup> Tati Quebra Barraco (Tati Shack Cracker) (“The Rights Are Equal”) sings:

The rights are equal, the rights are equal!  
If men are cheating, women will cheat more!  
There’s no being a little saint  
Stuck at home, washing and ironing,  
While you fool around  
With Tati Quebra Barraco  
You don’t mess around  
If you make a fool out of me  
I’ll make a sucker out of you

On the verge of yelling, Tati performs the lyrics for “The Rights Are Equal” in a demanding tone, accompanied by an aggressive bass line and beat that mixed with beatboxing, sounds like Rio-based funk beat, the *tamborzão*<sup>2</sup>. When women started to participate in the funk movement in increasing numbers, during the early 2000s, they

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<sup>1</sup> Female funk singer, dancer, or fan.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, “big drums.”

were either singing along with men's songs that were considered sexist or they were being "sang at" (Aragão 79)—though both ideas are contested (Freire Filho and Herschmann 65). However, by the mid-2000s, women's engagement in the movement changed significantly (Lopes 158).

From endorsing songs such as *Little Slap*, in which a male MC sings "a little slap I'm gonna give you," while a female MC replies, "a little slap doesn't hurt," women in Rio de Janeiro's funk movement began to sing their own songs (Lopes 154; Medeiros 75). While the *funkeiras* became popular during the mid-2000s, it seems that, so far, academia has not given them enough critical attention. All of the great consideration given to the funk movement in general, usually through analyses that legitimate the movement as "the voice of the favelas" ("Facina "Não Me Bate Doutor"; Lopes 133; Sá 11), is rarely extended to women, who perform mostly songs about sex and relationships with men and other women.

Performing about sex has decidedly put women in a position of analytical contention within the few works that addresses the matter in Brazilian academia, usually grounded in well-known dichotomies, such as oppression/liberation. The focus on the textual analysis of the lyrics (Aragão "O Discurso e a Construção da Imagem"; Oliveira "A Identidade Feminina no Gênero Textual"), for instance, tend to indicate that, by singing about sex in the way they do, the *funkeiras* are simply imitating men's behavior and, therefore, reaffirming a patriarchal ruling that places them at the bottom of gender hierarchies. The rare approaches that treat women in funk as the ultimate Brazilian feminism (Lyra "Eu Não Sou Cachorra Não") tend to romanticize the *funkeiras'* language as simple inversions of meanings. Thus, there is a great focus on language as verbal and

written text in those analyses that, sometimes, even equate verbal and written language with “discourse.”

The scarce debates in Brazilian academia had a lot to do with why I chose to research the *funkeiras* in my doctoral work. I had not noticed Rio de Janeiro’s funk for a good seven years, prior to my masters. My time going to *bailes* was behind me for that same time period. The last funk parties I had attended in early 2001 were dominated by artists from City of God, including a few women, such as the already mentioned Tati Quebra Barraco. As early as 2002, I was ready to leave behind my past as a fan of the funk movement, an appreciation that started in the early 1990s. Years later, in 2008, I was taking a class in Women’s History and Gender Relations and, sometimes, one of us would bring up the women in the funk movement as an example of a “complicated” negotiation with femininity and sexuality. There was a tendency in most of us to understand the funk movement, with some of its nuances acknowledged (such as race as socioeconomic class), as machista. But that was it. There was no further analysis.

It was not until the last year of my M.A., in 2009, that the interest in the funk movement, in women specifically, reemerged, while I was teaching a course in gender and media at Federal Fluminense University. During a class, towards the end of the semester, I decided to show and discuss the 2005 documentary, *I’m Ugly but Trendy*. The class was relatively small, about 16 people, and a lot of the students were actively involved with women’s and LGBTIQ rights. Hence, I was hoping to have a good debate on how gender intersects with race and socioeconomic class. To my surprise, a lot of my students who identified as feminists were appalled by the documentary. Some of them

even thought that the women's position in the story was degrading. After all, they were shamelessly exposing their sexual lives in their performances and interviews.

The class discussion got me thinking, even before my decision to proceed in academia. When I decided to pursue a doctoral degree, I started to watch videos online, especially from all-female group, Gaiola das Popozudas ("Big Trunks' Cage"). I came across the song "I Dumped My Husband/I Became a Whore" that I had heard before, at least parts of it, but had never watched a full performance. After watching the video, and considering my previous experiences, I had a thought: The Brazilian academia I knew, along with Brazilian feminism, did not understand the way women in the funk movement perform femininity and heterosexuality. That was also the time when I felt instigated to reflect on my own feminism, and the feminist theory I had learned in academia.

When looking for the work of scholars who had explored the issues surrounding Rio's funk movement, I noticed that there was reasonable diversity in terms of focus, theoretical and methodological frameworks. However, there were very few research endeavors dealing specifically with the role of women and/or gender relations in the funk movement. After examining all those different factors, and placing them together, I was strongly compelled to pursue the theme of women in Rio's funk movement in my doctoral work.

The issues that I found to be unsettling after interviewing the *funkeiras*, attending performances, and researching the theme for three years were definitely related to gender and sexuality, and how they are connected with race and class. Based on previous work on the *funkeiras*, I was also convinced that my focus would be on the performative, instead of solely on the discursive. Accordingly, in order to understand the complicated

ways women in Rio's funk negotiate femininity and heterosexuality through performance, I propose the following research questions as the guides to this project.

1. What is the role and contributions of women in the funk movement?
2. How do the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity and heterosexuality through performance?
3. How do these performances operate as part of Rio's vernacular discourse?

Finally, how can all of these approaches, together, provide a holistic understanding of the performances of the *funkeiras* that is possibly queer and feminist?

To answer the above questions, I start by setting the stage in Chapter Two, where I demonstrate the connections between Rio's colonial past and the emergence of the funk movement. Specifically, I lay out the historical ways fear has been used to mediate the material and affective relationships between middle and upper class and people who live in the favelas. Next, I explore the emergence of Rio's funk movement, a genre that was at first an important U.S. style brought to Rio de Janeiro in the 1970s. Throughout the 1980s and especially the 1990s funk starts being sung in Portuguese, until it hits its mainstream by the end of the 1990s, beginning of the 2000s. I then examine the period in which women became protagonists in the movement, the 2000s, to finally expose the biographies of the *funkeiras* analyzed in this study.

Chapter Three focuses on reviewing theories of performance, abject gender, and sexuality. I concentrate on the transgressive possibilities of enactments, be them mundane or aesthetic, especially in regards to disrupting binaries; also, I examine José Muñoz's disidentifications theory, which is concerned with the ways artists who are marginalized folks, namely queers of color, identify with and deny dominant culture in their

performances. I then move on to review theories of gender, including how traditional femininity has been studied in Brazil, as well as theories of abject femininity and heterosexuality. The latter makes the point that being feminine and heterosexual does not necessarily entail normativity, especially if those categories are connected with lower classness and non-whiteness.

Chapter Four examines the critical turn in rhetoric, with a particular focus on Raymie McKerrow's 1989 essay "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis" and Michael Calvin McGee's 1990 article "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture." I then move on to focus on a specific strand of critical rhetoric: Vernacular discourse. I analyze Kent Ono's and John Sloop's "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse" and other essays, especially the contributions of Latina/o scholars to vernacular discourse. This section of chapter three emphasizes specific and historically located ways marginalized groups negotiate with mainstream culture.

As a movement that operates via vernacular discourse, Rio's funk relies on non-traditional rhetorical forms of expression that are a combination of bodily and symbolic performances. Thus, as a study that relies mostly on interviews and the observation of performances, I also explore in this chapter performance ethnography, my chosen method of observation. I investigate some of the questions performance ethnography poses to traditional ethnography, especially as it challenges the role of the researcher and the goals of observation. Like with theories of performance and the critique of vernacular discourse, this method of observation is designed to understand the complexities of non-traditional texts, such as the performances of the *funkeiras*.

Finally, in Chapter Five I evaluate the performances of the *funkeiras* through analytical categories that stemmed from the interviews and observations of performances. Specifically, I propose the following categories: “Performances of Femininity: The Everyday and The Stage,” which encompasses the subheading “Femininity and Vulgarity”; “The Relationship with Other Women: the faithful, the mistress, and the envious woman,” which is subdivided into two other subsections, “The ‘Faithful Wife’ and The ‘Mistress’: rage and scorn at the center of the stage” and “‘Recalque’: the buzzword for ‘envious women’”; and finally “The Relationship with Men: love, sex, and business,” which examines “Love/Sex Relationships: From seduction to mockery” and “Independence/dependence and self-reliance: ‘I Don’t Depend on Men for Shit!’” The analyses mix interviews with stage performances, at times drawing parallels between what artists said on interviews and how that might confirm or differ from their stage performances.

In the conclusion, I finalize the study by suggesting that the diverse ways the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity and heterosexuality through disidentificatory performances, either everyday or on stage, are possibly feminist and queer. I bring back Lockford’s points on the resistive possibilities of abject femininity (11), as well as Cathy Cohen’s understanding of queer based not solely on sexuality, but across marginalized identities (26). Also, I indicate the ways Rio’s funk movement highlights the continuous need for vernacular discourse to be expanded so that the framework’s tools do not become generic elements that can be applied to indefinitely.

## **Chapter Two: “Funk Is Poor People’s Music”: The Emergence and the Contemporary Contours of Rio de Janeiro’s Funk Movement**

The funk movement in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was born out of a specific combination of factors: from the music tradition of Rio’s peripheries, to importing the U.S. American Black Power movement during the 1970s, to a broader history of segregation. To fully understand the changes within Rio’s funk, including how the movement has been perceived by Rio’s middle and upper classes, via the state and media, it is important to not only investigate the phases of the movement, but to understand the connection between those stages with a long history of fear and spatial discrimination in Rio de Janeiro.

In order to set the stage for a comprehensive analysis of the *funkeiras*, in this chapter I explore the historical context in which the funk movement arose, starting with the socio-historical conditions that enabled its emergence. On the center of those circumstances is Brazil’s violent colonial past and its implications in the present, especially when it comes to the use of fear as a form of social control. Accordingly, to fully understand the changes within the funk movement, including how the movement has been perceived by, and responded to, Rio’s government and media, it is important to not only investigate the phases of the movement, but to understand the connection between those stages with a long history of fear and discrimination in Rio de Janeiro.



I finalize this chapter with short biographical subsections that highlight the personal experiences and life stories of the *funkeiras* analyzed in this project as they intersect with Rio de Janeiro's funk movement. Uncovering the women's contributions through their participation in the movement is essential to both emphasize the distinctiveness of their performances of femininity and heterosexuality later on this study, as well as also to legitimize their often forgotten participation in Rio's funk. By adding their personal stories to the movement's history, this chapter hopes to convey the fundamental part the *funkeiras* play in both the history and continuance of Rio's funk.

*Rio de Janeiro's History of Colonial and Contemporary Fear*

Like so many colonies in the Americas, Brazil, explored by the Portuguese, was part of the Atlantic slave trade. The fact that in Brazilian soil pretty much anything could be grown—and Brazil was a large coffee bean producer in the colonial era, until late 1800s— and such a large territory was mostly and still rural by the time of the First Republic is directly connected to the great amount of involuntary migration the Portuguese enforced through slavery in Brazil, in particular, Rio de Janeiro (Campos 100). In 1808, Rio became the capital of the Portuguese world when the royal family moved to the city in order to escape from Napoleon's troops (O'Hare and Barke 225). The city began to receive financial support to look more like an industrialized and "civilized" polis that was also followed by a demand for order (Campos 142; O'Hare and Barke 226).

By the early 1900s, with slavery abolished, the masses of former slaves, other people of color, and the poor that lived in Rio's central areas were swept away to the

margins of the city (Laignier “O Lugar do Outro” 106). In a time when the capital of a metropolis had to look like a European city, all of the non-White and non-Western traits of Rio and Brazil had to be made invisible in order to dispel the idea of colonies as “savage states” (Batista 3; Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa” 181). Since, at that time, the rationality set forth by the Enlightenment was prevalent among the elite, the poor and the colored were linked to an uncontrollable savagery that did not belong to the central areas of the city, where the “civilized” people lived and worked (Laignier “O Lugar do Outro” 106; Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa” 181). Batista argues that this fear of the “uncontrollable,” as well as the increasing demand for order, were important mediating factors in the relationship between the heirs of the colonial elite, notably Rio’s middle and upper classes, and the poor people of color of the city (6).

Fear fomented the structure of the judicial and security systems in Brazil (Batista 1). Batista asserts that “[i]n Brazil, the diffusion of the fear of chaos and disorder has traditionally had the effect of activating strategies of neutralization and disciplining of the population” (1). Especially during the 1800s, when several revolts took place throughout the country to protest slavery and the coffee oligarchies, fear was the one defining element in the relationship between the Brazilian elite and the poor especially slaves (Batista 4). This fear has two dimensions: the first and more obvious relates to the fear of losing power, or yet the fear of physical violence perpetrated by the so-called “dangerous” and “animalistic” Others (Batista 5); the other aspect is that of sexual promiscuity (Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa” 181). This latter facet of fear was legitimized by Western European medical research that warned about the dangers of

“contagion” brought by the slaves, especially the ones living inside the master’s house, notably women (Batista 5).

Soihet notes that women of color in colonial era find in music and dancing a liberatory path to perform transgressiveness (“A Sensualidade em Festa” 179). Soihet’s critical readings of Eurocentric texts give an important account of agency to those who were excluded from Brazilian history, namely Black women and *mestiças* (“A Sensualidade em Festa” 178). What is notable about those moralistic accounts on the relative freedom people of color had to perform their culture in the public space is that they indicate practices of resistance by women of color, as reported by Soihet (“A Sensualidade em Festa” 179). Therefore, even with all the cruelty and privation of slavery, those women were still able to move through public spaces, using their bodies as sites of resistance.

With the shift from colony to republic in Brazil, the racist and moralizing accounts on bodies of color given by newcomers gained scientific legitimacy, especially through the medical and juridical discourses (Soihet “A Sensualidade em festa” 181). Corrêa points out how the majority of the positive accounts of the Brazilian mulata originated within aesthetics (music, literature, arts), whose artists seemed to be enticed by the “mystery” of biracial women’s body (39). As an object of desire, the mulata as a discursive construction was described by certain natural elements, such as flowers and herbs, becoming a national symbol of Brazil’s sensuality and *mestiçagem*, a contrast (Corrêa 39). The “undesirable mulata”, on the other hand, was established through a varied of discourses that also passed by aesthetics, going all the way to the medical and juridical discourses (Corrêa 40). The vocabulary used to describe the mulata and her body

in positive accounts would go from the enveloping scents of rosemary, cinnamon, and cloves to the use of words that made reference to uncontrolled (sexual) impulses, such as lubricity and amorality (Côrrea 40). The pathologized mulata was apprehended, therefore, as pure corporeal sensations, as the one who caused the social descent of men, including men of color (Corrêa 40).

All of these distinct discourses were part of the civilizing project Brazil was engaged in that, according to Soihet, lasted until the first decades of the 1900s, changing again in the 1920s (“A Sensualidade em Festa” 181). With the national identity endeavor that came with popular resistance and the Brazilian modernist art project in the 1920s, along with the 1930 revolution, the popular parties, such as carnival, where Black women and mulatas would expose their bodies became a part of Brazilian tradition that should be cherished, instead of condemned, like state and church used to do (Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa” 183). Soihet notes that no matter how liberal or restrictive state policies were, the bodies of women of color were abundant in public spaces, subverting and challenging prohibitions and racist/sexist laws, at the same time debunking the Eurocentric idea that women of color were submissive and docile (“A Sensualidade em Festa” 179).

These two dimensions of (post)colonial fear—of moral corruption and loss of political power—are also reflected in the contemporary relationship between Rio’s middle/upper classes and the favelas, in terms of both the people and their geographic location. In the nineteenth century, pushing the poor to the hills, to the wild nature, was a way to put them where the elite thought they belonged. To move the poor and mostly colored to the hills of the city, to environmentally vulnerable areas, culminated in what

Costa calls the “naturalization of poverty” (11), and I would add, racism. According to the author, there is an intentional relationship between favelas and areas she terms as “first Nature”: in contrast with the second Nature, or socialized nature, the first Nature areas are those regions where the physiographic and biotic aspects of the land are in their natural estate (Costa 2-3). Thus, the vulnerable population, the poor, has been systematically moved to environmentally vulnerable spaces where floods and mudslides are a constant part of their lives (Costa 3). As a consequence, if one part of the city is linked to capitalism and modernity—the asphalt, the other one, represented by the favelas, is connected with fear and insecurity generated by the lack of access to basic urban infrastructure (Couto “A Cidade Dividida”).

According to Batista, at the same time that there is a sense that the poor and the colored naturally belong to the favelas, the city has been experiencing, via state and media, an everyday enactment of fear of those areas, resulting in a long-term accumulated fear that determined the presence of the state in the favelas (7). Facina (“Não Me Bate Doutor”) argues that this process became even more obvious when Brazil joined the neoliberal wave adopted in Latin America in the early 1990s. For the author, though poverty was barely ever addressed in Rio—or Brazil, for that matter—without murky political interests, there was still a patronizing sense of care towards the favelas, which shifted with the neoliberal substitution of the Welfare State by the Penal State: poverty, then, became mostly a police matter (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”).

Recently, Rio’s government has been taking measures that focus on containing the spreading of the favelas throughout the city (A. Ferreira “Favelas no Rio de Janeiro”). A notable example of this is a 2009 proposal by Rio’s governor and mayor to build walls

around certain favelas near rich areas that was both justified as a security and a contention measure (Chade “ONU critica construção”; “Moradores criticam construção”). Hence, Batista and Facina suggest that this mechanism of naturalization and criminalization of favelas through fear is fomented by the state and its neoliberal interests, as well as supported by corporate media.

Through the years, “poor” and “favela” became interchangeable, just as criminal and *favelado*<sup>3</sup>, reaffirming the supposed “natural” connection between poverty and crime (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). Hence, everything that comes from the favelas, from dialects to music, is perceived and felt with/through that historical fear by the middle and upper classes, with a mix of curiosity and amazement (Freire Filho and Herschmann 63; Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa” 178). Even with all the legal and police apparatuses that maintain the poor away, something always escapes. Rio’s geopolitics are still immensely marked by contradictions (Laignier “O Lugar do Outro” 106) and the funk movement evidences the complex relationship between favelas and asphalt.

If fear was/is what emanated from the central areas of Rio to the favelas, the latter, in turn, fosters a sense of community that became very common within those areas. According to Paiva, it is in territories such as the favelas that social—and I would add affective—energies gather in a shared experience of solidarity (33). In that sense, we can think of the favelas as ambiguous spaces that have to navigate through social abandonment, exclusion, and stigma, at the same time that they foster a sense of solidarity in the way Protevi conceptualizes: subjects that emphatically self-organize in a

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<sup>3</sup> As the one who lives in favelas. It carries a pejorative sense that lumps together poor, uneducated, and colored.

spontaneous way on the level of civic body politic (181). Despite the fear coming from the asphalt, the solidarity in the favelas is the result of the everyday traumas people in those communities experience, from police violence and crime to floods.

It was in this context of fear mixed with solidarity that the funk movement was born in the 1970s. The movement in the way it is known for the past forty years was developed mostly in Rio's *favelas*, through their own improvised record companies, radio stations, and *bailes* (Garcia "Sou Feia"; Sá 7-11). The stigmatization of funk as low quality, poor people's music became more obvious during the 1990s, as well as its criminalization by both the state and corporate media. Since that period until these days, Rio's government, with the support of conservative sectors of the city's upper classes, has been working to forbid the *bailes* in the favelas, using fear as the justifying element (Facina "Não Me Bate Doutor"). The movement, in turn, is constantly looking for ways to keep Rio's funk alive.

### *Rio's Funk: A Brief History of Misrecognition*

Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* have a long tradition of creating their own ways of coping with segregation and poverty. The most notable examples are related to music. Brazil's most popular rhythm, *samba*, was born in Rio's favelas and later coopted by the city's elite for the creation of Bossa Nova that, by the 1950s, had gained worldwide recognition (Perrone and Dunn 16). Like *funk carioca*, samba was also persecuted by the state and regarded as low-quality music that only the poor people of color, notably those of African ancestry, would enjoy (Amaral, 103). By the 1930s, *samba* became an important part in the construction of a Brazilian national identity (Amaral 59). Unlike

samba, however, funk continues to be regarded as low-quality music and still struggles to gain recognition as one of many genres within Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) (Sá 13). In this section, I briefly expose what is the Rio's funk through the movement's three phases, from the 1970s until present day, the changes throughout time, and the specificities of each historical moment.

### **The 1970s and the 1980s: DJs and Dancers**

The music scene of Rio at the end of the 1970s was filled with parties that, inspired by U.S. Black Power movement, would mostly play African American soul and funk. Those parties, promoted by the Movimento Black Rio, usually happened in the rich South Zone of Rio, in a venue called Canecão, though the crowd was mostly formed by lower classes (Lopes 33). By the mid-1980s, when Canecão became the bastion of Brazil's "real" popular music, the *bailes* were moved to the peripheries of the city, notably the North and West Zones of Rio (Lopes 34). Once the parties were relocated, soul and funk were no longer the only prevalent genres in those events, which started to welcome the Miami Bass, a mix of the African American funk with Afro rhythms of the Caribbean (Sá 3).

*Funk carioca*'s most notable member from the 1980s to present days, DJ Marlboro, contends that a possible reason the Miami Bass became quickly popular in Rio is because, similar to *samba*, the former also relies on the low tones of bass drums (Sá 9). Sá argues that Miami Bass' Latin origin is another possible motive to explain its popularity within Brazilian soil (9). What is also interesting about the popularity of the Miami Bass is that it became well known in Rio without any connections with global



marketing and record companies, with the albums arriving at the city through the hands of DJs (Sá 10).

At that time, the *bailes* were a space for dancing: along with breakdance steps, the goers would mix typical Brazilian moves from *samba* and *jongo*. Lopes notes that when the corporate media first started to report the *bailes*, in the 1980s, they were covered mostly in sections about culture and music as the parties that the South Zone did not know about, and always with an air of curiosity, especially about the “odd” dance moves (31-32). This approach will radically change in the 1990s, as the next subsection shows.

With time and creativity, especially of DJs, the music played in the *bailes* slowly started to incorporate more Brazilian elements to it. Hence, *funk carioca* is, from its beginning, a hybrid mix of beats that ultimately challenges the idea of musical authenticity (Lopes 25, 114; Sá 9). By the 1990s, DJs and dancers were joined by MCs, when *funk carioca* finally started to produce songs in Portuguese, getting closer to become effectively *carioca*<sup>4</sup>.

### **The 1990s: Funk as the City’s Social Evils**

The 1990s marks the time of growing popularization of Rio’s funk among the poor, but also among middle class youth (Lopes 43). With the dissemination of the funk, came the subjects that definitely contributed to the construction of *funk carioca* as a Brazilian genre: the MCs (Master of Ceremonies). The songs would still rely on beats and samples from foreign rhythms, like the popular Miami Bass, except that now they

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<sup>4</sup> Demonym for those born and living in the city of Rio de Janeiro. It comes from the Native Brazilian Tupi dialect and it means “White men’s house” (Lopes 17).

were not only performed in Portuguese, but the overarching themes of the tunes revolved around the everyday life in the *favelas*, not only as social critiques to the state's abandonment, but they also carried a sense of elation towards those areas.

Many of the songs produced in the 1990s came from the *Festivais de Galera*<sup>5</sup>, contests promoted by DJs and “sound teams” that took place during the *bailes*, and were made up of several distinct stages in which the “rap” one became the most popular (Andressa Fetixe; Deize Tigrora; Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”; MC Dandara). The popularity of the “funk-raps” allowed the movement to cross the spatial and symbolic barriers from the margins of the city to the rich areas of Rio, especially via the young people from the middle class. With the popularity, came a distinct type of media attention: the criminalization of *funkeiros* (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”; Laignier “O Lugar do Outro” 101; Lopes 37). As it happened with *samba*, once again musical prejudice would go hand in hand with classism and racism (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”).

A couple of events were responsible for putting funk under the media spotlight as a criminal issue. During the 1990s, with the rise of violence in Rio, especially drug and territory-related conflicts, the *favelas* were under the scrutiny of media coverage. The idea that violence, along with poor people of color, should and would remain within the limits of the *favelas* changed in the mid-1990s with the so-called *arrastões*<sup>6</sup> (Lopes 34). Those events were characterized by the media as mass robberies happening at the famous

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<sup>5</sup> It reads something like “gangs’ festivals.” “Gang” in the sense of crew, group, etc. The equivalent in Portuguese, the slang “galera”, has no link to criminality whatsoever.

<sup>6</sup> A literal translation would be “trawlers.” The term was in fact created by the media (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”).

Ipanema beach, by *funkeiros* who were bringing panic to Rio's South Zone. Facina ("Não Me Bate Doutor") clarifies that the so-called *arrastões* were, in fact, clashes between *galeras* from "beyond the tunnel"<sup>7</sup> (dark-skinned favela youth), mainly from Vigário Geral, the favela where a police-dealer related mass slaughter had happened in that same period. The fact that they were intoning battle cries using the name of *favelas* and the word *bonde*<sup>8</sup> together made the media presume that there was an inevitable connection between the assumed criminals and funk music. The author adds that the enactment of fights between *galeras* was a very common practice in Rio's culture, even among the youth from South Zone (mostly wealthy, light-skinned people). What made the *arrastões* different were the "where" and the "who": poor people of color scaring tourists and the "good people" of the South Zone of Rio.

With the media coverage on the *arrastões*, the underlying fear of poor people of color from colonial times was once again triggered (Lopes 35). After those events, the media would not miss an opportunity to link all sorts of crimes that had any remote chance to be related to funk and, especially, the *bailes*. The interchangeability between *funkeiro* and *favelado* had the intention to criminalize both the funk movement and the *favelas* (its people and geographic location). The *funkeiros* were, therefore, portrayed as

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<sup>7</sup> Rio's wealthy side, the South Zone, connects with the different parts of the cities through tunnels.

<sup>8</sup> *Bonde* literally translates as "tram." It is a slang that has a similar meaning as *galera*, and it is used in thoroughly in "funk-raps" to designate, among other things, territory.

<sup>8</sup> There are different versions for the creation of the *tamborzão*. I have heard from a couple of MCs and a DJ himself that the beat was developed in City of God, a favela in the West Zone of Rio. Here is an example of a *tamborzão* base:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZNvDz4p2sQ>.

if they were “the cause of several social ills” (Lopes 41), and their voices were systematically erased from media coverage that outlawed the movement. In fact, the media came up with what Lopes termed a “cartography of fear” (35), highlighting the areas within the city that the *bailes*, on one hand, and the *arrastões*, on the other, were happening, exposing fear as “related with the racialization of space...” (35). Here, I bring back Protevi when he reminds us that since an unknown threat unleashes feelings of anxiety, it is better to name the threat and fear it, since “fear is a relief” in comparison to anxiety (175). Rio’s funk had become, then, the synonym for fear in Rio de Janeiro.

Throughout the 1990s, a lot of the *bailes* were marked by rivalries between different *galeras* in what became known as corridor *bailes* (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). Facina (“Não Me Bate Doutor”) argues that the corridor *bailes* worked as the event that turned the rivalry among *favelas* official, with each *galera* standing on an opposite side of a gymnasium or a salon, fighting in the encounter of the opposite group. Organized by sound teams, the violence in the *bailes* was, above all, profitable for the organizers, since the corridor *bailes* attracted so many people. Nonetheless, corridor *bailes* motivated several *funkeiros* to compose songs asking for peace in the parties, which is a sign that the corridor *bailes* were only one aspect of the funk movement, and not *the* funk movement (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”).

After pressure from corporate media, the state closed several *bailes* by the end of the 1990s, generating great economic despair for *funkeiros* (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). Facina argues that the response by the state, supported by corporate media, was part of a more general historical process in which the Welfare State was being replaced by the Neoliberal State. Lopes goes further and reminds us that the “solidarity between

corporate media and the penal system is absolutely functional to neoliberalism” (57) as in the way crimes explored by the media generates a “punitive hysteria” that, while it encourages the consuming of media, it promotes the Penal State as a “logic” substitute for the Welfare State.

The relationship between the funk movement, the media and the government is one marked by contradictions until these days. The fact is that funk had reached the coveted elite of the city, the ones that are not only the preferred consumers of corporate media, but that also have political influence in Rio. By the mid- to late 1990s, though still occupying the crime sections of leading newspapers and TV shows, funk, when consumed by the wealthy youth of the South Zone, was portrayed as a “new musical trend” (Lopes 48). In all of the reports glamourizing funk as the hottest beat in town, its origins were erased as much as possible. This suggests that the “problem” with funk is more about who produces and where are they come from than the genre itself—as if it were possible to completely separate those stances (Lopes 45).

Though the movement was heavily stigmatized throughout the 1990s, by the end of the decade, funk was part of an alternative phonographic market. With improvised recording studios and radio stations, funk had entered the music industry through its back door. If during the 1980s, funk, via *bailes*, was seeing solely as a form of entertainment (Vianna 102), by the end of the 1990s, the movement had gathered a significant number of successful MCs, DJs and sound teams, dancers, radio and TV hosts, etc. (Lopes 102). Above all, *funk carioca* was a form of public visibility for the people living in the *favelas*. When the 2000s approached, the contradiction of funk in media coverage remained. The

new decade brought mainstream success, new connections with crime and fear, anti-movement policies, and the new role of women in *funk carioca*.

### **The 2000s: Sex, Crime, and Mainstream Popularity**

The 2000s were the decade of mainstream achievement for the funk movement, though success still held hands with criminalization. It was during that time that funk was recognized as “legitimately *carioca*” (Lopes 49). Other key changes of the period are related to the production of funk—all of its musical elements started to be produced in Brazil—to a variation in the form and content of the songs, and, finally, to the new role of women as MCs and dancers.

Pushed back into the favelas by the State in the end of the 1990s, the movement and the people making a living off of it had to find new ways to keep Rio’s funk going (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). One thing that funk DJs created in the early 2000s was a new beat called *tamborzão*, which replaced the foreign samples by ones created in Rio’s *favelas* (Sá 13). Along with *tamborzão*, the *bondes* were the ones that would put funk once again in the graces of the middle class, instead of duets of MCs, like in the 1990s. Drawing from the popular *carioca* slang, *bondes* were groups formed by young men who would not only sing, but also dance in sexualized ways, with hip and buttocks moves (Lopes 158). It is not that the duets had disappeared, but even the ones that remained popular, were very different from the 1990s. Take, for instance, the pair MC Serginho and *Lacraia*<sup>9</sup> that instead of being formed by two male MCs, it was composed by an MC and a dancer—a man, and a former-drag queen that identified as an “almost woman”

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<sup>9</sup> Means, literally, “centipede.”

(Lopes 191)—who achieved mainstream success with the song “Eguinha Pocotó” (Lopes 191). Women also formed some of the *bondes* and, slowly, they also became more active in the movement as MCs and dancers.

With new beats and performers, came new themes and a new tone: instead of the romantic views on the favela and love songs, the funk of the new century was more concerned in describing the “neurotic reality of the favelas” (Facina, “Não Me Bate Doutor”), be it through using gangs as inspiration to make tunes about violence, or by singing about sex in a straightforward manner, with no romance (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”; Freire Filho and Herschmann 64; Lopes 184). What was also distinct from 1990s was the tone of the songs: from victims, the *funkeiros* changed their approach to the songs, using both a more aggressive and demanding way of singing, but also with good doses of mockery (Freire Filho and Herschmann 65).

The new aforementioned themes generated two parallel consequences: the first one is that the songs inspired in gang conflicts once again put funk under the media and the state’s scope (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”; Lopes 50); the second one is that the songs about sex—or their clean versions—became very popular outside of the favelas and, ultimately, brought women into the movement as performers. Next, I briefly expose how the funk movement once again had to deal crime-related controversy with the rise of the *proibidões*<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *Proibidão* is the type of funk that only plays inside favelas that are ruled by drug lords. It can be both about gang-related themes, but it can also be about explicit sex (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”).

In the very beginning of the 2000s, a supposed connection between *bailes*, child prostitution, and drug trafficking ended with the death of one of Rede Globo's<sup>11</sup> reporter, Tim Lopes, who was investigating those cases in a favela called Complexo do Alemão (Lopes 51, 57). It all started with a report from Rio's Board of Health stating that teenagers were getting pregnant and spreading HIV during *bailes*. Several media outlets published the concerns of the city hall and, by reading the stories, it is possible to realize that the Board of Health had, in fact, *one* confirmed case of pregnancy that had happened in a *baile* (Lopes 51). Moreover, government and media used that one case as an instance of funk being immoral and in need for control and intervention (Facina "Não Me Bate Doutor"; Lopes 50-53). After all, if there were any remote possibility that the parties were a space where poor girls and women of color could become pregnant, areas in which population control was threatened, the *bailes* had definitely become an undesired space.

From then on, instead of a more general connection with crimes, funk becomes a synonym of bad sexual practices and drug trafficking, and *funkeiro* becomes drug dealer (Facina "Não Me Bate Doutor"; Lopes 51). This idea was also justified by the relative popularity of songs about drug dealers and their gangs within the favelas controlled by drug lords (Lopes 50). Throughout the decade, MCs were constantly accused of endorsing gangs in their lyrics, until Rio's authorities finally decided to charge and

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<sup>11</sup> The largest media corporation in Brazil ("Globo se Torna a 2ª Maior").



prosecute some of them with disseminating speeches that promote crime<sup>12</sup> (Moreira, “Funkeiros São Presos no Rio”).

It is significant to note that this was also part of a larger move made by the state to fight drug dealers’ power that, starting in 2007, had the police occupying different *favelas*, especially in more central areas (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”; Freire “Favela na Zona Sul é modelo”). Once again, the *bailes* were forbidden inside the favelas, even in the ones occupied by the police—and even if the songs were being played inside people’s houses, the police would still shut it down (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). Since then, the population living in the occupied favelas have been organizing to bring funk back into their communities (Lopes 204).

The other theme of the 2000s, sex, brought certain popularity to the funk movement that was never achieved in the previous decades. A paradox had, then, been formed: even though the usual portrait the Brazilian media painted of the movement remained very negative and stigmatizing, *funk carioca* started to occupy distinct social spaces, including in the media. Hence, by gaining media visibility, funk had become, one more time, middle and upper classes’ favorite rhythm, being played and performed beyond the favelas (Freire Filho and Herschmann 64; Lopes 48).

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<sup>12</sup> MC Frank’s *157 Boladão* (157 is a reference to the Brazil’s Penal Code article that deals with robbery. *Boladão* means something like “pissed off”), for instance, was repeatedly featured in the media to prove the MC was promoting crime. The lyrics goes something like this: “Don’t take your hands off the steering wheel, don’t look at me/ This is Scooby’s *bonde* [the drug lord’s gang] from Morro do Macaco [the name of a *favela*]/Go, get out of the car/Look down and don’t move/ Give me your imported [car] that the insurance will give you a new one.” MC Frank is still doing jail time in Rio (Moreira “Funkeiros São Presos no Rio”).

In the beginning of the decade, the *bailes* in favelas reopened and Rio's wealthy youth were massively present in them, despite the constant "warning" of the media about violence in those areas (Laignier "O Lugar do Outro" 103). Funk was the "dangerous" element that brought privileged people to that marginalized spaces. The popular songs about non-romantic sex fueled a fear of moral corruption that was at the forefront of the critiques made to funk, by both the state and sections of the corporate media. With middle/upper class young people becoming habitués of the parties, the fear of a transgressive mix of different socioeconomic classes and races permeated a lot of news media stories about funk (Freire Filho and Herschmann 63). Furthermore, the "good" young people of the asphalt would witness fights between gangs, as well as become familiar with the life of the "natives" and their promiscuity, being lured by the sensual music and dancing (Freire Filho and Herschmann 63). The colonial fear of the colored, the poor, and the uncontrollable was once again revived. It is one thing was to consume funk as a cultural product (Lopes 49); however, to enact it, especially inside the favelas, was/is seen as a dangerous practice that involves more than physical risk; it is also morally threatening (Freire Filho and Herschmann 63).

It was during those moments of alarming the population to the moral danger funk represented that women became an active part of the movement. In fact, a lot of the moralistic rants targeted the *funkeiras* and their performances ("Daniela Mercury Bate Boca com Pitty"). After being in the margins of the movement for so long, women had finally become protagonists of a section of funk denominated *funk putaria*, or dirty funk (Lopes 158). What started as a male-only dialogue about sexual courtship and conquest, especially from the *bondes*, became a sort of a sex war when women began to respond to

the song's performed by men—with similar aggressiveness and mockery (Freire Filho and Herschmann 65; Lopes 58). I investigate the role of women within the movement and their responses to men's attempt of sexual domination in the next, and final, subsection.

### **The *Funkeiras* on Top**

The 2000s represented an important shift in the funk movement: women would finally gain visibility as performers and enjoy both the benefits and downsides of being in the spotlight (Lopes 158). Similar to men in the movement, the *funkeiras* are mostly young women in their mid-20s or early 30s, and are generally Afro-Brazilians or *mestiças* (Lopes 155). They sing about sex, relationships, and competition with men and other women. MCs such as Tati Quebra Barraco (Tati “Shack Craker”), Deize Tigrona (Deize “The Tigress”), and Valesca Popozuda (Valesca “Big Trunk”) became famous during the mid-2000s with hits such as “Hot Bitch,” “The Fucking Pussy is Mine,” and “My Pussy is the Power” (Garcia “Sou Feia Mas Tô Na Moda”; Lopes 168, 178, 180).

The participation of women in the funk world as protagonists has been contributing to problematize an essentially masculine movement in which men were the ones speaking up about a variety of matters, including about and to women. Since the few works that aim at examining the roles of the *funkeiras* within the funk movement rely on the tracing of individual trajectories of female artists, I make a similar move here. Specifically, I present women's stories in the funk movement as they were told during personal interviews, and to a lesser extent, in interviews published in the media. I focus on artists whose interviews and performances are analyzed in depth in Chapter Five, namely Tati Quebra Barraco, Deize Tigrona, Valesca Popozuda, MC Pocahontas, MC

Dandara, MC Katia Fiel, MC Paloma a Transtornada do Funk, Andressa Fetixe, MC Marcelly, MC Pink, and all-female groups Maysa e As Abusadas and Abysolutas.

I came in contact with the *funkeiras* in diverse ways. The majority of the interviews I was able to schedule through my local interlocutors from City of God. They would either take me to events where I would come in connect with other people in the funk movement, or they would give me phone numbers of managers or the artists themselves. The occasions in which I found a contact online, called the manager, and was able to actually schedule a meeting were rare, though I tried that many times. In fact, it only happened once, with MC Pocahontas. Hence, one has to somehow be involved with people in the funk in order to have access to the *funkeiras*.

Few of the women interviewed are known in mainstream stages. Recognizing that the *funkeiras* that are not in the spotlight also contribute to the movement is important because funk is ultimately a vernacular discourse; it emerges and flourishes in the favelas. Hence, this study is also committed to including MCs that perform in *bailes* and are well known in their communities, but are out of mainstream spotlight.

By focusing on personal experiences, I do not mean to understand the *funkeiras*' life stories as disconnected from one another or the movement in general; instead, it is important to keep in sight that everything I describe in this next subsection is inserted in the context I exposed in the previous pages. Though this sort of contextual account may leave many other stories untold, exposing the experiences of the *funkeiras* sheds light into the contributions of women to the funk movement—contributions that are often made invisible in “general” accounts of the Rio’s funk as though women’s inputs concern only specific gendered studies, which are scarce. Hence, the decision to add the *funkeiras*'

biographies in this chapter is also strategic: ultimately, the expectation is to validate their stories as essential to the emergence, popularization, and continuation of Rio de Janeiro's funk movement.

*MC Dandara: "The First Woman in Funk"*

MC Dandara always wanted to be a singer. She was born in Brazil's Northeast region and was abandoned by her mother at the age of 5. In 1987, she moved to Rio to pursue her dream to become a singer. MC Dandara is an Afro-Brazilian woman in her 40s with a sweet but mischievous smile. We met at her new manager's office, a simple room with a desk and two chairs, and a couch. The MC was sitting across from me, in the couch, with her 1-year-old on her lap. She was wearing a purple tunic and tights with her short dark hair pulled back. Dandara had a smile on her face while telling me how she used to spend all day calling radio stations and even hospitals asking them if they needed a singer, making her boss very angry—the *funkeira* worked as a maid.

In 1995, the MC Dandara heard there was a funk festival going on in her community. Those were very common in the 1990s, where MCs would compete against each other by performing their songs in the form of battles. "They were all men, I was the only woman in it" (MC Dandara). I asked her if that was a problem at the time, and she replied "No, not at all. I face more prejudice now from men for singing dirty funk" (MC Dandara). The MC ended up winning the contest with the political song "Rap da Benedita," becoming "the first woman" to be recognized as a female funk performer, along with MC Cacao (MC Dandara).

MC Dandara confesses in our interview that in 1990s funk was an opportunity to sing—she would have participated in the contest regardless of the genre. Now, however, she says, “funk runs in my veins. I am an MC. I am a *funkeira*” (MC Dandara). Though she used to perform politically charged songs in the 1990s, in the 2000s MC Dandara started to sing dirty funk because “that is what is popular.” At first, the *funkeira* felt that her “good morals” were not appreciated, since performing non-sexual and politically conscious songs were not enough to be successful anymore. Dandara narrated the unusual situation in which she wrote her first dirty funk, in a conversation with herself on a bus ride: “‘I kept to the narrow path and nobody appreciated.’ Wait, I think I have a line for a song. ‘Now I became a whore.’ Hey, there’s another line!” (MC Dandara). While laughing loudly and boisterously, she then told me she uses the term “putisse,” a made up word, to refer to dirty funk instead of the actual “putaria” (whoring) in order to assuage the obscene meaning of the word (MC Dandara).

The *funkeira* sold the lyrics of “Now That I’m Single,” which turned out to be a hit performed by Gaiola das Popozudas (MC Dandara). MC Dandara told me she writes 90% of her songs: “what I like about my dirty songs is that they make sense. I think about the melody, the moaning!” (MC Dandara). She still mostly performs dirty funk songs, but she claimed she would have no issues with adapting to other styles, to what is popular in the funk movement (MC Dandara).

*Deize Tigrone and Tati Quebra Barraco: Leading Funkeiras From City of God*

It took me a couple of phone calls to schedule an interview with Deize Tigrone in City of God, where she has lived for her whole life. One of my local contacts in the

favela was finally able to access a phone number the week I was supposed to return to the United States after two months in Rio. I met with Deize the day before I left. The *funkeira* lives in a busy street of City of God in a big, but simple, two-story house, which I found out later, are two separate homes as she rents the second floor. After waiting for a couple of minutes at the front gate, Deize opened the door for me while a little girl, her daughter, stood next to her. We crossed the living room, which had a large TV on, and went to the kitchen, where she was starting to cook dinner. It was 3:00 p.m.

Deize is a 34 years old Afro-Brazilian woman. When we met, she was wearing a short sleeve top and shorts, with her hair pulled back in a short ponytail. With a serious expression on her face, Deize asked me where I was from and whom I knew in City of God. I told her about my interlocutors, both of who are her acquaintances. At first, Deize seemed very closed off and stern. Throughout our talk, I noticed that she was different from many of the other *funkeiras* I interviewed: she used less humor and mockery, perhaps because she shared with me many of the challenges of growing up as a poor Black woman (Deize Tigrone).

With an alcoholic mother and a stepfather with drug-related problems, Deize was the oldest of nine siblings, as she was also responsible for taking care of them. She grew up poor in City of God and started to perform when she was a teenager in the late 1990s. Deize told me about the pains and joys of her life story without me having to ask any questions. She assertively guided our whole conversation while cooking dinner, standing by the kitchen counter. I was sitting at a small dining table across from her. She told me she used to work as a maid when she joined an all-female *bonde* that used to perform in City of God's non-violent *baile*, the Coroado. Deize was one of the first female funk

artists to achieve success in the 2000s, boosted by her participation in a documentary about women in funk and the song “Bucky Done Gun” by British pop artist M.I.A. and US American DJ Diplo, which used an adapted sampler from Deize’s song, “Injeção” (Injection) (Deize Tigrone). The *funkeira* narrated her rise to success in Europe in the mid-2000s, the excitement and hardships of performing in foreign countries, and the record deal with a German company that was never signed because she became severely depressed. “I was so famous in Europe, I didn’t even know” (Deize Tigrone). After seeking medical treatment and the support of her family, especially her husband, Deize told me she finished high school and went back to working as a maid, then as a janitor for a pharmaceutical company (Deize Tigrone).

As a performer of double-meaning funk, Deize believes trends in the movement come and go. Unlike other women I interviewed, Deize does not adapt to what is new. In fact, when we talked about the popularity of ostentation funk, in which songs focus on material possessions, she told me, “I’m not going to write lyrics about ostentation because that is not our reality” (Deize Tigrone). Playful songs about sex, the dirty funk, on the other hand, will always be popular, according to Deize. She is sticking with the same style as when she started to perform in 1997 because it “works until nowadays, which is the double-meaning [lyrics]” (Deize Tigrone). When I interviewed the *funkeira* she was trying to go back to performing. Her latest single, “Prostituto” (Male Prostitute), was released in 2008 and it still generates invitations to performances, mostly in gay parties in different areas of Brazil (Deize Tigrone).

Tati Quebra Barraco also performs frequently in gay and middle class parties. It was in a private college party that I watched a performance by Tati. I was able to talk to



her producer and go backstage to meet her. She was the first *funkeira* I met during fieldwork. I was so excited and impressed with how easy it was to convince her producer to let me in, and my enthusiasm was visible. Backstage, Tati was accompanied by three other people; two women and a man. They were all very nice and pleasant when I came in. Tati, a light-skinned Afro-Brazilian in her mid-30s, gave me a hug. We talked briefly about how she inspired my work and how I was looking forward to meet with her another time to talk about her life story. She agreed and gave me her manager's contact. After that night, I never met or spoke with Tati again. Trying to schedule interviews through the women's managers and failing at it turned out to be very common during my fieldwork.

Deize Tigrone and Tati Quebra Barraco's stories are very much intertwined, possibly because they are from the same area, City of God, as well as because they both perform dirty funk. Living in a community that gave rise to many successful MCs and DJs and to the third phase of the movement, Deize and Tati, both with the help of DJ Duda, also from City of God, started to record their own tracks and perform them in local *bailes*. Tati Quebra Barraco became well known especially after performing one of Deize's song, "Fama de Putona" (Whore's Reputation) (Deize Tigrone; Silva and Mattos "Deize Quebra o Barraco com Tati").

The lyrics with sexual content crossed the limits of City of God in the early 2000s and started to hit the *bailes* in different parts of the city. Soon, songs from Deize Tigrone and Tati Quebra Barraco were dominating parties and funk radio shows (Medeiros 77-78). With their success, came the attention from media and academia—and this is important to note: Deize and Tati were the most significant artists in sparking public

interest in the performances of the *funkeiras*, their meanings, and different interpretations in the mid-2000s (Medeiros 76-77). A noteworthy example is the already mentioned 2005 documentary *I'm Ugly But Trendy*, which focuses primarily on dirty funk and the performances of women, especially Tati Quebra Barraco and Deize Tigrona. The film, whose title references Tati's song of the same name, generated a type of attention women in funk had never received before (Lopes 188). The discussion promoted by the picture was extended to other media outlets and academia. The issue in most of those debates was the same: are the *funkeiras* promoting derogatory ideas to women or are they the new voice of Brazilian feminism?

In a 2006 media report entitled "Women of Respect," about female singers from marginalized communities, including rappers, the tension between those two trends was clear. The magazine's reporters interviewed both Tati Quebra Barraco and Deize Tigrona, along with a female rapper from São Paulo, and two other experts, an anthropologist and the director of *I'm Ugly But Trendy*: one condemns the *funkeiras*' performances as sexism, while the other one legitimizes it, since "they shock because they subvert social roles" (Garcia qtd. in Fernandes and Granato). The debate continues nowadays (Lopes 194-200; Almendra "Funk Carioca Ganha Nova Cara"), and it was boosted by the mainstream popularity of another artist, Valesca Popozuda and her group Gaiola das Popozudas (Big Trunk's Cage).

#### *Valesca Popozuda: Funkeira and Celebrity*

Valesca Popozuda is the most notable *funkeira* in Brazilian mainstream media. Perhaps because of her popularity and busy schedule, I was never able to personally

interview her, despite several exchanges with her manager. In 2007, Valesca obtained success with her group, Gaiola das Popozudas (Big Trunks' Cage), with a song called "I Became a Whore," originally written by another artist, MC Dandara (Lopes 186; MC Dandara). The group of *funkeiras*, formed by Valesca herself and two female dancers, is well known for performing songs with blatant sexual connotation (Lopes 178). As the voice (and image) of the *Gaiola*, it was through Valesca that people identified the group's popularity and its important role in the funk movement (Garcia "I'm Ugly But Trendy"). In August 2013, however, Valesca started her solo career releasing a non-sexual single called "Beijinho no Ombro" (Kiss on the Shoulder), followed by a pompous music video that provided the *funkeira* with mainstream fame (Souza "Cantora de Beijinho no Ombro").

Valesca was born in a low-income area in the West of Rio de Janeiro and, in one of her many interviews to celebrity media venues, she affirms to be proud of where she came from, as "life was never easy" for her (L. Ferreira "Valesca Popozuda sobe a Rocinha"). In fact, before being Valesca *Popozuda*, she worked as a gas station attendant when, in the early 2000s, she joined the funk movement ("De Frente Com Gabi"). One thing that differentiates Valesca from both Tati and Deize (and the majority of the *funkeiras*) is that the former became a celebrity in mainstream media, achieving a type of success that was never granted to any other woman in the funk movement. She is indeed more famous than the majority of male MCs. Popular artists such as Anitta and Naldo Benny started in funk but did not identify with the movement after achieving popularity. Valesca, on the other hand, continues to identify as a *funkeira* (Ortega "Não Sou Pop, Nasci Funkeira").

The status of celebrity is another distinguishable aspect in Valesca's career in comparison to the rest of the *funkeiras*. From the time with the Gaiola das Popozudas, Valesca has been performing songs with explicit sexual content that, for most part, cannot be played on mainstream media (Lopes 158). Still, the *funkeira* is able to navigate between mainstream acceptance and popularity in the favelas for at least the past seven years. That along with the fact that Valesca is significantly lighter-skinned than Tati and Deize, for instance, places her in a unique in-between position. From meeting with Brazil's former president ("Valesca Popozuda Conhece Lula"), to being part of Rio's worldwide famous carnival parade ("Destaque do Salgueiro"), Valesca's visibility keeps funk in the media, at the same time it continues to instigate the debate surrounding the *real* social and cultural meaning of the *funkeiras*' performances (G. Oliveira "Valesca Popozuda: 'Ser Vadia É Ser Livre'").

Valesca is the only *funkeira* I analyze in this study who identifies as a feminist (G. Oliveira "Valesca Popozuda: 'Ser Vadia É Ser Livre'"). Indeed, the more Valesca Popozuda is embraced by feminists in Brazilian social media, the more she talks about feminism in her interviews. She is now recognized as a *funkeira* who is a "symbol of sexual freedom" for São Paulo's Slut Walk (G. Oliveira "Valesca Popozuda: 'Ser Vadia É Ser Livre'"), as well as an anti-homophobia activist (Ortega "Não Sou Pop, Nasci Funkeira") who has been also sparking academic interest (Marinho "Aluna Passa em 2º Lugar"). As a contemporary form of cultural expression, funk changes rapidly. Valesca's current mainstream success attests to the difficulty in keeping track of those changes while they are happening. Nonetheless, her popularity is also a sign that women in Rio's funk have a distinct artistic presence in comparison to men. As Deize Tigrone told me in

our interview, “Women, when we become popular, we come with so much strength” (Deize Tigrana).

*MC Katia Fiel: Bashing the Mistresses*

Around the same time Valesca and her Cage became popular, another style of performances was rising: the battles between wives and mistresses (Lopes 175). The most notable performers in this trend were MC Katia Fiel (Katia The Faithful) and MC Nem, representing wives and mistresses, respectively. In July 2013 I interview MC Katia in her house, a small but cozy second floor inside the Mandela favela. In the two hours I spent with the *funkeira*, her DJ/manager/husband, and another male MC, she made me coffee and let me play with her little dog. Katia was very pleasant, but also very assertive. The tone she uses on stage, explored in Chapter Five, is very similar to the tone used in our conversation: firm, with hint of scorn.

“The first *baile* I went to was in Maria da Graça, a club that has been shut down now because of fights” (MC Katia). In the late 1980s, when Katia was a teenager, her parents would not let her go to funk parties: “parents never think *baile* is a place for their kids.” She told me that, at the time, even with the lyrics all in English, everyone knew the songs were obscene: “I think there was a song that had ‘pussy’ in it,” said the *funkeira*, laughing loudly (MC Katia). Katia is 37 years old, about 5.3 feet tall, light brown skin, and straightened mid-length dark brown hair, with straight across bangs. She looks tough, but there is joviality in her way of speaking and gesticulating.

Katia was born in the Manguinhos favela and has been living in Mandela for 20 years. She used to help a male *bonde* to write their songs until she started in funk as an

MC in 2003, “defending faithful women,” with the song “O Marido É Meu” (The Husband Is Mine), a response to MC Nem’s “Eu Tô Comendo Seu Marido (I’m Fucking Your Husband) (MC Katia). It all started when MC Katia’s married friends asked her to make a song defending wives from MC Nem’s track (MC Katia). After that first exchange, MC Nem made another song responding to MC Katia’s titled “O Marido É Nosso” (The Husband Is Ours). Back then, all of Katia’s songs revolved around the wife/mistress relationship, especially in the way they occur in the favelas (MC Katia). After a couple of back and forth responses to each other’s songs, MC Nem’s manager proposed a stage partnership between the two MCs. Their first battle was recorded and added to Furacão 2000’s DVD “Twister” (MC Katia). Curiously, MC Katia told me that at the time, she was actually single and MC Nem was married. She laughed when telling me that “people thought Nem was actually going out with my husband!” (MC Katia). The two women performed together for four years (MC Katia). Now, MC Katia continues to sing songs defending faithful women, but she also performs a number of dirty funk songs, as well as tracks about female competition.

*Andressa Fetixe, Abysolutas, and Maysa e As Abusadas: The Female Bondes*

It was a rainy day when I was finally able to meet Andressa, lead singer from all-female group, or *bonde*, Fetixe (Fetish). I went to her house, which was actually very close to my mother’s house, where I stayed during fieldwork, in the West side of Rio. The place looked brand new: two-story, modern looking middle class home. Andressa is a beautiful woman. She was wearing gym clothes when we met, which accentuated her fit form; she is relatively tall for a Brazilian woman, about 5.5 feet. Andressa has delicate

facial features, a big smile, long brown curly hair, and dark brown skin. Throughout our interview, she demonstrated a special interest in the funk movement, was articulate, and brought up issues that I had not anticipated.

Andressa leads the all-female *bonde* Fetixe (Fetish), which was on a break at the time of our interview. She is also a professional dancer who does freelance work for other MCs, such as her close friend Mulher Melancia (Watermelon Woman) (Andressa Fetixe). The *funkeira* is born and raised in Rio, in different parts of the South and North sides of the city. Although she has lived in many different places, she identifies with a favela called Cajueiro, in the North side of Rio, where she became familiar with funk. With 16 years old, living in West side of Rio, she started to go to *bailes* without her mother's permission and with 18 years old she was invited to join the all-female *bonde* Juliana e As Fogosas (Juliana and the Fiery Girls) as a dancer (Andressa Fetixe). She stayed with them for about 2-3 years until she met her husband and moved to São Paulo for four years (Andressa Fetixe), where she thought she was ending her career as a dancer. When she came back to Rio, she met a producer from City of God who invited her to form a *bonde* with three other dancers, the group Fetixe (Andressa Fetixe).

Andressa reiterated throughout our conversation how much she loves dancing, and how much of a tough business it is in funk because, “dancers are undervalued, they are made to stay in the background” (Andressa Fetixe). Her perspective is important because there is a tendency among the *funkeiras* I interviewed to condemn dancers and female *bondes* in general as obscene and the reason why funk has a bad image in mainstream culture. Thus, unlike many of the women I interviewed, Andressa is very

much comfortable dancing in stage and claimed not to judge what women do up there (Andressa Fetixe).

What is different about female *bondes* is that besides singing about sex, the women look hyper-feminine, as they also enact overtly sexual moves on stage, wearing small clothes. As Abysolutas (The Absolute) is an example of a female *bonde* that relies heavily on sexuality. I was able to accompany them in a community radio interview, as well as in a *baile* performance. Unlike other groups in which the MC is perceived as the leader of the group, As Abysolutas have one of the dancers as their head. Josi has been in the group since the beginning, and she is the one who explained their name, “Absolute,” which she considers a “very strong word” (Josi Abysoluta). Michele, the MC of the group, added to Josi’s explanation that the word also means “independent woman”: “not that that woman is better than or above everybody else, but that she owns her destiny” (Michele Abysoluta). Their songs use the popular double meaning with sexual connotation, as well as more blatantly sexual songs, some of them mocking men, and others about female competition.

Maysa, from the *bonde* Maysa e As Abusadas (Maysa and the Sassy Girls), started as a dancer, like Andressa. She has been active in funk since the early 2000s as part of the *bonde* Leandro e As Abusadas (Leandro and the Sassy Girls), led by a man (Rodrigues “Maysa Abusada”). After seven years with the group, the *funkeira* decided to create her own *bonde* in 2012, Maysa e As Abusadas. The group’s first hit was “Não Dependo de Homem” (I Don’t Depend on Men), but in the last year, they have been releasing songs that revolve around themes of sex and sexuality (Rodrigues “Maysa Abusada”).



I met Maysa in two different occasions: after a performance in a middle class club in a new rich neighborhood of Rio, when we briefly talked about scheduling an interview, and backstage before her performance in a lower class venue in the West side of Rio. Maysa is a light brown skin curvy woman who has a strong, commanding voice on stage, that becomes surprisingly soft off stage. On both occasions, she was very polite and attentive. On the second time we met, especially, Maysa was very gracious. She even remembered me from the first time we met. We spoke about trivial things; she was telling me how busy her weekend schedules were. Maysa called her producer, who is also her fiancé, and asked him to give me his phone number since I was having trouble contacting her managers from Furacão 2000. After a couple of calls and conflicting schedules, I returned from fieldwork without having the chance to interview Maysa.

*MC Pocahontas and MC Marcelly: The New Generation*

“The Internet made me,” said MC Pocahontas during our June 2013 interview. The *funkeira*, who was 18 years old at the time of the interview, is part of a new generation of young artists who identify with ostentation funk, a section of the movement that focuses lyrics on flaunting about material possessions (MC Katia; MC Pink; MC Pocahontas). Ostentation funk is highly popular on social media. Visiting the most popular MCs’ social media accounts it is possible to notice that they are not only active, they also have large numbers of followers. As of April 2014, MC Pocahontas had more than 290K followers on Instagram, which, according to her, maintains her popularity (MC Pocahontas). What is also distinct about ostentation funk in comparison to double meaning and other sexually explicit songs is that it has been rapidly expanding funk to

different parts of Brazil, especially São Paulo (MC Pocahontas; Felícia Cristina). Because MC Pocahontas is recognized as an ostentation funk artist, she performs all over the country. I was able to schedule an interview in weekend between trips, on Wednesday afternoon.

When I arrived at her manager's house (at the time, he was also her fiancé), I waited on the porch for about five minutes until someone took me to the second floor of the house through stairs on the outside. I was asked to sit in a dining table. The place looked like a modern apartment with brand new furniture and appliances, contrasting with the simple, rural looking community it was located on. I noticed there was a woman standing in front of a cabinet mirror. It was MC Pocahontas. It took her a few minutes to acknowledge my presence, which was very intimidating, since that was my first interview. By the end of our almost 5 hours together, however, we were already making plans to go to the beach together.

MC Pocahontas looked fashionable, wearing a black top with thin chains attached to it, looking like a necklace. Her pants were tight, and had scrambled letters and hearts in black and white. The *funkeira*'s hair was loose and straight, waist-length; she has brown skin and green eyes. She told me her stage name came from her childhood nickname, in reference to the Disney movie *Pocahontas*.

Becoming an MC was accident. MC Pocahontas was a rock fan when one day, by chance, she became friends with funk fan whose boyfriend was a DJ. In less than a year, the *funkeira* went from recording her first song, "Chamando Seu Nome" (Calling Your Name) to getting paid to perform for the first time, in 2011. By the time she was 16 years old, she was already financially independent (MC Pocahontas). Though MC Pocahontas

identifies with ostentation funk, she also performs female competition songs, as well as other with sexual connotation, such as “Casa dos Machos” (House of Machos).

When I asked if MC Pocahontas looked up to and was inspired by any other female artists in the funk world, she was emphatic: no. “I’m different. I have my own style” (MC Pocahontas). She did, however, admitted to liking the “neurotic”<sup>13</sup> style of MC Marcelly, another *funkeira* of the same generation that became known for mainstream audiences with the 2013 song “Bigode Grosso” (Thick Mustache) (Alcântara “Anitta Não Somou Nada”). MC Marcelly is a little bit older than MC Pocahontas, she is 21 years old, but they do have similar styles, which include hats, sneakers, and casual but sexy clothes.

Similar to MC Pocahontas, MC Marcelly is also active in social media, constantly interacting with fans. The latter, however, does not identify with ostentation funk (Alcântara “Anitta Não Somou Nada”); she performs a variety of styles within funk, from romantic funk to sexually explicit songs. MC Marcelly has been active in the movement since 2008, when she was discovered by her manager at the age of 16. She was already fairly popular among funk fans before “Bigode Grosso”, going mainstream in 2013 (Alcântara “Anitta Não Somou Nada”).

*MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk: “The First Trans Woman in Funk”*

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<sup>13</sup> “Neurotic” is a funk slang that means “cool” or “sick.”

MC Paloma TransTornada<sup>14</sup> do Funk was already a *funkeira* when she decided to enter a contest to become a dancer in Valesca's group, Gaiola das Popozudas. She made it to the top ten contestants when she was invited to record her own work (MC Paloma). Being an MC allowed MC Paloma to proudly state a couple of times during our interview that she is "the first trans woman in funk" (MC Paloma).

I had never heard of MC Paloma until a friend mentioned her in a casual conversation. It was a pleasant surprise when I met Paloma by chance, during a "funk meeting," a monthly get-together where artists, DJs, and dancers network. In a chaotic mall food court, Paloma, who lives outside of Rio, agreed to talk to me. The *funkeira* is a light-skinned tall woman with long blond hair. She is warm and is always smiling, while wave and greet other artists. MC Paloma told me she is very respected in the funk movement, which my brief experience in this event confirms. When she entered the food court, I was sitting in a table with three other male artists. They knew I was looking for female performers and when they saw Paloma walking in, they all told me who she was—"there's MC Paloma"—and that I should interview her. There were no jokes, and no controversy about her presence.

When I asked MC Paloma what kind of songs she performs, there was no straight answer; she likes romantic funk, ostentation, as well as double meaning. However, she was categorical in affirming that as a trans woman she already faces prejudice, "because it would be very easy for people to think, 'well, she's a trans, she's a prostitute.' I was

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<sup>14</sup> "Transtornada" in Portuguese means "angry" or "upset", but Paloma explained to me how she was playing with the root "trans", to signify trans woman, and "tornado", which means "becoming." Thus, her stage name means "becoming trans" (MC Paloma).

never a prostitute. I studied. I went to college... I'm a person like anybody else and that's what I like to convey through my songs.” Thus, MC Paloma thinks it would hurt her as a trans woman and a *funkeira* to go on stage and perform explicit songs. Even though she contends that though she feels respected and accepted in the funk movement, she recognizes that *funkeiras* in general face sexism. That is why she believes “funk needs to keep women on top” (MC Paloma).

### *MC Pink: The Romantic Pinup*

“I am called ‘Pink’ since I was a kid.” MC Pink is as unique as her stage name. She proudly stated a few times throughout our conversation that she likes looking different for a *funkeira*: the *funkeira* is curvy, has choppy neck-length auburn hair, stylish clear glasses, and a pink headband. Her mom had her when she was a teenager, so the MC has always lived with her grandmother in the West side of Rio de Janeiro (MC Pink). She has always been artistic, never losing an opportunity to be involved with music and theater at school. “I fell into funk” (MC Pink), said the *funkeira* who became an MC after meeting Dennis DJ, one of the top DJs in the funk world, recording a song called “I Love Mr. DJ” (MC Pink).

MC Pink feels divided when it comes to keeping her unique look and being a *funkeira*. Accordingly, she narrated facing prejudice for looking different among *funkeiros* and for being a funk artist among other non-*funkeiros*: “You can be different and be a *funkeira*” (MC Pink). She was the only woman I interviewed who insisted on the fact that she is an artist; “an artist and an MC” (MC Pink). MC Pink likes to mix different styles with funk beats, such as Korean Pop and electronic music, which is

unusual in funk. Her uniqueness, then, is not related solely to her pinup-like looks, but also to her distinct ways of making funk.

As the *funkeiras*' biographies show, there is significant diversity, but also similarity, within their experiences. Where they locate themselves in the funk movement also varies, and it is an important factor in determining their stage performances. There is plenty of tension among the *funkeiras* that relates to how femininity is and should be performed in Rio's funk. This multiplicity is important because it complicates previous studies with more definite, oppositional approaches to women in funk, as it also pushes me to understand how negotiate femininity and heterosexuality, on and off stage, in complicated, non-linear ways. Next in Chapter three, I examine performance theories as well as theories of abject femininity and heterosexuality that guide and illuminate my analysis of the *funkeiras*' performances in Chapter Five.

### **Chapter Three: Theories of Performance and Performances of Femininity**

To explore the significant change in *funk carioca*'s dynamics, especially in regards to the role of women within the movement, I propose a theoretical approach that provides a distinct look at the *funkeiras*, one that differs from the analyses done so far. To accomplish that, I will first briefly describe some of the foundational ideas about performance and performativity; then, I will focus specifically on theories of performance via a politics of enactment that understands resistance—or yet, transgression—in a non-representational fashion. I also rely on theories of disidentification that map the ways in which marginalized folks, especially queers of color, perform in both resistive and conforming manners as ways of reworking their selves in dominant contexts. Though there are significant differences between those two perspectives, I show throughout the essay that they also share important commonalities.

Given that the analysis highlights the prominent role of the performing body, I then explore literature that deals with performances of femininity, more specifically, abject femininities and the subversive potential they present. The focus then is on how those performances are both conforming to traditional social norms and simultaneously transgressing them, at the same time they are the target of continuous social vigilance and control. I also propose a brief detour to explore studies of femininities in Brazil, as well as some of the previous work done on the *funkeiras*.

*Performance, Performativity, and the Problem of Identification*

Performances used to be generally understood as aesthetic events (Foust 144). To perform, then, was historically tied to the arts, with few scholars, such as Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin and his analysis of the carnival, expanding the idea of aesthetics into the everyday performances of ordinary people. Most importantly, while analyzing the “nonofficial” and “nonconforming” images in the work of French Renaissance artist François Rabelais, Bakhtin recognized the subversive potential in performances that were previously seen as simply grotesque or inappropriate, or yet, apolitical (2). About Carnival, specifically, he notes the humorous reenactments of official and ecclesiastical rituals that brought up a distinct “aspect of the world... and of human relations” (6). Bringing together the realms of the everyday life and that of the aesthetics presents great possibilities to performances of resistance and transgression, but not without troubling ideas such as identities and identification.

The understanding of identity as performative and performance as a way to trouble stiff identity categories and normative identification has permeated a lot of the contemporary debate on identities, agency, and resistance. Much of that discussion was pushed by Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, which she conceptualizes as a process of reiterative and citational practices of norms that are produced via discourse and performed/materialized via the body (“Performative Acts” 520). The concept of performativity critiques both essentialism and social constructionism: the former does not account for historical contexts, culture, language, and subjectivity; the latter is just not



enough, on Butler's view, to explicate normative rules and values. Both approaches give a sense of fixity and linearity of what is temporal and fluid.

The idea that we perform gender, thus materializing sex, had important consequences in the understanding of identities and identification. As Fenske argues, "performance calls identity into question, therefore, while simultaneously reaffirming the force of the body's materiality" (4). A way to "call out" the fallacy of tidy, pre-existing identity categories is to question the process by which identity is formed, or identification. While critiquing psychoanalysis' interpretation of identification, Butler contends, "every identification, precisely because it has as phantasm as its ideal, is bound to fail" (*Gender Trouble* 75).

There is a political possibility in the idea of disidentification (Butler "Corpos que Pesam"). Muñoz understands disidentification as a process in which subjects "tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form" (12). Similarly, the idea of a politics of enactment holds that a hybrid combination of immediacy and mediation indicates that performances can trick spectators into interrupting their tendency to identify with the performer, to see themselves in the performance to (Dolan 143). While analyzing one of Chicana feminist Cherríe Moraga's poems, Dolan suggests, instead, that the audience described in the poem is asked, "just to *see*" (Dolan, 143 emphasis in original). They are not required to identify.

Highlighting the performative aspect of identities does not only question the fantasy of, say, the stability and coherence of gender's identification, but it also enables new ways of thinking about resistance and transgression through performance (Butler "Corpos que Pesam", Shugart "Parody as Subversive Performance"). According to

Jagger, Butler has maintained throughout her work that the practices that constitutes us as gendered subjects are also those which will give us the possibility of agency and resistance because they are simultaneously constricting and enabling (89). Madison explains that, like Butler, Dwight Conquergood saw subversive potential in the idea of identities as performative: “Just as performativity is an internalized repetition of hegemonic stylized acts inherited from the status quo, it can also be an internalized repetition of subversive stylized acts inherited by contested identities” (165). From this perspective, identity construction can be theorized as a performative process that allows a constant remaking of itself—or as Butler suggests, it’s durable, but not immutable (as cited in Jagger 90). Consequently, if oppression (and repression) comes in the form of normative performance, why can’t resistance and transgression come in similar embodied forms?

The study of performance (and of identity as performance) is one of importance to marginalized communities (Holling and Calafell 59), as it is an alternative to studies that acknowledge identity and representation exclusively in symbolic and pre-existing, fixed terms. Madison and Hamera add that there has been a shift in the studies of performances, which are now understood as “ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” (xii). With that trend came the idea that the purpose of performance is not only to entertain; performance is “a way of *creation* and *being*” (Madison and Hamera, xii, emphasis in original).

The theories of performance I review in the next section are concerned with the possible ways bodily performances interrogate symbolic practices for transgressive and

resistive purposes. The work of several performance scholars guide the next pages, as they review and propose compelling ways of understanding the resistive and transgressive tactics of performance. But I would also like to highlight Madison and Hamera's warning that

performance is a contested concept because when we understand performance beyond theatrics and recognize it as fundamental and inherent to life and culture we are confronted with the ambiguities of different spaces and places that are foreign, contentious, and often under siege" (Madison and Hamera, xii).

In a lot of ways, the theories I expose bellow are an expression of that contestation and of the ambiguities surrounding the idea of performance, be it on a stage or in everyday life. First, I focus on theories that propose a discussion on the disruption of binaries such as mind/body, mediate/immediate, and dominance/oppression, via a politics of enactment/performance. Then, I examine Muñoz's analysis of ambiguous performances of queers of color, notably Latina/os, and their use of disidentificatory practices as a marginal strategic mode.

### *Disrupting Dichotomies Through a (Transgressive) Politics of Enactment*

The transgressive potential of aesthetics is not new to academia. Though the dichotomous Cartesian model has been prevalent in the sciences in the past centuries, philosophers in different points of time saw in the arts and in everyday life a transgressive potential for aesthetics via bodily performances. Foust exposes how both Nietzsche and Bakhtin theorized in those lines with the respective concepts of the Dionysian art, which placed emphasis on the "joyous and intoxicating", and carnival, which challenged "official culture" through, among other things, the grotesque (144). The

body is also a central site of knowledge and resistance for marginalized folks that often have their experiences dismissed in the mind/body divide present in academic theorizing, which more than often places these realms in separate, hierarchical position, with the mind prevailing over the body (Conquergood 180).

Madison and Hamera note an important shift in performance studies. There was an exclusive concern for performance's triad—theory, method, and event--, in which “performance theory provides analytical frameworks; performance method provides concrete application; and performance event provides an aesthetic or noteworthy happening” (Madison and Hamera xii). Conquergood conceptualized new sets of triads that deal with more complex, dynamic and shifting ways performance can work for different bodies. Madison and Hamera note that those triads encompass elements such as “*imaginary, inquiry, and intervention... artistry, analysis, and activism... creativity, critique, and citizenship*” (xii emphasis in original). With that, Conquergood pushed scholars in the field into thinking about the many transformative possibilities of performance beyond the theatrical.

Enactments are invariably performative, which means they are aesthetic events, such as those related to theatre, music, or dance, as well as everyday, “mundane” activities (Olbrys 242). Contemporary scholars suggest that the transgressive possibilities that are present in aesthetic and everyday performances, via a politics of enactment, come from their potential to dissolve official identities (Fenske 4). Hence, the power to destabilize stiff categories of identity also entails an exceeding of representation, at least from the standpoint of enactments. Holling and Calafell understand performance “as an embodied practice,” which “advances a narrative that is both personal and cultural” (59).

They note that performances have the possibility to be an emancipatory and empowering practice that enables the re-centering of marginalized discourses and identities “through a politics of embodiment and visual imagery” (61). For Phelan, there is transgressive possibility in the way performance resists contemporary reproductive economy: performances occur over a time that cannot be repeated; it can be reperformed, but this repetition in itself marks difference (146).

There is lot of discussion surrounding the transgressive potential of performance stemming from the diverse ways scholars understand the relationship between the immediate, namely via corporeality (as well as the volatile, the sensorial) and the mediate (the discursive, the representational, the symbolic) (Fenske 6; Foust 146). In classical aesthetics, those realms were distinct and operated separately, in opposition to each other. From the perspective of hegemony, the mediate needs to be at the forefront in the combat against oppression as the immediate is too vulnerable to dominant powers and on its own could never offer “enough” resistance to fight subjugation, also because it intends to escape representation and identity politics (Foust 146).

Contemporary performance theory is concerned with how the arrangements of mediation and the immediate (“a hybrid ‘im/mediacy’”) allow for “enactment [to] play tricks with traditional politics” (Foust 146). This hybrid arrangement does not break away from the mediate; instead, it calls for a more nuanced understanding of the binary in that the body is comprehended as an alternative to the mind—the corporeal, the material function as excess, a material remainder that escapes “the common, the substantial, linguistic representation necessary to constitute individuals as subjects” (Foust 150). Gomez-Peña, for instance, understands performance as “a presence, not a representation”

(qtd. in Holling and Calafell 59). Moreover, Gómez-Peña sees “a sense of urgency and immediacy” in the creative and production processes of artistic performances that he does not recognize in other artistic fields: “We experience, therefore we perform” (9).

The challenging of binaries such as mind/body and mediate/immediate affects how enactments are not necessarily concerned with metaphorical representations and tidy identity categories (Fenske 6). One way this happens is by representing the immediate, instead of doing so symbolically (Schneider 6). As Schneider argues, “to render literal is to collapse symbolic space” (6). When a performance breaks with art by depicting “real” acts, by enacting, say, social degradation instead of representing it, it becomes a transgressive act with “the power to defy clean representations which order ‘proper’ art or politics” (Foust 153) The *funkeiras* break with “proper” symbolic representations to “mediate the immediate” in their stage performances when they both sing about those “very real acts,” at the same time their bodies enact some of those “real acts” when they move with the beats of funk, “rendering the mediated immediate” (153).

Performance scholars also call attention to the power of the moving body in escaping controllable representations and destabilizing them. Hill reminds us about the importance of the “‘energizing voltage of performance’ in facilitating the transgression of idealized myths” (280), especially those related to femininity. Nevertheless, despite moving away from representation, enactments *do* have political consequences, as they challenge the stiffness of stereotypical identities. For instance, in analyzing Ricky Martin’s ambiguous performances of race and sexuality, Calafell contends that, in his performances, Martin embodies both “whiteness and Otherness simultaneously” (90). Marginalized bodies tend to benefit from performances of ambiguity precisely because

they destabilize normative identity categories that are generally oppressive to them. In that sense, Martin's moving and dancing body not only transgress dominant categorizations, but it also "becomes a vehicle for survival" (91).

Another potentially transgressive aspect of performance is the blurring of the line between performer and spectator. Like in Bakhtin's carnival, dissolving those pre-established roles implicated in defying hierarchies that maintain social order (6). In Foust's words, "Being with others in shared, performative moments gives rise to the potential that we are immediately vulnerable to each other" (148). Similarly, Muñoz sees in disidentification an unclear definition in the roles of spectator and performer. Similar to Foust's politics of enactment, "Disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production" (Muñoz 161).

The interruptions and disruptions enabled by bodily performances pave the way to a conceptualization of aesthetics as a potential site of transgression, as previously exposed. Foust continuously reminds us that the transgressive quality of a given performance and its liveness is in its "hybrid incarnations of the body-and-language" and that "transgression re-materializes social movement as a rhetorical agency and invention by exceeding representation through a heightened (but not exclusive) corporeal presence" (145). The transgressive potential of embodied performances is less about "appearing" or representing the underrepresented and more about calling "attention to the very real transgressions bodies may perform. Without necessarily building a collective agent, performance *materializes* (or, at least, asserts materiality against) that which authority seeks to abstract, disappear, manage" (152, emphasis in original).

Performances alone, in their pure corporeality, cannot undo subjugation. Muñoz notes that, in fact, performances' liveness can become an affliction for marginalized folks. The "burden of liveness," as termed by Muñoz, comes from the fact that "the minoritarian subject is always encouraged to perform," which he relates to the fact that minorities are pushed into performing for the amusement of majoritarian groups (187). This role of the Other as that of the entertainer of dominant groups "affords the minoritarian subject an extremely circumscribed temporality" (189), that of the "the live" only, which ultimately denies the marginalized performer a history or a sense of futurity: "If the subject can only exist in *the moment*, she or he does not have the privilege or the pleasure of being a historical subject" (189). As artists who gravitate in both peripheral and mainstream stages, it is valid to keep Muñoz's point in sight to understand in what situations the *funkeiras* are tainted to entertain dominant groups, like Rio de Janeiro's (light-skinned) middle class. One of the *funkeiras* who gained success through more sexual performances revealed that she tried to enter the funk world with lyrics about socioeconomic oppression, as it was common until the late 1990s, but she said that was not the kind of music that would get her mainstream attention (MC Dandara).

To further the transgressive quality of performance theory, it is necessary to question one last divide: dominance/resistance. Rose makes a compelling point in suggesting that though studies of resistance demonstrate the creative and diverse ways the dominant system is constantly being challenged by resistive practices, they also undertake the system as a preestablished entity (391). Moreover, understanding the dominant system as central, stable, and coherent and resistance as volatile and temporary deems resistive practices as mere reactions to systems, undermining, for instance, the



transgressive power of performances. In this line, Rose argues for a performative theory of systems that recognizes the persistence of creative social practice, such as bodily performances, and that apprehends dominance as processural, instead of structural (394).

Taking into consideration the nuanced ways performance theory understands binaries such as mind/body, mediated/immediate, and dominant/oppressive, I move on to elaborate upon more thoroughly Muñoz's concept of disidentifications in order to refine the analysis on the performances of the *funkeiras*. A theory of disidentification "charts the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates" (6), further complicating the very notion of identification, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

#### *Disidentification and Performances as Resistive Practice*

The process of disidentification is not one of selecting what to keep or take out of identification. As Muñoz puts it, "To disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (12). Disidentificatory practices, thus, do not entail the deliberate withdrawal from the politically ambiguous elements "within an identificatory locus" (12). Instead, they involve "the reworking of those energies that do not elide the 'harmful' or contradictory components of any identity" (12). Disidentification involves the embracing of ambiguity and "the necessary interjection that has occurred in such situations" (12). It is a third option to the binary identification/counteridentification that allows minoritarian groups to rearrange their selves within the social.

Muñoz's work defies traditional notions of identification that tend to prioritize metaphorical processes that translate embodied events into tidy systems of symbols and identities. The cultural workers whose performances Muñoz investigates experience identity in rather ambiguous, fractured, and split ways. Hence, traditional ways of dealing with identity, identification, and representation would likely undermine the transgressive potential the performances exposed by Muñoz have. In this mode, disidentification theory moves away from a dichotomous, either/or approach to social practices to recognize a simultaneous process of resisting and confirming that is inevitably marked by dubiousness.

Though disidentification is a performative mark I find in the *funkeiras* in general, one of Brazil's most notable funk performers, Valesca "Big Trunk," is a good example of the ambiguity theorized by Muñoz. Valesca's performative body is hyper-feminine, as she is constantly in provocative glittery outfits that barely cover her large breasts, hips, and buttocks. At the same time, perhaps because her exaggerated voluptuous form is the result of plastic surgery (Tecidio "Ego"), Valesca's performance of femininity is so over the top that resembles that of a drag queen. The *funkeira's* practice is disidentificatory (here I mean the performance itself and my interpretation of it, as suggested by Muñoz) insofar as, though women *should* be performing femininity, there is a way and a limit to it that should not *exceed* the supposed natural correspondence between normative sex and gender. By exaggerating those typical feminine traits, Valesca highlights the performative aspect of femininity almost in a parody (Shugart 96).

Muñoz further complicates the binary dominance/resistance, usually understood in opposition with each other, in which the subject neither chooses to conform to the

dominant structure nor simply and rigorously resists it (28). Rather, disidentification is the process by which subjects simultaneously conform and resist dominant ideologies: “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” (31). I would argue, then, that Muñoz agrees with Rose insofar as this back and forth of resistive and conforming practices in disidentification theories signals the instability of both dimensions. Like Rose, Muñoz does not take systems of dominance as a stable realm in which acts of resistance are mere responses to that static dimension. Though the struggles faced by minoritarian groups are “very real,” they are also constantly mutating.

Like in Dolan’s idea of enactments as having the potential to play tricks with traditional politics (143), Muñoz conceptualizes disidentification as a strategy employed by minoritarian groups. Through disidentificatory practices, they “negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (5). Muñoz sees in disidentificatory performances possibilities for cultural transformation from within, “always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (11-12). Though here it may seem that Muñoz comes from a hegemonic understanding of dominance as (solely) structural, which goes against Rose’s previously mentioned ideas, the very dynamics Muñoz describes as part of disidentification theory suggest that dominance is not stable, nor is resistance for that matter.

On the next section, I explore ideas surrounding the concept of femininity, especially traditional and abject femininities, from diverse perspectives. It is important to note, however, that many of the performance theorists exposed in the previous

subsections also explore feminine, queer of color performances. Hence, I expect both sections to come together in a way that enriches the analysis of the *funkeiras*' performances.

### *The Studies of Femininity and Abject Femininity*

Femininity, in the singular, historically pertain to white, middle-class Western women, as previously mentioned. According to Ringrose and Walkerdine, it is the bourgeoisie performance of femininity that defines boundaries and norms for all women, what is appropriate and what is “excessive” (229). It is also this enactment of femininity that has been under scrutiny in feminist studies, especially since Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 *The Second Sex*.

While a section of feminist scholars were more concerned in identifying the cultural norms that dictate femininity, others, such as Judith Butler, focused on the acts of femininity, or how compulsory femininity does not preexist subjects, but rather bring them into being while reinforcing itself through performance (*Gender Trouble*). More specifically, Butler contends that gender cannot be apprehended as a stable identity or a “locus of agency from which various acts proceed” (“Performative Acts” 519). Gender is an identity only insofar as it is constituted through a “*stylized repetition of acts*” (emphasis in original) that are performed by the body—and those gendered bodily movements, gestures, and various other enactments are what constitute the impression of gender's endurance.

Of course, feminist scholars also established that there is no femininity without cultural norms, meaning that there is no feminine essence. Lockford, backed by Butler's

ideas, contends that those cultural norms that control women's bodies are, in fact, performative and, they are so pervasive that the stereotypical, traditional (white) femininity is, indeed, easily identifiable (3). By traditional femininity, she means, "those performative displays, enactments, or activities that are often called into suspicion by some mainstream feminist scholars and activists because they potentially promote the social expectation that women are feminine" (Lockford 3). Moreover, the connection between cultural norms and performance of femininity are made visible through gendered enactments.

The cultural imposition of how women should properly perform femininity is external, but the enforcement of traditional femininity comes both from others around us, as well as from within—women have an internalized moral code of femininity. This internalization reflects on women's desires as the way they feel/act should be constituted in relation to that model of traditional femininity (Lockford 6). Thus, as feminist scholars have been consistently arguing, normative femininity, the "doll-like" type of performance, constrains women's agency. Embodiment and performance of cultural stereotype of femininity normalizes the status quo at the same time it maintains women in a position of diminished autonomy. On the other hand, while traditional femininity is mandatory—it is everywhere in our culture--, the competent performance of that feminine archetype is incredibly difficult, "if not impossible," as noted by Lockford (7). The failure to properly perform femininity in the part of women generates apparent, as well as more indirect and covert punishments, as noted by Butler ("Performative Acts" 522).

Lockford articulates something of utmost importance for this work: while feminism has been a contested term/concept that has generated a multiplicity of meanings (Ergas 588) “acts of femininity continue to be charged with decidedly unfeminist, if not anti-feminist, attributions” (Lockford 7). Accordingly, Lockford locates her work within this constricted “field of . . . negatively imbued performative acts” (7). I am proposing a similar move in this project, except that I am more concerned with how performances of excessive and inappropriate femininity can be considered abject, and, consequently, potentially subversive. But first I would like to briefly expose the studies of femininity by women and gender studies in Brazil, including those that examine women in Rio’s funk movement.

### **The Studies of Femininity in Brazil**

In order to connect theories of performances and feminist theory, it is important to expose the context of feminist studies in Brazil. Specifically, I would like to examine some of the work exploring femininity in Brazil in this brief subsection. I have no intentions in covering the whole history of women and feminist studies in the country, as Brazilian scholars such as Soihet, Pedro, Heilborn, and Corrêa have exhaustively done it. The focus here is on apprehending some of studies on femininity that are pertinent to this research. The study of different types of femininity in the Brazilian context is very important for this research for a couple of reasons: even though this analysis is centered on performances of abject femininity, which is still an obscure subject in Brazilian academia, it is important to expose the work that has been done on Brazilian femininities in order to interpret what would be considered “abject” according to the context’s norms.

Accordingly, it is also a way to validate literature from non-Brazilian scholars as I am showing the similarities in femininities in different contexts. Finally, this work is in a critical dialogue with that literature, including the few previous research done on the *funkeiras*.

A lot of the work of Brazilian feminists was concerned with tracing historical evidence of women's oppressive and resistive experiences, as well as the roots of Brazilian patriarchy as it connects with traditional femininity. Bassanezi, for instance, suggests that when considering Brazilian traditional femininity, there are many similarities with White-European middle-class performances of femininity: heterosexual marriage and motherhood as life goals, sexually restraint and attentive to men's needs, private space as "naturally" feminine, etc. (Bassanezi 15-16). This is a result of the social and cultural impact of colonialism in the country that, though colonized by Portugal, had great cultural influence from France in the 1800s until mid-twentieth century (O'Hare, G. and Barke 225-226) and the U.S. from the 1950s on (Bassanezi "Virando As Páginas"). Portilho, for instance, investigated how Brazilian women's magazines prescribe moral behaviors that are very similar to those found in U.S. American magazines, with some minor cultural differences: similar (white-European) beauty standards, and relationships advises, similar fashion guides (184). Like in many Western countries, bourgeois femininity has prevailed as the norm in Brazil, being the point of reference to study, understand, and critique femininity.

Many of the Brazilian feminist studies, developed especially from the 1970s on, started because and were built in a critical dialogue with patriarchy and traditional femininity, like in so many other Western countries such as the United States and France

(Soihet “Feminismos e Cultura Política”). Those studies, in Brazil and abroad, usually focused on the monolithic category “woman” in which femininity and gender oppression, for instance, were apprehended as feeling/looking the same for all women (Soihet “Feminismos e cultura política”, “História das mulheres e relações de gênero”).

Shortly after women and feminist studies were established in Brazil, research was also being done on Black femininity, though authors such as Corrêa argues that there was, at the time she was writing in the mid-1990s, an impressive gap in studies about race and gender in Brazil (“Do Feminismo aos Estudos” 25). Many of those studies investigated colonialism, but also literature and media representations, of Black women’s bodies, especially, the construction and problematization of the mulata, as exposed in Chapter Two. Placing the research focus on the body was, for most part, a consequence of the exotization and oversexualization of women of color’s bodies by colonial and elite rule (Corrêa “A Invenção da Mulata”). However, authors like Soihet (“A sensualidade em Festa”) chose to center her analysis on the resistive potential of Black and mulata women in the public space. This double-biding when it comes to the tension between oppression and resistance in the studies of Black women and mulatas is, indeed, noted by Arrizón, as well as Soihet (“A Sensualidade em Festa”). On the one hand, the focus on the exotic and animalistic, and at times submissive, representations enabled a clearer view of the oppressive horrors and constraints of slavery and colonial rule. But the emphasis on the body, on the other, made possible a view of those women as not only having agency, but also as women who defied the moral codes of the time, along with slavery, colonialism, racism, and sexism. E. Oliveira further states that even though the funk movement is formed by poor people of color looking for cultural legitimation, the sexism that traverses



it is part of a “larger structure” present in many societies, even more so in economically disadvantaged groups (941).

As women joined the funk movement in Rio in the 2000s, a new challenge to Brazilian studies on femininity would emerge. The focus on the traditional femininity in comparison with a possible “opposite” feminist identity was not able to properly deal with the complexities of the over-the-top, excessive performances of femininity of the *funkeiras*. The following paragraphs attest in part to the invisibility of the *funkeiras* in the field of Gender and Women Studies in Brazil, as well as to the limits a traditional feminist theoretical and moral approach imposes on the interpretation of those performances.

In a 2011 article, Aragão examines the discourse and the construction of the image of women in Rio’s funk. The author relies mostly on Foucault’s discourse analysis to make sense of lyrics that, according to him, are sexist and place women in a submissive position in relation to men. The starting point of the article, never corroborated by any other references, is that women in funk reproduce the idea of women being “ready for sex,” which is, according to the author, degrading (78). The essay is filled with definitive judgments on the funk movement as just another piece in the machinery of structural sexism. It is also packed with moralistic assumptions, such as, if a woman wants to have sex and expresses it she is indeed taking part in her own subordination. What is also noticeable in Aragão’s work is the assumption that Western femininity is a universal marker, with no variations, which is also expressed by his choice in relying on de Beauvoir as the authority in gender oppression.

Coming from a similar perspective, Oliveira also chooses to investigate sexism in funk through the discursive analysis of the lyrics. This time, however, the author is concerned with how feminine identities are expressed in a diminishing way in the lyrics, with a focus on linguistic aspects that give hints about women's subordination. The presupposition, however, is the same as in Aragão's work: that women in funk are put in a degrading position that is embraced by them because they naively take part in male domination. Oliveira further states that even though the funk movement is formed by poor people of color looking for cultural legitimation, the sexism that traverses it is part of a "larger structure" present in many societies, even more so in economically disadvantaged groups (941).

Both essays come from a very similar moral place, which was also very common in Western and Brazilian second wave feminism: that of apprehending sex as an almost inherently patriarchal matter that is always oppressive and violent towards women (Lyra "Eu Não Sou Cachorra"). Along with that, traditional femininity as an analytical starting point is another shared marker of both papers. The feminine, in this sense, is purely textual.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Lyra proclaims that funkeiras are the vanguard of third wave feminism. The author explains that, different from second wavers, third wave feminist have a special concern with self-esteem and sexuality. There was, indeed, a shift in how femininity was perceived: from oppressive and male-dominated to identity affirming and empowering. About the funkeiras, specifically, Lyra proposes that they move from that traditional place of passivity usually conceived as feminine, to the active role of the seducer—a traditionally masculine space. Therefore,

Lyra proposes that *funkeiras* such as Deize Tigrona and Tati Quebra Barraco invert gender roles with their “daring” lyrics. Though the focus is, again, more on what is being sung, Lyra recognizes, to some extent, that the subject position of the *funkeiras*, women of color from Rio’s peripheries, matters.

In a recent, and fundamental, work about the funk movement, Lopes saves a small section of her book to analyze gender relations and the role of women in the funk movement (152-200). The author focuses on lyrics, but also uses interviews and some performative aspects of the movement to establish that, unlike most of the previous work done on the *funkeiras*, they have agency. Basing her analysis on the work of Judith Butler and gender performativity, Lopes suggests that, though *funkeiras* have agency, they are merely reproducing dominant and oppressive gender relations in their songs.

Though Lopes’ work reproduces some of the limited assumptions about funk and *funkeiras*, she does a much better job in beginning to unpack the complexities and ambiguities of the *funkeiras*’ performances of femininity. For instance, she states, “In funk’s language, there is an emphasis on male domination and in the asymmetric standards of gender relations, but that does not mean that women position themselves in a passive or alienated way” (175). She goes on to say that women indeed have voice and respond to men’s incitements, but they do so within the boundaries provided by Brazilian culture, as well as the funk world, and culture industry—all realms creating limits to how they respond to men.

Another aspect of Lopes work that is worth noting is that she categorizes the most common gender relations apparent in funk lyrics. A few examples would be “war of the sexes”, “the young girl,” “the bitches,” and “faithful versus mistress.” I will delve into

some those categories more thoroughly on Chapter Five, but what I would like to comment on is that even though Lopes recognizes a series of resistive possibilities for the performances of femininities of the *funkeiras*, she ends up concluding that those subversive repetitions present in their performances become a cliché in the context of culture industry, in which gender subversion has a market price.

There is certainly merit in Lopes' readings, and this is precisely why I will be dialoguing with her research throughout this work. However, when the oppressed attempt to invert power positions, what we have is not a simple inversion of power positions because that would implicate a change in structural oppression. That is not to say there are no effects. On the contrary, what we observe is something more complex than simple inversions: the oppressed does not occupy the oppressor's position, but a new position in which there is an ambiguity of how she will relate to those she's subordinated to. This space of ambiguity is where I place the *funkeiras*. I am hoping to challenge some of Lopes' conclusions regarding the *funkeiras*' performances of femininity combining what has been already laid out in this chapter, and with what I will establish next, which is a theory of the performance of abject femininity.

### **Performances of Abject Femininity**

Earlier in this chapter, I proposed a discussion partly involving Butler's concept of performativity. After exposing aspects of the act of performing that are potentially transgressive, I now move on to talk about performances of abject femininity and hyper-heterosexuality. As in other work investigating performances, those paradigms "are applied to enable discussion of the body as a means of inhabiting and modifying

normative performances of female sexuality” (Hill 280). Moreover, in this section, I briefly examine the literature on the abject body to then discuss the transgressive potential of performances deemed abject, specifically through gender and sexuality.

The abject body, as well as abjection, was famously conceptualized by Julia Kristeva (“Powers of Horror”). There is an important distinction between the two: while the abject is a state of being, Kristeva understands abjection as the individual active reaction to an abject body, which also entails “a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives” (10). Thus, abject and abjection are relational: the latter is the proper response to what is filthy and impure. But the abject is not simply defilement. Kristeva notes that the abject is not just the unclean or impure; it disregards borders and rules, disrupts “identity, system, order” (4). Accordingly, the abject is marked by “ambiguity” (9). Lockford sums up Kristeva’s thought in the abject: “In short, the abject is that which is both clean and dirty, that which is both sacred and profane, that which breaks borders and is yet held tightly within them” (12). As ambiguous beings, women are “always already abject” (12): they are embodiments of the sacred maternal—whether they are capable of bearing children or not—, at the same time they are profane, as their bodies produce and eliminate a wealth of “unclean” and “impure” fluids (Lockford 12).

While Kristeva understands the abject as a state of being, Lockford contends that it is also an activity (148). Hence, in this work, I will be considering the performative aspects of the abject feminine. More contemporary notions of abject femininity and its variables—hyper-femininity and hyper-heterosexuality, excessive femininity, or inappropriate femininity—also understand it as “flaws” in gender and sexuality

performances (Gerrard and Ball 123) in comparison to normative notions femininity and heterosexuality.

Gerrard and Ball note that contemporary notions of normative femininity invoke the idea of “natural beauty,” which condemns performative excesses, such as too much makeup, stiletto heels, tight clothes, weaves, as well as drinking, loudness, and exaggerated displays of heterosexuality (122-123). They also note that though this shift, present especially in the media, could be deemed as having feminist undertones to it since it implies women are “naturally” beautiful, they call attention to the danger of essentializing (normative, white) femininity, as if “naturalness” did not entail any type of performance, repetition, and practice (123).

Tincknell suggests that normative femininity in its contemporary version, though still prescribing whiteness and middle-classness, is also accompanied by the comeback of the idea that femininity is a pathological condition. However, this time, this is made apparent through a “relentless drive for physical perfectibility” (83). In this interpretation of contemporary femininity in a neoliberal context, women are pushed into perpetually remaking themselves in order to be perfectly, but not hyper, feminine. Though seemingly contradictory, the “natural beauty” ideal and the constant remaking of one’s femininity are part of the same dynamics of “practicing self-reflexivity and transformation through consumption” (Ringrose and Walkerdine 227). All these authors note that it is not just about consuming—this could easily lead to excesses. There is, hence, certain propriety when it comes to adequate one’s femininity through consuming.

Women who perform femininity in an excessive manner, in comparison to proper white bourgeoisie femininity, are, according to Skeggs deemed as “subjectivities out of

control” (qtd. in Gerrard and Ball 122). Those women fail at correctly interpreting femininity. In a neoliberal context in which valuable individuals are those who know how to self-govern according to rules of the market (Lemke 34), those who either ignore or misinterpret them can be potentially deemed abject (Gerrard and Ball 128). Moreover, the “proper” feminine performance entails control over the body, over “bodily posture and movements and also controlling the language used to refer to bodily activities and processes, which together constitute bodily decorum” (Arthurs and Grimshaw 137). This lack of bodily decorum in women’s performances is what needs to be tamed and corrected.

There is no assumption, however, that this need to regulate abject bodies is new. In fact, Arthurs and Grimshaw remind us that the necessity to control women’s bodies comes from the idea that they are regarded as “the moral guardians of society whose behaviour must set the standard for men...” (141). Moreover, Skeggs points out there is a long history of racialized and classed discourses linking performances of hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity in order to define, supervise, and police practices of appropriateness and sexuality.

Especially when it comes to black and brown women, there has been a long history of regulation “through the racializing and sexualizing imperialist gaze” (Ringrose and Walderkine 234). Going back to Soihet’s (“A Sensualidade em Festa”) and Batista’s (“Na Periferia do Medo”) work, they attest to the elite and middle class permanent “fear of the uncontrollable,” from colonial to contemporary Brazil, when it comes to Black and Brown women’s sexual morality. Accordingly, poor women of color’s performances of

gender and sexuality have long been deemed improper and repulsive (Corrêa “A Invenção da Mulata”).

Here, it is pertinent to bring in Muñoz’ analysis of *chusmería*, “a form of behavior that refuses standards of bourgeoisie comportment” (182). It is, then, those tacky and over-the-top performances associated with stigmatized class identity, race, as well as gender and sexuality. Thus, the Cuban term can also be used as a racial slur, as well as to suggest gender nonconformance. According to Muñoz, “The prototypical *chusma*’s sexuality is deemed excessive and flagrant... there is something monstrous about the *chusma*” (182).

Lopes briefly explores the grotesque in the *funkeiras*’ performances. She sees in their performance an exaggeration, using animalistic terms with which they express their sexuality, i.e., bitch (as dog’s female) and piranha (synonym of whore) are an indication of that trend. But what this also points to, according to Lopes, a “mocking tone” (181) in their songs that take sexuality to such a degree of repulsion and exaggeration that becomes humorous: it is a language that is both “degrading and regenerating... that develops the fundamental ambivalence in the grotesque” (Lopes 187). I consider this aspect of Lopes’ analysis the most provocative and generative of critical feminist conversations. Though she recognizes the subversive potential in the *songs* performed by the *funkeiras*, Lopes leaves the artists’ bodies out, therefore not really analyzing their performances, going back to a more traditional understandings of gender and negative objectification.

What feminist scholars are pointing out is that some of those regulations were reworked in the contemporary neoliberal context where those over-the-top and



incompetent femininities, either marked by race or class, or both, (Gerrard and Ball 123)  
is being counter with self-regulatory discursive appeals:

Modes of regulation are shifting from practices of policing and external regulation to technologies of self-regulation in which subjects come to understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation, as “free” and individual agents in the management of themselves as autonomous beings, which is central to a neo-liberal project in which the community, the state, the sociality itself is taken to have melted away. (Ringrose and Walkerdine “Regulating the Abject” 229)

Thus, the remedy to excess and inadequacy is precisely the “appropriate” performance of white bourgeoisie femininity precisely because hyper-femininity and hyper-heterosexuality highlight the artificiality of normative constructs that are constantly being naturalized (Gerrard and Ball 127).

Here, abject femininity and performance theory meet in order to illuminate possibilities of transgression, as well as a distinct contribution to the study on the *funkeiras*. Performance reaffirms the abject body. Also, “the abject, through its strategic deployment and visceral response, brings into relief both performer and spectator agency” (Lockford 11). As Hill puts it,

Through performance, women intervene in the layers of inherited representations of femininity to corporeally challenge and remake them, to shift their role from object of desire to desiring subject as the female body is contested as a site of control and instead has the potential to modify and resist societal constraints. (“The Crossing of Boundaries” 280)

Like with disidentificatory performances (Muñoz), performing abjection also carries that double bidding of complicity and rejection of dominant cultural norms (Lockford).

Lockford suggests that performances of abjection need also to generate a double reflection. She writes: “insofar as performing abjection is subversive, it is also, paradoxically, a strategy that potentially produces a refusal of abjection” (11). In a way,

both studies propose a dismantling of normative gender and sexuality binaries because those performances of abjection are marked by ambiguity. Hence, a performance of traditional femininity can be deemed abject if, say, it is done by an undesired body. Other times, it is a straight out inappropriate, excessive interpretation of femininity. According to the works of Muñoz and Lockford, both categories of performances have resistive and transgressive potential. Depending on how traditional femininity and heterosexuality are enacted, they *can* be subversive. Performances of what could be conceived as traditional femininity need to be contextualized because, at the end of the day, *who* and *how* she is performing it matters a whole lot.

Cathy Cohen makes a compelling point in critiquing the monolithic way heterosexuality is apprehended in certain strains of queer politics (37). According to her, the transformational possibility of queer politics is undermined by the reproduction of the binary heterosexual/queer:

In many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything “queer.” An understanding of the ways in which power informs and constitutes privileged and marginalized subjects on both sides of this dichotomy has been left unexamined. (Cohen 22)

Accordingly, Cohen explores the possibilities of queer politics as a way to challenge traditional politics across identity categories through examples in which perceived heterosexual performances are considered non-normative. The sexuality and reproductive choices of working class Black women and Latinas, for instance, are often deemed improper and pathological, and in need to be controlled (Cohen 41). Accordingly, Cohen exposes the “numerous ways that sexuality and sexual deviance from a prescribed norm

have been used to demonize and to oppress various segments of the population, even some classified under the label ‘heterosexual’” (42). Thus, the distribution of and access to dominant power is not done based on homogenized identities, but “across the boundaries of ‘het’ and ‘queer’ that we construct” (43). The term “queer,” hence, could also be expanded across sexual identities based on how certain gender and sexual practices are pathologized.

While analyzing the performances of Latina drag queens, Moreman and McIntosh recognize they are marked by a fluidity of gender performances (that are also raced) that are potentially empowering because they “confuses the political binds of gender” (125). Though there are obvious distinctions between Moreman and McIntosh’s characters and most of the *funkeiras*, there is something important to be said about artistic performances that are marked by exaggeration and ambiguity. In analyzing one of their interlocutors, Moreman and McIntosh write:

Butler has claimed that subversive acts of gender, such as drag, can slide into reiterating/reaffirming dominant representations of gender. The conceptualization of gender deconstruction becomes dependent on recognitions of the normative differences between genders. However, to stop at an understanding of Fantasia’s masculine and feminine fluidity would be to fail to understand the racial implications of this fluidity and would fail our intersectional reading of the performance. (“Brown Scriptings” 125)

In the previous work done on the *funkeiras*, there were frequently mentions about other identity categories that form those artists, notably race and class. Interestingly, in the analyses of the women’s enactments of femininity, there was rarely any reference about their other identities and how they might impact what how they perform. This is also an indication of the importance of studying their performances. It does not really matter if

they do not mention, say, race in their lyrics frequently; they bodies are raced, hence, their performances will be marked by that subject position.

While Lockford contends that there is nothing more abject than one's willfully performance of abjection, I would argue that the "choice" or strategic factor in performing abjection might be granted only to those women that are given the benefit of the doubt when it comes to their abjection—notably gender conforming bourgeoisie White women who can *possibly* perform gender properly. In this case, abjection is not only present in one's intentional or unintentional performance, but already marked in her gender, classed, and raced body. Cohen, for instance, contends that the *choice* to perform gender and sexuality in fluid ways carries an inevitable dimension of privilege, especially related to class and race, because traditional identities tend to be very important for the community building, survival, and safety of marginalized folks (34).

Though Lockford's work presupposes performance of abjection as mostly a strategic choice, which I think it might not always be the case with the *funkeiras*, the argument still resonates with this study, especially when articulated with Cohen's point on pathologized sexual practices. The women's performances of femininity and heterosexuality are exaggerated, inappropriate, with two aggravating aspects: they are poor and a lot of them are women of color.

Are performances of abject femininity only transgressive if they are intentional, like in Lockford's (and other feminist scholars cited in this chapter) examples of performance art? Keeping Cohen's points in sight, I would argue that the uses of strategic performances of abject femininity cannot, or should not, be limited to those bodies that can choose. That is why the work of Muñoz is also so vital to expand the subversive

possibilities of ambiguous performances, especially those from marginalized folks. Hence, in this research, I am advocating for the recognition of both intentional and unintentional performances that *do* defy—even while at times reinforcing—gender and sexuality normativity. The fact that the *funkeiras* perform what they call “characters” on stage hints the idea that maybe they indeed choose to perform abjection, even if they do not use the specific language of feminist art and/or theory. But as I show in Chapter Five, they also perform abjection out of necessity.

Based on the previous work done on the *funkeiras*, and on the extremely oppositional perspectives their study usually generates, I am not proposing the search for a middle ground approach. Rather, I suggest that those perspectives are both accepted and denied, considered and relativized. In reality, they are both too definitive to be kept up with the complex changes occurred in the funk movement in the last five years, especially in regards to the role of women in it. But they are certainly not dispensable, especially Lopes’ work.

Finally, I am also calling for a similar move as the one proposed by Lockford: that the performances of the *funkeiras* be read or reflected on twice—“...think and feel beyond your first impulse, an impulse that may prompt you to close your hearts” (2). She explains that, by performing traditional femininity in abject ways, readers might feel tempted to shut off before giving a chance to other possible thoughts. Like Lockford, Cohen, and other authors reviewed in this chapter, I am contending that performances of traditional femininity and heterosexuality can, indeed, generate ambiguity and even subvert social norms, depending on how it is enacted and whose body is performing

them. In Chapter Five, I show that the suggested analysis will instigate critical reflection in feminism, feminist theory, and feminist strategies.

## **Chapter Four: New Ways to Understand Funk Through Vernacular Discourse and Performance Ethnography**

The critical move in rhetoric brought to rhetorical studies a lot of the concerns already present in cultural studies, such as the interest in uncovering power in social relations. This concern was then expanded to studies of resistance, through vernacular discourse in the mid-1990s. Likewise, performance studies made a similar move with the theoretical push given by Butler's performativity that was then re-read in terms of resistive possibilities (Madison 165). Both fields, Rhetoric and Performance Studies, underwent critical shifts and in this chapter I examine how they intersect.

In a lot of ways, the performative turn in Communication Studies was accompanied by rhetoric's critical turn, especially through the works of McKerrow and McGee. McKerrow, for instance, argues that rhetorical criticism is a performance in the sense that it "moves the focus from criticism as method to critique as practice" (108). Hence, performance has a two-fold meaning, from a theoretical and methodological standpoint: from the perspective of theory, performance focuses on the aesthetic and everyday possibilities offered by im/mediacy; from a critical rhetorical viewpoint, rhetoric becomes a critical practice in which the focus "is more on the performance of discourse than on the archeology of discourse" (McGee 279). Critical rhetoric, then,

intervenes in how the critic interprets rhetorical practice and at the same time it suggests the critic to adopt a performative position herself.

Rio's funk movement has been the target of mainstream media criticism since its early stages when it became popular within and outside of marginalized communities. One way Brazilian academia has been studying Rio's funk is through the textual examination of those media representations. Textual analyses are also popular among scholars investigating funk lyrics, especially the ones related to sex, performed by both men and women, as exemplified by the work of Aragão ("O Discurso e a Construção da Imagem), Lopes (*Funk-se Quem Quiser*), and Oliveira ("A Expressão da Identidade"). Other studies focused on ethnographic methods and were concerned with matters that range from fashion, as in the work Mizrahi ("Indumentária Funk), to Pinho's ("A 'Fiel', a 'Amante'") work on gender roles within funk fans who live in favelas. Many studies were heavily centered in verbal rhetoric (Aragão "O Discurso e a Construção da Imagem; Oliveira "A Expressão da Identidade") even the studies that expressed a concern with the performative aspect of funk, such as Lopes' (*Funk-se Quem Quiser*), still focused on lyrics and written media texts.

The fact that the funk movement, a musical and cultural group, has not been analyzed from lenses other than those of traditional, text-centric theories and methodologies says a great deal about not only the theoretical and methodological challenge Rio's funk poses to academia. Moreover, traditional theories and methods also obscure the resistive, however ambiguous, possibilities that funk put forth, especially the women in it. Thus, this chapter proposes a distinct methodological approach to women in



Rio's funk that bridges the localized aspects of movement's production beyond lyrics with a method of observation that focus on performance.

In this section, I examine a critical rhetorical approach that, as suggested by Calafell and Delgado, meets the "text on its terms" (18). Otherwise, we could be constraining the multiple possibilities of a "text" that is produced in a specific location, but works inside and outside of dominant systems. The approach I am proposing encompasses the critical turn in rhetoric that was set forth by Ono and Sloop's essay on vernacular discourse, as well as Delgado and Calafell's call for the analysis of non-verbal forms of discourse. Hence, I am moving away from traditional forms of analysis, grounded in Western universal notions of power, oppression, and domination, which are unfit to analyze texts produced by marginalized groups (Enck-Wanzer 178).

*Building Critical Rhetoric: From Polysemy and Fragmentation to Vernacular Discourse*

The late 1980s until the mid-1990s were crucial in the formation of the critical branch in rhetorical criticism. It was during this time that three groundbreaking essays were published with the intent to redefine rhetorical practice, in theoretical and methodological terms. In this section, I will articulate the complementary arguments of McKerrow, McGee, as well as Ono and Sloop, as they were highly influential in establishing critical rhetoric. I start by briefly examining McKerrow's proposed critical rhetorical shift, to then move on to McGee's idea of fragmentation of texts and context. Next, I expose how these ideas opened a path to Ono and Sloop's vernacular discourse as a way to examine cultural, social, and political manifestations from marginalized groups.

Raymie McKerrow's foundational essay "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis" offers perspectives that should guide a critical rhetorical perspective. Critical rhetoric entails an approach to rhetoric that is "divorced from the constraints of a Platonic conception" (91). Accordingly, a critical perspective on rhetoric is concerned with the unmasking or demystification of discourses of power. For that reason, it is also important to stress that critique, in that sense, is not uninterested or "impersonal" (92), a standpoint that breaks away from more traditional approaches in which the critic fills a neutral space.

Though McKerrow relies heavily on the oppression/resistance binary, as he also proposes a two-fold analytical approach to critical rhetoric as mode of inquiry (via the critique of domination and the critique of freedom) (92-96), he contends that the unraveling of dominant discourse cannot be done with simple hierarchical oppositions (95). Recognizing that the positions of dominant and dominated are not static allows the critic to assume that "any articulatory practice may emerge as relevant or consequential" (96) and their discursive effects should not be taken for granted.

McKerrow's suggestions in regard to the position of the critic as she uncovers discourses of power end with a call for an approach to critique as a performance, in the sense that "the critic as inventor becomes arguer or advocate for an interpretation of the collected fragments" (108), and polysemic—"texts" that refuse resolution. According to McKerrow,

A polysemic critique is one which uncovers a subordinate or secondary reading which contains the seeds of subversion or rejection of authority, at the same time that the primary reading appears to confirm the power of the dominant cultural norms. (108)

In McKerrow's view, polysemic texts have the possibility to invert dominant/subordinate power relations as well as to resist and challenge hegemonic cultural forces by "drawing out new meanings that better fit their own needs and desires" (Ceccarelli 396). These multiple meanings in contention, these fragments, indicate that the idea of "text" itself needed to be reconceptualized in a way that questioned its supposed stability and wholeness.

In an important essay for Communication Studies in general and critical rhetoric specifically, Michael Calvin McGee argues that the fragmentation that now characterizes postmodern culture "has resulted in a role reversal, making *interpretation* the primary task of speakers and writers and *text construction* the primary task of audiences, readers, and critics" (emphasis on text 274). McGee also notes that he is not separating those tasks; rather, he is posing the "most essential" operation, not the only one, for those roles. McGee's essay is important in that it opens up new methodological and critical possibilities, as the very concept of "text" changes in this new scenario (279).

Postmodern texts are, according to McGee, fragmented, especially when we think about them with an emphasis on rhetoric, instead of on criticism. With a stress on the latter, as understood by McGee, the constitution of "text" is not problematized. Rather, "text" is apprehended as the "finished" object of criticism (279). By highlighting rhetoric, a "text" is seen as "larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent (279). The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made" (McGee 279). In that sense, McGee proposes that there is a collapse between text and context in that "*discourses cease to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken 'out of context'*" (283, emphasis in

text). In fact, McGee contends that “texts,” in the way it has been traditionally conceptualized by rhetorical analysis—“the finished text,” “have disappeared altogether” (287). Instead, the rhetorical makeup of context is fragmented. In this essay, when I employ the use of the concept “text” I do so by relying on McGee’s understanding of it as fragmentary, highly contextual, and “unfinished.”

### *Vernacular Discourse*

Drawing from scholars in different disciplines, including McKerrow and McGee, Ono and Sloop contributed to critical rhetoric with the essay “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse.” Their essay incorporated and refined the ideas of fragmentation and polysemy, articulating them to a mode of inquiry for texts that were not produced by the dominant culture. Specifically, Ono and Sloop argue that the uncovering of power relations and how they function has been a part of rhetorical criticism’s goals—the so-called focus on the “evil power” (19). They note that by examining power solely or mostly from that perspective, writes “out of history” other texts that empowered and shaped “local cultures first, then affect[ed], through the sheer number of local communities, cultures at large” (19). As noted by Calafell and Delgado, “Rather than conceptualizing separate critiques of domination and freedom [like McKerrow], [Ono and Sloop] ask that we recognize the ways in which these projects are inseparable or identical” (5). Hence, Ono and Sloop propose a theoretical enterprise that concentrates on the critique of “speech that resonates within local communities” (20) that have been historically swept to the margins. It is through texts, they note, that those discourses become accessible. Even though Ono and Sloop place emphasis on verbal texts, they

contend that vernacular discourses also have a cultural dimension located in music, art, dance, etc.

Coming from a similar self-reflexive position of the critic McKerrow and McGee propose, Ono and Sloop call attention to the fact that even though it is imperative to make vernacular discourse visible, it is not enough to merely “recuperate, locate, and catalogue” (21) discourses that originated in marginalized communities. Their concern comes from the assumption that critics’ subjectivities would be removed from the process of *simply* describing vernacular discourse and acknowledging its existence (21).

Consequently, Ono and Sloop note that uncovering vernacular discourse is not a liberatory practice in itself; there is no inherent positive political, cultural, and social outcome from merely finding and describing vernacular discourse (21). This approach disregards critics’ intentions, biases, and purposes because criticism is performed non-reflectively, without acknowledging that the very process of describing and translating vernacular it is not a neutral one, removed from contexts, ideologies, and power relations. While the authors do praise the task of uncovering vernacular discourse, they highlight that a “more important goal is to construct a critical framework within which to discuss vernacular discourse” (21). Thus, vernacular discourse should be given the same critical suspicion critics have been given mainstream texts in their rhetorical analyses.

How, then, critics should approach vernacular discourse? Ono and Sloop reminds us that there is uniqueness in every community’s vernacular, meaning that those types of discourses are very specific to each one of them (20). Hence, they also have a particular analytical need based on the historical power relations that have been playing out to push those vernacular discourses to the margins in the first place (20). That is why an

oppressed group's discourse needs to be studied from the perspective of their own production.

Vernacular discourse has two defining characteristics that are used as critical tools: *cultural syncretism* and *pastiche* (21). Cultural syncretism refers to the ways in which others engage in a “simultaneous process of cultural expression and affirmation of community” (Holling and Calafell 19) while questioning dominant ideologies. Though the idea of affirming while protesting is not novel to rhetoric, as philosopher Kenneth Burke proposes that for every affirmation there is a simultaneous negation (qtd. in Ono and Sloop 22), the culturally specific rhetoric of marginalized communities negate dominant culture in distinct, unique ways. In short, rhetorical criticism that focuses on vernacular discourses places a greater emphasis on what is socially and culturally specific in a community.

Boyd's study of Black cinema exemplifies how cultural syncretism operates in vernacular discourse, emphasizing the self-affirming function such discursive movement has (101). Moreover, vernacular discourse is constitutive of marginalized communities, at the same time cultural syncretism “constructs social relations and protest representations” of those groups that circulate in the majority culture (Ono and Sloop 22). In the process of critiquing dominant culture from the standpoint of marginalized communities, subjectivities that defy that majority culture are created. “Culture and protest” are, then, intertwined elements of vernacular discourse (22). However, Boyd also stresses that the role of vernacular discourse as a critical device is that those marginalized discourses do not operate only in counter-hegemonic ways; they are also affirmative, “articulating a sense of community that does not function solely as oppositional to dominant ideologies”

(Ono and Sloop 23). Furthermore, Ono and Sloop contend that marginalized communities not only negate, but affirm their subjectivities in various ways, i.e. a Black community would not build their vernacular solely in opposition to racism, but also they also constitute their subjectivities “as affirmers” of civil rights (22).

Pastiche, another tool in Ono and Sloop’s conceptualization of vernacular discourse, works “as a metaphorical description” of McGee’s fragmentation of texts and contexts; a construction of a “unique discursive form out of cultural fragments” (Ono and Sloop 23). Hence, pastiche is theorized as an ever-changing and moving embodied practice that, while borrowing hegemonic elements from mainstream culture, is largely based on invention, reconstitution, and reorganization of discourses from specific sociocultural locations (23). Thus, it is not a simple mimicry of dominant cultural artifacts; instead, it borrows fragments from hegemonic discourse at the same time it rearticulates them with discourses from the margins, creating something unique. This is the case of Rio’s funk, both as a hybrid genre, as well as cultural movement (Lopes 105, 100-101)

Holling and Calafell argue that the publication of Ono and Sloop’s piece marked an important period, which worked as an extra push for the study of Latina/o vernacular that, consequently, expanded the understanding of the critique in the field of communication. Before Ono and Sloop’s essay, scholars were already calling for the need to investigate “historically marginalized communities and disciplinary Othered voices” (Holling and Calafell 18), at the same time a body of work on Chicana/o rhetoric was being developed. Those two trends, together, helped in the production of scholarship on Latina/o vernacular.

One important critique Latina/o scholars make of vernacular discourse is that it is still largely centered on verbal texts, which can be limiting—and colonizing (Calafell and Delgado 5; Enck-Wanzer 178). Calafell and Delgado, for instance, shed light into the importance of visual rhetoric when analyzing vernacular discourses of Latina/os in an essay examining a photographic collection called *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States*. Specifically, they examine how the collection visually and verbally “operates vernacularly to highlight the ways in which Latina/o social and personal identities are always in process...” (Calafell and Delgado 2). Thus, *Americanos* reaffirms a pan-Latina/o community, at the same time it protests dominant images as it “...functions as a vernacular rhetoric that retells the story of Latina/o peoples and counters the legacy of distorted impressions of Latina/o peoples and cultures” (Calafell and Delgado 4). The authors assert that the role of images, then, is fundamental in the way Latinas/os express their vernacular. A way to think how pastiche would work in relation to vernacular images is when Calafell and Delgado expose that art, as a visual medium, “can collect images and artifacts of cultural and ideological resonance and reposition them within a given frame to echo long-held sentiments while articulating new meanings” (5). Calafell and Delgado show how those repositions through visual art are indeed part of Latinas/os’ vernacular discourse.

Accordingly, if vernacular discourse as a critical tool already proposes that critics should look for diverse forms of discourse, in attempt to meet the text on its own terms, it makes sense that critics willing to adopt the framework consider that vernacular discourses can be expressed in multiple ways other than solely as verbal rhetoric. Thus, I explore how Rio’s funk operates as vernacular discourse through cultural syncretism and



pastiche and, following Calafell and Delgado's call, I am also proposing that those tools need to be adjusted in order to effectively deal with the cultural specificities of the funk movement's vernacular discourse.

In order to understand marginalized communities' constructions of their vernacular discourse, the critic should start by locating and situating the text within socio-historical contexts that explain how the representations of a given community were produced (Ono and Sloop 21). The history and sociocultural context of Rio's funk, exposed in Chapter Two, illuminate not only how their representations in mainstream culture came to be (as they are, in fact, closely related), but also how the rhetoric of the movement challenges such dominant depictions developed throughout the years. Furthermore, I am not focusing on those representations, I am not going to reproduce everything that has been already examined in chapter two; I am highlighting key aspects of the funk movement in order to shed light to what is unique in Rio's funk as vernacular discourse.

One of the challenges when analyzing the funk movement comes precisely from the difficulty to establish where it stands in the mainstream/dominant-alternative/marginal spectrum. Because the movement has many different facets, it is hard to fixate it in one point of that spectrum. I would argue that funk is somewhere in the middle, tending to the marginal spectrum, depending on what aspect of the movement is being analyzed. My position seems to be in line with many scholars who study funk in this aspect, as I demonstrate next.

Sá argues that Rio's funk developed on the fringes of mainstream music industry, with no push from international record companies (3). Citing Herschmann's work, Facina

(“Não Me Bate Doutor”) explains that funk, as a Brazilian mass phenomenon, indeed poses “constitutive contradiction”: Funk, as a cultural product, has been accepted by ample sections of Brazilian youth, including the middle classes. Notwithstanding, it still faces discrimination and stigmatization as a cultural movement that emerged in the outskirts of Rio. Lopes argues that there was a process of professionalization of the funk movement that has led to the creation of a specific “chain of production and consumption, creating new opportunities specially to impoverished young people” (102). This happened especially in the 1990s, when funk became “carioca”, meaning that it started to be produced in Rio de Janeiro. Hence, even though Rio’s funk works in similar modes as culture industry, the movement’s aesthetic, styles, and even monopolies developed in the margins of dominant culture.

As a genre, funk is marked by hybridity (Lopes 105): since its emergence, Rio’s funk combines different aesthetic forms whose elements were already the result of other hybrid musical practices, such as Miami bass, samba, and Cadomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion (Laignier “Por Uma Economia Política do Funk” 72). Nonetheless, as a cultural product, Rio’s funk has been framed as one of the most detestable genres in Brazilian popular culture, according to Facina: its music and lyrics are deemed as “poor”, its singers are never in key, they “ruin” too many pop and classic songs with their own versions. However, there is agreement among scholars that the aesthetic elements that compose funk reflect its socio-historical emergence, so it would be hard to divorce the genre from the conditions in which the social movement emerged (Laignier “Por Uma Economia Política do Funk” 73; Lopes 18; Sá 3); also, there is the perception that aesthetic forms coming from marginalized spaces will be inevitably “inferior” to other

already validated genres, such as Brazilian Popular Music (Laignier “Por Uma Economia Política do Funk” 72).

What has been illustrated so far is that Rio’s funk does not only oppose dominant culture or simply mimics it. The paragraph above illustrates that the funk movement does both, and something else: in the tense dialogue with dominant culture, funk created its own cultural syncretism that is nonetheless a result of that interaction. Furthermore, while the critique professes that culture and protest are interwoven, and communities’ vernacular discourses operate in counter-hegemonic and affirming ways, the relationship with dominant culture, in the case of funk, is not solely based on opposition and affirmation. Hence, within the funk movement, there is a tendency to do all three: oppose, reinterpret, and reproduce the dominant culture.

This is, perhaps, the most evident way in which Rio’s funk operates as vernacular discourse: from the beats and the lyrics to the clothes, the dancing, and the relationship with mainstream media, the funk movement is constantly negotiating its unstable relationship with mainstream culture, and part of that negotiation entails the recognition and affirmation of its marginality, but also specificity and originality.

This is also true for women in the funk movement. There is a level of complexity in their performances that problematizes the either conforming and reproducing, or transgressing and resisting, dominant discourses approach that is usually used to study them. There is no linearity in the way they deal with issues related to funk, to femininity, to sexuality, to vulgarity. Lopes proposes something similar, but she ends up reproducing those linear approaches by contending that a closer look in the *funkeiras*’ discourse reveals that though they have agency in their songs, contradicting previous analyses, they

generally conform to a broader patriarchal discourse of traditional femininity and masculinity (200).

Rio's funk vernacular discourse has also two distinct performative characteristics: the use of scorn and an in-your-face attitude. These elements are often performed together. About exaggerated comedy, Muñoz recognizes that "comedic disidentification accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies" (119). Though these characteristics are present in Rio's funk vernacular discourse in general, the mockery accompanied by an "in-your-face" attitude is remarkably present in women's performances. I see these elements as particularly important to *funkeiras* because it is a way to send a confronting message, using humor as a physical and moral shield from men especially, but also from other women.

A vernacular approach to women in Rio's funk movement focuses on their discursive and performative productions, artistic and everyday, as they move between marginal and dominant culture. Furthermore, this study is not as interested in how institutions, such as the state and the media, have been trying to disrupt and/or regularize the movement, and more concerned with the rhetorical/performative production of the movement, which inevitable includes the interactions with those institutions.

Critical rhetoric's emphasis on the performative shed light into the mind/body divide and its constraints set forward by Cartesian thought (Conquergood 180). Moreover, performance is the element that challenges and disrupts the supposed prevalence of the mind over the body. As the theories presented in Chapter Three demonstrate, more than simply reverting that binary, they challenge it through a hybrid

combination of mind *and* body. Accordingly, as previously emphasized, a critical approach to rhetoric follows McGee's perspective that performance is a primary element of discourse (279). Moreover, as rhetoricians, "the trick is to put ourselves in the frame of mind of a performer making judgments about 'what goes with what' among fragments that could be joined together in a 'finished' formal 'argument'" (McGee 88).

In order to coherently analyze the *funkeiras*, there was the need to adopt a mode of observation that is in line with both the proposed theories of performance and disidentification, as well as with the idea that Rio's funk operates as vernacular discourse. Thus, considering that a significant portion of this research relies on the observations of the women's performances and interviews, performance ethnography is the chosen ethnographic method. In the next subsection, I explore some of the questions performance ethnography poses to traditional ethnography, especially as it challenges the role of the researcher and the goals of observation. Like with theories of performance and the critique of vernacular discourse, this method of observation is designed to understand the complexities of non-traditional texts, such as the performances of the *funkeiras*, questioning established binaries, especially the mind/body divide—consequently also defying the researcher's positionality.

### *Performance Ethnography*

The observation of the *funkeiras*' performances and interviews with them are a fundamental aspect of this project. Performance ethnography, a critical method presenting important ethical and moral aspects that the researcher must keep in mind when engaging with communities she does not belong to. In this section, I present those

concerns as they challenge traditional ethnography at the same time they aid the researcher in creating a dialogic relationship with her interlocutors.

Fiske conceptualizes ethnography as “*writing the other*” (330 emphasis on original). The knowledge generated by ethnography about Others has a direct connection to the discourses produced about marginalized folks. If domination takes place through “the construction and maintenance of a particular order of discourse” (Therborn qtd. in McKerrow 93), to comprehend the relationship between power and knowledge, it is fundamental to understand the possibilities and constraints in promoting social change. Furthermore, “reality” is only really meaningful when it is put into the discourse: “discursivity is not descriptive but generative” (Fiske 330). Ethnography, then, is a “putting-into-discourse (in its observational or investigative moments no less than in its recording ones) so ethnography always changes the object of its study” (Fiske 330), or yet, we change the status of their *otherness*.

Still according to Fiske, ethnography is always theoretically driven; there is no non-interpretative stage in the ethnographic investigation. From the investigation to the identification and rejection of data, to the final goal that is to produce “reality”, ethnography and in all of its stages are always interpretative. There is an inherent level of involvement in ethnography that makes impossible to understand this method according to “[t]he once dominant ideal of a detached observer using neutral language to explain ‘raw’ data” (Rosaldo qtd. in Conquergood 179-180). Moreover, classic ethnography’s premise of “pattern, continuity, coherence, and unity” is more likely to have to do with Western ideologies strong alignment with individualism than with actual “on-the-ground cultural practices” (Conquergood 184).

In the words of Conquergood, “ethnography is *an embodied practice*” (180 emphasis in original) This approach calls for “the project of radical empiricism,” in which there is a change in “ethnography’s traditional approach from Other-as-theme to Other-as-interlocutor” also representing “a shift from monologue to dialogue, from information to communication” (Conquergood 182). Or yet, through Rosaldo’s ideas, Conquergood suggests that ‘the research agenda needs to move from centers to “borderlands,” “zones of difference,” and “busy intersections” where many identities and interests are not compartmentalized, but articulated in multiple ways (184).

If fieldwork exposes the researcher to vulnerabilities and vicissitudes, the radical empiricist response to these conditions are “honesty, humility, self-reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of the interdependence and reciprocal role-playing between knower and known” (Conquergood 182). Furthermore, Conquergood explains that

performance-centered research takes as both its subject matter and method the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history. The performance paradigm insists on face-to-face encounters instead of abstractions and reductions. It situates ethnographers within the delicately negotiated and fragile “face-work” that is part of the intricate and nuanced dramaturgy of everyday life. (Conquergood 189)

Through five central questions, Madison building on Conquergood’s work, considers the significance of the role played by “the transmitter of information and skilled interpreter in both presenting and representing the lives and stories of others whom you have come to know and who have given you permission to reveal their stories” (4). These questions revolve around issues such as the intentions, purposes, and frame of analysis of the researcher; the possible consequences of the researcher’s work, including the potential to do harm; if the researcher maintain dialogue that enables collaboration between herself

and Others; how the local affects the broader context; and, finally, if the research is committed to social justice. I have already addressed some of these questions in the previous and present chapters. The remaining ones regarding fieldwork will be addressed in chapter four.

Performance ethnography is driven by the idea of an “ethical responsibility” of the researcher, which Madison explains to be “a compelling sense of duty commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being” (5). The critical ethnographer must have the goal to dig deeper, distrusting taken-for-granted assumptions that obscure complex relations of power and control: “Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from “what is” to “what could be” (5). That means the critical ethnographer should take advantage of her privileged position and resources available to disseminate and fight for the invisible voices and experiences of Others.

Through Conquergood’s ideas, Madison underlines the notion of “dialogue as performance,” in which the researcher and the Other engage in an open and ongoing debate that challenges one another. The dialogical stance places researcher and Other in a more equal position that offers “reciprocal giving and receiving rather than a timeless resolve... Dialogue is therefore the quintessential encounter with the Other” (Madison 9). Also, because a dialogical relationship resists conclusion, the Other is not represented and interpreted as static and unchangeable, like in traditional ethnography. Madison describes a shift from the ethnographic *present* to the ethnographic *presence*, in which the researcher maintains a conversation with the Other that is no longer seeing as a stagnant instance. Finally, Madison conceptualizes critical ethnography as “always a meeting of



multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in the Other's world" (Madison 9).

Performance ethnography, when properly utilized, has the possibility to become "a civic, participatory, collaborative project. It turns researchers and subjects into co-participants in a common moral project" (Denzin 249). Researchers engaged in performance ethnography must take sides, making their own political and moral values clear, "including the social constructions, values, and so-called objective facts and ideological assumptions that are attached to these positions" (Denzin 250). Their goal must be to unfold and reveal situations of disadvantages and disempowerment of a specific group.

There are multiple elements in performance ethnography's methodological sequences, from investigating the researcher's positionality to tips for preparing for the field (Madison 19-25). But I would like to shed light on one of those elements: interviewing. As previously mentioned, this work relies heavily on the interviews I have done with women in Rio's funk movement. I took into consideration the points Madison exposes on the role of the ethnographic interview as a "hallmark experience of fieldwork research" (25) in order to make better use of my time with the *funkeiras*.

The ethnographic interview searches for meanings in ways that go beyond trivial information or "finding the 'truth of the matter'" (Madison 25). Madison points out that the researcher must always keep in mind that interviewees are not "objects." On the contrary, they are subjects, "with agency, history, and... her own idiosyncratic command of a story" (25). Furthermore, the primary goal of interviewing in critical ethnography is

not to find reliable and verifiable information, but to illuminate the complexities of “individual subjectivity, memory, yearnings, polemics, and hope that are unveiled and inseparable from shared and inherited expressions of communal strivings, social history, and political possibility” (Madison 26).

Madison lists three types of ethnographic interviews: oral history, personal narrative, and topical interviews. These forms are not exclusionary of one another; on the contrary, they overlap many times (26). Oral history would be an interview focused on the recounting of events as they relate to the lives of the individuals who experienced them. Personal narrative deals with the subject’s point-of-view on an event or experience. Finally, the topical interview concentrates on individuals’ perspectives on an issue, process, or phenomenon (26). The type of ethnographic interview I used in fieldwork varied according to the subject, sometimes combining all three modes because, as Chapter Five illustrates, some of the women have been part of the movement for two years, and others have been in it for over 15 years. Thus, the interview script (Appendix A) changed accordingly. I submitted an Exempt Form to the University of Denver’s Institutional Board Review, which was approved on August 18, 2013, along with the consent form (Appendix B).

The questions in the interviews I conducted were formulated according to the Patton Model (Madison 27). This qualitative model focuses on six different types of questions. I focused specifically on five: behavior and experience, or “ways of ‘doing’”; opinions and values, with the former centering on individual idiosyncrasies while the latter emphasizes the “guiding principles and ideals emanating from formal or informal social arrangements;” feeling questions deal with “emotion, sentiments, and passions”

and sensory interrogations focus on human senses; finally, knowledge questions concentrates on the information participants hold about a given issue or phenomenon (Madison 27).

In order to build “mindful rapport,” an essential aspect of the ethnographic interview, I followed Madison’s suggestions to privilege active thinking and sympathetic listening, as well as to be aware of status difference. In critical ethnography, there is no firm “back-and-forth replay of question-answer-question” (Madison 32). Instead, interviewer and participant engage in a more “fluid and reciprocal dynamic” conversation, one that is driven by understanding and not judgment (32). It is this conversational quality, or what evolves from that exchange that signals the reliance on active thinking and sympathetic listening. In order for that to happen, the researcher must also be aware of the power imbalances that might be at play during the interview. This is important because ultimately researchers have the power of “the last word on how [subjects] will be represented” (Madison 33).

On that note, performance ethnography helped this researcher to keep her ethical commitment when entering fieldwork to observe and interview the *funkeiras*. Ultimately, I hope this project expresses the concerns with the well-being of the individuals involved, as well as a deeper sense of involvement with the community that I have reached. In the next chapter I unpack those encounters and revisit the theories addressed in previous chapters in order to analyze and understand the performances, especially those related to femininity, of the women in Rio’s funk movement.

## **Chapter Five: Negotiating Femininity and Heterosexuality in Everyday and Aesthetic Performances**

In this chapter, I examine how *funkeiras* negotiate femininity based on the analysis of interviews I completed in July and August 2013, as well stage performances attended in the same period. The chapter is divided in analytical categories that were developed based on fieldwork observations. Thus, this section follows the overall objectives of the present work, which is to establish an investigation that is informed by the performances of women in Rio's funk movement.

During the months of June, July, August, and December 2013, I have attended eight performances in diverse settings—from favelas to prestigious clubs. Because of fieldwork limitations, I was not able to attend live shows of all of the *funkeiras* present in this study. Accordingly, I am also relying on video recordings of performances, which allows me to better assess the complexities of both their everyday and stage performances. I have interviewed seven individual artists and one all-female group of four. I also examine a very small number of media reports to compliment fieldwork observations.

The analytical categories are the following: “Performances of Femininity: The Everyday and The Stage,” which encompasses the subheading “Femininity and Vulgarly”; “The Relationship with Other Women: the faithful, the mistress, and the

envious woman,” which is subdivided into two other subsections, “The ‘Faithful Wife’ and The ‘Mistress’: rage and scorn at the center of the stage” and “‘Recalque’: the buzzword for “envious women”; and finally “The Relationship with Men: love, sex, and business,” which examines “Love/Sex Relationships: From seduction to mockery” and “Independence/dependence and self-reliance: ‘I Don’t Depend on Men for Shit!’”

These categories are not by all means self-contained or all encompassing. Instead, they are complimentary of one another and there is certainly an “outflow” in their fragile boundaries. Most importantly, those categories are necessarily relational, meaning they overlap. When analyzing how the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity on and off stage, this category unescapably intersects with how women relate to one another, as well as how they relate to men. Hence, some of the examples used in one section could be easily fit in a different analytical group.

*Performances of Femininity: The Everyday and the Stage*

“I’m not Evelyn; I’m MC

Pink 24/7. I consider myself a  
character 24/7”

MC Pink

“I’m not on skimpy clothes  
and makeup 24/7”

Andressa Fetixe

The performances of femininity the *funkeiras* enact are not only resistive and affirming of their positions as marginal artists, as women, as poor individuals. They are also in constant negotiation and, at times, in conformance with dominant culture (Lopes 18; Ono and Sloop 23). In order to capture the diverse ways the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity and heterosexuality through performance, I explore in this section the possibilities of the stage, the tensions with what is and is not considered vulgar, and the potential constraints of feminine performances in the funk movement. Specifically, I focus on material and symbolic aspects of their performances of femininity, both on and off stage, such as clothing, body shape, occupation in the movement (MC, dancer or both), as well as issues morality and “real” womanhood. Some of those performances conform to traditional femininity and some resist; at times, they aspire to conform though their excessively feminine or aggressive performances are not normative.

Femininity as a set of prescribed performative rules (Butler “Performative Acts” 519) works as a vital element in the reproduction of dominant patriarchal and, consequently, heteronormative culture; femininity as pathology entails a series of (mis)performed acts that can work to expose the artificial connections between sex and gender, as well as a site of resistance to proper femininity (Gerrard and Ball 128; Lockford 6). In this section, I focus in both possibilities working separately and simultaneously.

Women’s moral and bodily ambiguities are “always already abject” (Lockford 12): they can be both the embodiments of the sacred maternal—whether they are capable of bearing children or not—, at the same time they are profane, as their bodies produce and eliminate a wealth of “unclean” and “impure” fluids (Lockford 12). Similarly, Cathy

Cohen contends that poor women of color's sexualities and reproductive choices are constantly portrayed as pathological and in need for state control (40). As I demonstrated in chapter two, Rio's funk has been targeted by state and media's investigation, when the matter is women having sex in *baiões*. Accordingly, the resistance to the *funkeiras'* performances is due to the fact that they enact what is deemed profane and obscene about women's bodies and sexualities, especially as poor Black and Brown women.

As established in Chapter Three, I am using a definition of performance that does not prioritize aesthetics over the everyday, which I find appropriate to analyze the performances of the *funkeiras*, whose stage performances are constantly informed by everyday issues. Also, in order to understand their performances of femininity and heterosexuality on stage, it is imperative to examine how they deal with those issues on a daily basis. This section focuses on both realms as they complement each other. However, even though I am relying on a relatively loose separation between stage and everyday, I acknowledge that the stage presents distinct performative possibilities. After attending performances and conducting interviews, I recognize that the stage can be an empowering space where women can play with diverse subject positions and different versions of femininity. Or yet, according to Muñoz, where they can identify with dominant culture while resisting it.

Contemporary normative femininity brings back the idea that women who perform femininity in an excessive manner, in comparison to proper white bourgeoisie femininity are "subjectivities out of control" (Skeggs qtd. in Gerrard and Ball 122). In a neoliberal context in which valuable individuals are those who know how to self-govern according to rules of the market (Lemke 34), those who either ignore or misinterpret

them can be potentially deemed abject (Gerrard and Ball 128). Hence, to properly perform femininity entails having control over the body and bodily impulses, as well as of language and posture, especially in public.

*Funkeiras* openly perform about being “out of control” both in terms of bodily desires and impulses, as well as out of men’s control, as I analyze later in the chapter. The symbolic rules that drive traditional femininity have a lot to do with “appropriateness.” These rules, which are at times reinforced by the *funkeiras*, are broken when performed in exaggerated, excessive ways. What is considered excessive or inappropriate has a lot to do with other performative and bodily markers, such as socioeconomic class and race.

The epigraphs opening this section give us a hint about the diverging positions of the *funkeiras* when it comes reflecting on their everyday lives and their stage performances. In a lot of ways, those performances conflict, meaning they may diverge even when the artist claims to be “the same person” on and off stage. However, admitting that the stage can be a site of empowerment also inspires caution because different stages emanate distinct types of power. The stages of most of the performances I attended, in clubs, seemed to be a space of moral and bodily liberation, except for one. Not by chance, that “stage,” figuratively speaking, since there was no actual structure resembling a stage, was located in a very masculine environment: a *baile* inside a favela in the outskirts of Rio. Ultimately, the self-empowering songs or even the tracks that make fun of men and other women were replaced by topics that were gang-related and male-centered explicit sex. I am affirming this space was oppressive based on limited data and experience. A



thorough analysis of *bailes* in favelas ruled by drug lords is needed in order to illuminate the specific gender dynamics of those spaces.

“On stage, we are characters,” says Andressa, the lead singer from all-female funk group Fetixe. I found this to be a common response when I asked the *funkeiras* about their work. MC Dandara agrees with this position by saying, “I face funk as though I’m an actress. So much so that when I started to sing dirty songs, I was still a virgin. I was singing ‘You can call me a whore/I’m gonna fuck all night’ [“You Can Call Me a Whore”] and had never ‘given away the doll’s mouth’ [Dandara’s metaphor for having sex]” (MC Dandara). What is important to note from this position is that women do not necessarily condemn their stage personas or that they do not have anything in common with them. They perform from distinct standpoints—as wives, as mistresses, as single women, as femme fatales, as envied women. This is one way, I found, they make sense of their stage performances in relation to their everyday lives.

Even MC Katia, who became famous for emphatically singing about the wife/mistress relationship admits, “MC Katia is a character, and Katia is Katia” (MC Katia Fiel). She sees her stage performances as having an empowering impact on women’s lives because, according to her, it changed the dynamics between wives and mistresses, as well as wives and husbands.

Before I started to sing, the wife would see the mistress going out with her husband and couldn’t do anything, or did not have the courage to do anything about it, fearing that people would know she has been cheated on. She wouldn’t acknowledge that [situation]. So when I went on stage and started to tell those stories, something changed for faithful women. Now they even beat up their husbands [laughing]! (MC Katia Fiel)

Another position concerning stage and everyday performances is when MCs say they are the same person on and off stage—either their “true selves” or a character 24/7. Like MC Pink’s statement in the epigraph, MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk also states that she is a full-time character: “My life is already on stage... walking down the streets to me is like being on stage” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk). This is not a position she holds for *funkeiras* in general, just to herself. While talking about Valesca Popozuda and her song “Today I won’t give, I’ll distribute,” which refers to sexual activity, MC Paloma points out that Valesca is misjudged by others based on stage performances when in reality, “that’s a character” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk). She reaffirms that in her case, it is different. Whether or not it is a coincidence that a trans woman declares she performs 24/7, it is certainly an indication of the fanciful sex/gender correspondence (Butler “Performative Acts”). MC Paloma also highlights the fantasy of “natural” femininity by bringing up the distinctiveness of her own gender performance: “I am what I am. Can you imagine if I went on stage with this booming voice... singing “down, down, down’ [with high pitch tone], can’t do it! I’m not an illusion; this is what I am” pointing both hands to her body. “And you want to be accepted like this” I ask, rhetorically. “No, I *am* accepted like this” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk), she firmly replies.

On an apparent opposite side of the performing spectrum, MC Pocahontas suggests she is not a character on stage; she is “the same person [on and off stage]” (MC Pocahontas), meaning she is “real” in everyday and aesthetic performances. Curiously, considering she is MC Pocahontas on stage, it is not clear whether she meant she stays in character off stage, since she is “the same person.” Additionally, while telling me some

of her everyday experiences, she mentioned a few times that people around her call her “Poca” which is a short version of Pocahontas (and not Viviane, her given name). Even though MC Pocahontas tries to give a sense of coherence to who she is on and off stage, “the same person,” she inevitably performs femininity in diverse ways—faithful woman, single woman, the one who likes to flaunt material possessions, and the one who enjoys one-night stands—and even from the perspective of another woman. For instance, she performed the song “Agora Eu Tô Assim” (Now I’m Like This) in the show I attended in July 2013. When I asked about the lyrics during our interview the month before, she told me her fiancée’s sister wrote the song for her to perform. The chorus repeats the line “Now I’m like this/doing silly things/during the day I’m married/at night I’m single” (MC Pocahontas “Agora Eu Tô Assim”) while the melody of the song has a playful whistle along the powerful *tamborzão*. The other woman feels that MC Pocahontas is powerful and free enough to perform the song, which expresses how she aspired her life to be like (MC Pocahontas).

This example serves two purposes: one, it challenges the MC’s statement about “being the same person” on and off stage, as it either means she is always on character—she is MC Pocahontas 24/7—or that her assertion is not supported by her stage performances, which include enacting another woman’s specific desires. Second, performing her sister-in-law’s wishes is possibly empowering for both women in general, as it gives MC Pocahontas another opportunity to enact distinct aspect of femininity, which will be analyzed later in this chapter, at the same time it echoes the wish for a different life coming from a woman who does not have access to the stage.

When a performance breaks with art by depicting “real” acts, by enacting, say, social degradation instead of representing it, it becomes a transgressive act with “the power to defy clean representations which order ‘proper’ art or politics” (Foust 153). The *funkeiras* break with “proper” symbolic representations to “mediate the immediate” in their staged performances when they both sing about those “very real acts,” at the same time their bodies enact some of those “real acts” when they move with the beats of funk, “rendering the mediated immediate” (153).

Performances have the possibility to disrupt tidy identity categories while defying “clean representations” (Fenske 6; Foust 153), as exposed in chapter three. The *funkeiras*’ performances entail different embodiments of femininity. By actually embodying and performing different characters on stage—acting tougher when singing about female competition or enacting sexual moves when singing about sex—, representing their literal, material acts “is to collapse symbolic space” (Schneider 6). Here, I also bring back Foust’s point that the transgressive quality of a given live performance is in its “hybrid incarnations of the body-and-language... [which] exceed[s] representation through a heightened (but not exclusive) corporeal presence” (145). The women in Rio’s funk enact femininity in contradictory ways, as the examples in this section demonstrate, breaking with “clean” and well-defined symbolic representations of what it means to be properly feminine on and off stage, but especially on. In that sense, the stage indeed becomes a space of performative possibilities. Some of the women in the funk movement openly recognize this aspect of aesthetic performances: “I can say anything I want to on stage” (Deize Tigrana).

Aesthetic performances are possibly empowering, but not always. As also noted in chapter three, pure corporeality does not undo subjugation. In fact, live performances can become a burden for marginalized folks. Because women in the funk movement occupy simultaneous positions of privilege in relation to other women in their communities, and of marginalization in comparison to men in the funk movement and other mainstream female artists, they may deal with some of the burden of liveness discussed by Muñoz (187). Thus, while the ephemeral aspect of live performances may be possibly transgressive and resistive to limiting official identities and confining clean representations, it can also present “an extremely circumscribed temporality” (Muñoz 189) that disregards the women’s past while denying the performers a sense of futurity. MC Dandara and MC Pink feel creatively limited by the need to entertain audiences in order to being successful in the funk movement. Both of them tried to perform what they see as the reality of the life in the *favelas*, something that men were able to do successfully in the 1990s (Facina “Não Me Bate Doutor”). While performing about sex and relationships can be empowering, MC Dandara feels burdened for not being able to successfully express the historical and everyday difficulties of life in Rio’s slums (MC Dandara).

In the next subsection, I examine how the *funkeiras* talk about femininity in the interviews, as well as how they enact femininity on stage. One aspect of femininity within the funk movement that stood out during the interviews was “vulgar performance” or the “vulgar woman.” The *funkeiras* tend to point out what they dislike about other women’s performance of femininity, while relativizing their own, reinforcing the idea that they negotiate femininity in non-linear, ambiguous ways.

## Femininity and Vulgarity

When I went to [TV Show] Super Pop, Luciana Gimenez, told me, “Wow, Poca, you’re so pretty, but you’re so skinny! When they told me [your name was] Pocahontas, I was expecting a muscular woman with silicone implants.” I thought to myself, “Is she trying to say I’m not hot?” I stopped and thought, fuck, there’s only muscular women in funk, only women with silicone implants, if I was also like that, I would be just another [*funkeira*], isn’t that true [asking the audience, who cheers]? And people want new stuff, do you know what I mean? I’m not belittling anyone, it’s like my dream [to be muscular], but it doesn’t fit me. I can workout for a whole year straight, I don’t get muscular, I just don’t. Congrats to all who workout and are hot, congrats to you all who are skinny. By the way, “a hot woman” is not just the one with big boobs, not just the one with a big butt, nor the one with a curvy body. A hot woman is the one who does it good [shaking the hips all the way down to the floor. Audience cheers loudly]. (MC Pocahontas, live performance, July 2013).

MC Pocahontas is a relatively tall and fit brown woman. She has green eyes and waist-length straight black hair, which is actually comprised of extensions. In the performance I describe above, the MC wears a black cap with yellow brim; her hair is tied on the right side, fall over her shoulder, going all the way down to her waist. Her denim shorts are

long enough to cover the very top of her thighs, and the black and silver cropped top goes all the way to her upper stomach. On her feet she wears a pair of black high-top sneakers with gold studs—“I never wear high heels” (MC Pocahontas, personal interview), which is uncommon among women in Rio’s funk.

Though Pocahontas’ style is not common in Rio’s funk, it now seems to be somewhat popular, especially among younger *funkeiras*, such as MC Marcelly and MC Ludmilla. In fact, she claims that no woman in funk used to wear more laid-back, sporty clothes, and straight brim caps, and now they are all “copying” her style (MC Pocahontas, personal interview). This is partially true. Deize Tigrona has been performing in more gender-neutral sporty clothes since the mid-2000s. That is not to say MC Pocahontas’ style is gender-neutral; it is, however, different from the hyper-feminine trend that has been popular among *funkeiras* since women started as dancers in the early 2000s.

A good reason for MC Pocahontas to invest in this new style, besides wanting to differentiate herself from other *funkeiras*, is because she believes women in funk have a “bad image,” specifically because of certain bodily and performative markers, such as the silicone implants, the muscles, the clothes, and the sexually-charged lyrics. All of that encourages her to try “to revolutionize funk, to show that funk is not only about favela, about vulgarity, about denigrating women’s image” (personal interview). Unlike her interaction with the audience described above, MC Pocahontas establishes during our interview an inevitable connection between gender performance, singing songs with sexual content, and body markers, such as enlarged breasts and buttocks, as well as a strapping body. Consequently, MC Pocahontas considers women who enact this type of

femininity “vulgar” and their work denigrating to other *funkeiras*: “Thank god this is ending in funk” (MC Pocahontas).

At first, I thought there were a few inconsistencies in MC Pocahontas’ interview and her stage performance. After all, she performs the belligerent faithful fiancée (analyzed later in the chapter), the woman who is married during the day and single at night, as well as the woman who “sits shaking the hips,” a double-meaning reference to dance moves and sexual positions. However, offstage she cherishes traditional femininity by bringing her Christian values, by condemning dirty funk and women who sing it, by wishing to get married and have kids—“I was born to be a mother” (MC Pocahontas), and asserting that singing about jealousy and female competition does not degrade women. I thought that perhaps the contradictions between discourse and performance were specific to the particular MC.

After interviewing other *funkeiras* and attending live performances, I started to notice a common tendency: women in Rio’s funk often, not always, relativize what it means to be “vulgar.” By that, I mean that the women conceive what it means to act in a “vulgar” manner in diverse, non-strict ways: from singing about sex in general to being able to talk about sex without letting men degrade women, and, finally, feeling free to perform about sex-related issues using profanity, as long as the actual stage performance does not have overly sexual dance moves and “indecent” outfits. Overall, being vulgar usually means whatever *other* women in funk do, even if there are many similarities among their different performances of femininity. Ultimately, performing about sex is not necessarily considered vulgar, depending on who is the performer. Thus, while they act in ways that could be considered excessively (or pathologically) feminine and hyper-



heterosexual, as I show in this subsection, many of them try to escape the stigma of being “vulgar” by both highlighting conforming aspects of their performances of femininity, as well as by relativizing what is appropriate for women in general and within the funk movement.

These disidentifying movements seem to be central in understanding Rio’s funk dynamics in general, but especially in terms of performances of gender and sexuality. Muñoz’ idea of queers of color conforming while resisting dominant culture (19) fits well in the way the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity because it highlights the dubious and contradictory ways they deal with moral issues, especially in relation to sex, the body, and stage performances. In fact, the performance of the *funkeiras* could be deemed queer, making Muñoz’ point even more relevant to this study. Here I return to Cathy Cohen’s argument that heterosexuality can be deemed pathological, especially for poor women of color (40). Talking about men and women who enjoy the *bailes*, Aragão reinforces this view by writing that

The social context of ignorance, poverty, lack of culture and education brings principles and values that are not concerned with the fact that women are not only worthy as “mothers”, “housewives” or sexual objects. People who enjoy singing and dancing funk, going to *bailes* and exposing themselves sexually, have no awareness that there are more intelligent and productive roles women can partake. (Aragão 80)

In the above passage, Aragão clearly makes a connection between poverty, bad sexual conduct, and sexism, reinforcing Cohen’s point on how heterosexuality does not signify normativity. Accordingly, though the *funkeiras* enact feminine heterosexuality, they do so in non-normative ways—with exaggeration and inappropriateness—and that could be considered “queer” (Cohen 40). Cohen suggests that a more nuanced understanding of

“queer,” one that breaks with the duality heterosexuality and “everything queer,” is necessary in for a truly intersectional coalitional work (22).

This tense negotiation with femininity and heterosexuality is also part of Rio’s funk vernacular and its relationship with dominant culture: It is not surprising that a lot of the women in Rio’s funk that I have interviewed try to relativize what is appropriate, which is something that could help them move from a possible position of marginality. Ultimately, marginalized bodies tend to benefit from performances of ambiguity precisely because they destabilize normative identity categories that are generally oppressive to them (Calafell 90).

MC Paloma also relativizes what could be considered vulgar for women in funk, but in a very specific manner. She told me that in her case, as a trans woman, people in the audience might already come in with prejudiced assumptions so “Can you imagine me going on stage and singing obscenities?” When I asked her why singing about sex would not be beneficial for her as a trans woman, she replied “Because it would be very easy for people to think, ‘well, she’s trans, she’s a prostitute’” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk). Thus, her statement suggests a strategic anti-sex approach to dirty funk: singing about sex could not only hurt her reputation, but also her physical and moral safety as a trans woman.

Singing about sex is not always inappropriate, according to MC Paloma. When I tried to reiterate what she told me about singing “heavy” sexual songs, she interrupted me and said, “No, wait. If it’s a joke, then it’s ok. Playfulness, mockery is one thing... I have a song saying, ‘I sit, I bounce, I shake my hips’” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk). The verb “to sit” is a common example of how double meaning works in funk, since the

acts described in the lyrics are references to both dance moves and sexual positions. She clarified, then, that performances with sexual undertones are not necessarily vulgar; the issue is more in the use of sexually charged lyrics to “put women down” (MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk).

Often, what is also going to be considered vulgar is related more to the body and bodily performances, as MC Pocahontas’ live performance and interview suggest. This means that women can use profanity on stage, can sing about sexual activities and desires yet they will not consider themselves vulgar because they are not dressed in skimpy clothes, nor they are dancing in a sexually suggestive manner. MC Katia also associates vulgarity with the way some women present themselves on stage, though with not as much conviction as MC Pocahontas.

MC Katia The Faithful does not perform solely about wives and mistresses fighting for each other’s respect, which I explore in the next section of this chapter. The MC has other songs in which the lyrics are either blatantly sexual or have double-meanings. In “Me Xinga, Me Chama de Puta” (Call Me Names, Call Me a Bitch), for instance, she repeats the title of the song a few times, completing the verse with “...that I bounce in your dick” (MC Katia and DJ LD de Realengo “Me Xinga, Me Chama de Puta”). In aesthetic terms, this type of song is commonly known in the funk movement as an “assembly”—when the *tamborzão* is accompanied by loops in the MC’s rapping. “Olha a Malandragem” (Check Out The Trickery) is another example of a sexually suggestive song by the same MC Katia. She sings that “The DJ here in the *baile* only plays dirty things... here I sit and shake my hips and then I do a massage!” (MC Katia

and Brabo Produções “Olha a Malandragem”). In this case, “to sit” and “to shake the hips” could either mean dance moves or references to sexual positions.

Still on the subject of vulgarity, MC Katia explained that as a woman who is an MC and not a dancer, for instance, she feels that there is a demand for her bodily performance to be more sexual: “I’m there on stage, I’m an MC. So there’s a lot of people... the male audience that think that for me to be an MC I have to, how can I say this, be like Valesca [Popozuda]; put breasts [implants], butt [implants], wear a short stuck in the ass, rub my ass in their faces. No. I’m an MC, you know what I mean?” (MC Katia). I inquired how does that affect her, when she replied with no hesitation: “I think it’s ridiculous. Then I can say [funk] is denigrating women’s image. Then how can it not be said that funk is all about indecencies?” When I make the point that the type of performance she is condemning is successful outside the favelas, she agrees with me, then, again, recognizes that not all women can get away with acting in an overly sensual manner, especially when the body is involved “if someone films a girl in the favela doing the same [as *funkeiras* in clubs], she’s called a whore, a slut... but the *bonde* [female group] is up there [on stage] doing worse than the girl in the favela” (MC Katia, personal interview).

MC Katia makes it clear that what she considers to be inappropriate for women is related to how they use their bodies and not what they sing. Thus, she defends her position as an MC who uses swearing and sings dirty lyrics, but at least she is fully clothed on stage. However, in MC Katia’s case, there is more than just relativizing vulgarity: she conforms with dominant culture by accusing other women of using their

bodies to be successful, at the same time the MC recognizes throughout our interview the discrimination against poor women within the movement and society in general.

Similarly to MC Katia, who says she has enough talent, and hence does not need to rely on her body, MC Pink distinguishes between those two as well: “I want to be an artist, I don’t want to be a “popozuda” (big trunk)... [being an artist] is different from seeing a bunch of women [on stage] with their butts up in the air” (personal interview). MC Pink, who performs a pinup-like femininity—she is full figured, but is neither muscular nor does she have silicone implants—says she has been approached by DJs and managers a few times before with the same specific request: to be more “sexy,” which means wearing certain clothes, working out, and performing in a more sexually charged manner (MC Pink).

Being a dancer or an MC who also relies heavily on bodily performances carries a stigma among some of the women I interviewed, who, for most part, also seem to think it is not an issue to enunciate words with blatant sexual content. Moreover, wearing few clothes and using the body to enact what is suggested in the lyrics is morally degrading. MC and dancer Andressa from all female group Fetixe (Fetish) brings to light one possible reason explaining the prejudice against dancers: some men in the funk movement still think women are only fit for dancing, to be in the background. According to Andressa, it is because “They still don’t believe in women 100%... but I also think men are afraid of us, you know?” (Andressa Fetixe).

Women’s bodies are threatening to the mainstream image of Rio’s funk—they become the central reason the movement is considered obscene and morally condemnable. This is not necessarily surprising. Hill notes that the moving body has

power to escape controllable representations, as well as destabilize them (280). Thus, the power of an embodied performance is not that of *representing* femininity in non-traditional ways, but shedding light on the actual, material transgressions it may perform. Ultimately, an “out-of-control” performing body, like the bodies of dancers in Rio’s funk, is threatening because it has the potential to transgress “idealized myths” of femininity (Hill 280). Performative excesses of femininity, such as too much makeup, stiletto heels, tight clothes, weaves and hair extensions, as well as drinking, loudness, and exaggerated displays of heterosexuality are all condemned by contemporary notions of appropriate femininity (Gerrard and Ball 122-123). Here is also possibly to draw a parallel with Muñoz’ analysis of *chusmería* as those tacky and over-the-top performances associated with stigmatized class identity, race, gender, and sexuality (182) exposed in chapter three. “There is something monstrous about the *chusma*,” writes Muñoz (182).

Maysa Abusada (Sassy Maysa) walks on stage and immediately turns her back to the audience, slowly shaking her hips and buttocks in a sexual manner, throwing her hair side to side, while her two female dancers, one on each side of the stage, also dance with their backs to the audience, moving the hips frantically. Maysa is wearing a small, fringed black outfit that resembles a bikini, with shiny gold details in the front. She has long, waist-length dark hair and light brown skin. Her body is curvy—large breasts, large buttocks, and thick thighs. She embodies the woman MC Pocahontas described on that same stage a couple of weeks later, during her performance.

After the first minutes on stage, already facing the audience, Maysa asks, with a deep husky voice: “Who likes obscenities? Raise their hands! Who likes orgy? Raise their hands!” The dancer on the left, a curvy brown woman with long dark hair raises

both her arms. “Because now it will begin... now the orgy will begin!” The beats are intense at this point, with the *tamborzão* sounding like it is being impersonated by a human voice. Maysa is announcing the song “Vai Começar a Putaria” (“Let The Orgy Begin”), from male MC Mr. Catra. At this point, the dancers as well as Maysa are moving in a sexual, free-style manner, with plenty of hip and buttocks movements, and no choreographed steps.

Towards the end of the performance, Maysa invites another dancer on stage, a woman who does a cameo in her music video “Faz Quadrado Que Excita” (“Do Little Square That Arouses”), the track she is performing on stage. The dancer, a tall Afro-Brazilian wearing small, but properly feminine clothes, is considerably smaller in comparison to Maysa and the other two dancers. The MC lets the other woman take the center of the stage, while singing “I know what you like/I know what instigates you/Do little square that arouses.” The “little square” is a popular funk dance move that requires great flexibility, since the performer firmly moves her/his hips to form the shape of a square. Sensually moving up and down, and with great skill, the dancer follows Maysa’s instructions (“Attention, women! Lie on the floor!”), often turning her back to the spectators, lowering down her upper body, and putting her head between her legs, making eye contact with the audience.

Maysa’s exaggerated body shape, along with her tiny outfit, and dance moves that imitate sexual activity suggests a hyper-feminine stage persona. Her deep, husky, demanding voice contrasts with the overly feminine appearance and bodily performance. Normative femininity depends a correspondence of sex and gender that must seem “natural.” In the case of Maysa Abusada, however, the excessive and inappropriate way

she performs femininity breaks with the normative connection of sex and gender because there is a limit until it becomes abject, especially the bodily expression of undue sexual energy.

Valesca Popozuda (Valesca Big Trunk), lead singer of Gaiola das Popozudas (“Big Trunk’s Cage), is known for having started this type of performance in Rio’s funk. I attended a Gaiola das Popozudas’ performance in July 2013, right before Valesca left the group to invest in her now successful solo career (Marques “Valesca Popozuda Comemora”). The show was in a large venue in Rio’s West side, and it was promoted by the sound team Furacão 2000. Like Maysa, Valesca enters the stage after her two dancers had already been there for a minute or so. They all wear bright green shiny outfits, a body suit with see-through pieces that show a lot of skin, accentuating their voluptuous bodies. “I go to the *baile* without panties/I’ve always been a whore and nobody is holding me back!” (MC Dandara “Agora Eu Tô Piranha”), sings Valesca, changing the lyrics, on the verge of yelling.

When analyzing the lyrics of “Agora Eu Tô Piranha” (“Now I’m a Whore”), performed by Gaiola das Popozudas, but originally written by MC Dandara, along with others of similar style, Lopes suggests that “women in funk carnivalize and cite an inside out logic of the ‘active’ and the ‘passive,’ once they implement the ‘active’ logic for women” (182). She continues to explain that like in other Brazilian genres, in Rio’s funk “men and women are signified in a antagonist way by a vernacular that is highly sexist, in which masculinity is always valued, and women are portrayed through the ‘saint *versus* whore’ dichotomy” (Lopes 182). Lopes emphasizes that the “supposedly” empowering vocabulary women use are the result of the same dualist process. Thus, while the



*funkeiras* have agency for asserting themselves as women who like sex, they are not resisting traditional gender roles. Hence women in funk do not seek or fit a feminist agenda (195).

While there is merit in Lopes' arguments, I disagree the way women perform in funk is grounded in or results in reproduction of dichotomies. It would be extremely difficult, however, to disagree with Lopes without analyzing different dimensions of the *funkeiras*' performances. By focusing on binaries as an interpretive tool, it becomes hard to recognize the tensions, contradictions, and diversity of ways women negotiate femininity and heterosexuality, categories that are not monolithic. Ultimately, Lopes takes for granted what "feminism" and "feminist agenda" mean, placing an emphasis on the discursive rather than on the performative. There is also tendency to assume feminism is accessible and inclusive. As pointed out in chapter three, the focus on traditional femininity in opposition to a feminist identity was not able to thoroughly deal with the complexities of the over-the-top, excessive performances of femininity and heterosexuality of the *funkeiras*.

Differently, I propose that the visual and bodily elements described above are crucial to understand Valesca as a performer, as they communicate an ambiguous enactment of femininity: the hair extensions, along with the hyper-feminine clothes juxtapose with her deep husky voice and muscular, exaggerated body—a contrast that resembles that of a drag queen because it highlights, to some extent, the artificiality of fixed notions of gender expression (Gerrard and Ball 127; Shugart 96). Like Maysa, Valesca defies the neat separation between masculinity/femininity; at the same time she enables ambiguous readings that challenge hegemonic notions of womanhood because

she blurs the lines between those two supposedly opposite poles. Valesca, in that sense, performs a form of pathologized, abject femininity that is simultaneously excessive and nebulous.

Thus far, I have examined different ways women in Rio's funk negotiate femininity in paradoxical ways. Because the funk movement is an expression of a localized vernacular discourse, it has its own specific beauty standards that were built in relation to mainstream culture. Accordingly, they are not the same, but they are not disconnected. Mainstream media and *funkeiras* such as Valesca Popozuda, who is fairly popular, have a tense relationship that a lot of times revolves around the way she looks (Santos and Tecídio "Valesca Popozuda Repete"). Not by chance, now that the *funkeira* has gone mainstream, she has been losing weight and muscles in order to appeal to a larger audience (Ribeiro "Valesca Popozuda Perde 10 kg"; "Sou 89% Perfeita"). The complaints of women who feel their careers are affected because they do not look a certain way (muscular, with implants, straight hair extensions) mimic what already happens in Brazilian culture industry (Lopes 187). The tension among women because of that and because of other aspects in their performances of femininity also indicate that women are aware of those disparities not only when they acknowledge them during backstage interviews, but also by challenging other women and men on stage.

A final point I would like to examine in this section is women's acknowledgment of marginal positions, be they in terms of gender, class, or race. Recognizing the distinct performative possibilities of the *funkeiras* does not mean there are no limitations imposed on their careers. Most women gave ambiguous answers when I asked if they faced any specific challenges for being part of funk in general, and as women in the funk movement

specifically. The first answer is always quick and non-hesitant: “No.” After a couple of more specific questions, most of the answers changed. The last portion of this chapter is dedicated to what women say particularly about how men limit their role within movement. Thus, here I briefly explore what they say in terms of class, class and gender, as well as race and gender.

A lot of times, the *funkeiras* make comments related to class oppression that are not necessarily gendered, pertaining to the movement in general. An example of this is how they were unanimous in indicating why funk is scrutinized for exploring sex-related topics and other genres that are just as “indecent” do not. “It’s because funk comes from the favela” and “It’s poor people’s music” were repeated several times by different women, no matter what type of funk they perform. MC Paloma makes an interesting point: she says funk brings together a lot of people who face prejudice: “If someone points to me in a *baile* and say, ‘Look at that fag!’ I could reply ‘How about you, you’re black!’ By the way, I love Black men! (laughing), but yeah, we’re all the same, there’s no such thing [as prejudice] in funk” (MC Paloma).

During our interview, MC Katia was trying to make sense of the marginal position of funk within Rio’s culture. She goes back and forth, at times blaming the media for the way funk is seen, at times blaming other women. According to her, there’s an “ugly side of funk” that contributes to the movement’s relegation to the margins. At first, she argues that certain songs should not be allowed to be performed: “These women with their bare breasts and shorts that look like underwear, this contributes to what? To more people saying funk is all about obscenities” (MC Katia, personal interview). To my surprise, MC Katia immediately backs down: “But if you go to a rock concert you see the

same thing... in Axé<sup>15</sup>... ‘oh, ‘cause women in funk go on stage naked’. What about the ones who dance Axé, putting a bottle between their legs<sup>16</sup> and go down shaking their hips?” I ask her what is the difference, then, between these two cases: “The difference? Well, women in funk don’t use the bottle” (laughing). I laugh, and continue: “No, why do you think there is prejudice against funk?” Katia immediately says: “Oh, because it comes from the favela!” (MC Katia, personal interview).

MC Dandara believes funk carries a social stigma, especially the kind of funk she performs, using profanity and sexual content: “People drink, smoke, and have sex everywhere, but because funk came from the outskirts, from the favelas, it carries this stigma. They think people only go to the *bailes* to have sex... and who doesn’t like obscenities?” (MC Dandara, personal interview). As mentioned above, MC Katia also identifies a bias when it comes to women’s performances: poor women are often targeted with name-calling when they perform femininity in inappropriate ways.

“Dirtiness is all over media, and it’s not because of funk”, says Deize Tigrone in a personal interview. The MC from City of God thinks funk is singled out in media out of prejudice. “Prostituto” (“Male Prostitute”) is her latest song, released back in 2008. The lyrics are sexually explicit and even though the track is six years old, she still performs because of it. Deize says: “If I release two or three more like that one, it will be played. I know it. So I don’t want the media coming to me and saying that the lyrics are ‘too heavy,’ that it won’t be on TV ‘cause it’s ‘too heavy.’ Ok, so what? You know,

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<sup>15</sup> Axé is a Brazilian genre that became popular in the 1990s.

<sup>16</sup> This is in reference to the Axé song “Boquinha da Garrafa” (Bottleneck), a hit in Brazilian mainstream culture during the mid-1990s.

sometimes I ask myself, ‘Is this because I’m Black?’ This is with funk in general, not just with me” (Deize Tigrana).

Though not frequently, some of the *funkeiras* identify prejudice based on race, like Deize’s statement above, and one of them reported on the difficulties of being an aging woman in funk—she is 45 years old (MC Dandara, personal interview). MC Dandara thinks that her success is limited by racial discrimination. While lighter skinned women make money by posing for *Playboy* and other nude magazines, she says, laughing, that she would only be in the cover of *Globo Rural*<sup>17</sup> since, “No one wants to see a black doll’s mouth,” in reference to her vagina (MC Dandara).

In regards to race and gender in funk, Lopes points out that the tendency is to value whiteness, especially for women (187). No wonder many *funkeiras* look racially ambiguous in attempts to dissimulate or erase blackness. Hence the inclination of many *funkeiras* to have straightened blond hair and/or to wear blue/green contacts, like Valesca Popozuda. Curiously, this is a trend that also seems to be changing in comparison to when Lopes conducted her fieldwork. Among the women I interviewed, only MC Paloma had her hair dyed blond, but she is light skinned. Out of the four Afro-Brazilian women I interviewed, two of them had natural curly hair. Perhaps two of them wore blue/green contacts, but I could be wrong. The point is that the trend of valuing light skin women persist in funk, but at the same time, the standard is always changing.

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<sup>17</sup> *Globo Rural* is a farming magazine, often referenced in comparison to *Playboy* as a joke, since the latter presents models and celebrities in its cover, while the former publishes pictures of cows and other rural animals.

Acknowledging that women from the favelas are judged more harshly in comparison to others because they are poor, and often women of color, validates Cohen's point that heterosexuality is not a homogenized identity that automatically grants privilege to those enacting it (24). Many of the *funkeiras* do not perform "correct" or "worthy" femininity and heterosexuality, which places them in a morally ambiguous position: their performances could be considered normative only if their femininity and heterosexuality were embedded in whiteness and, especially, middle-classness. Furthermore, homogenized categories would not be able to account for their possible queer performances because heterosexual feminine women (mostly cisgender) should entail a privileged category in the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Next, I explore how women negotiate femininity with one another. Specifically, I am concerned with understanding the tense dynamics between popular characters in Rio's funk, the faithful wife and the mistress. Additionally, I also analyze a trend that is becoming increasingly popular especially among *funkeiras*, which are songs that highlight female competition, focusing on envy and jealousy. Though this new strand of funk reproduces some of the persistent aspects of female competition common in the movement, men are somewhat left out of the dispute.

*The relationship with other women: The faithful, the mistress, and the envious woman*

"To the lovers, this is my  
message  
The boyfriend is mine

When you really want it,  
You'll find yours  
And when you find yours  
Everyone is gonna fuck him”  
MC Katia, The Faithful

Female competition is part of the way women express themselves in Rio's funk since the beginning of their participation in the movement. Especially in the mid-2000s songs about the relationship between wives versus mistresses became popular. The MCs performing about that tense relationship rely on belligerent language and movements, especially when singing from the perspective of the wife, as well as scorn and playfulness when performing from both standpoints. What is interesting about this trend is that many *funkeiras* enact both roles and need the support of other women to impose respect in whatever is the perspective they are singing from.

Another tendency that is becoming increasingly popular is to mock other women for being jealous. The point of dispute, this time, is not so much men, but beauty, fame, and talent (MC Pocahontas, personal interview). Like in the performances of the faithful/lover, women rely on their *bondes* or groups of other women to support their position of being better than the rival group. Furthermore, in both trends, the *funkeiras* complicate issues of competition and solidarity, as I show next.

### **The “Faithful Wife” and the “Mistress”: Rage and Scorn Takes Center Stage**

MC Pocahontas says that there's nothing worse than a mistress. She says that today's *bailes* are “full of mistresses,” that those women enjoy being “the other

[woman]” (personal interview, July, 2013). At the time, she was engaged to her manager, MC Roba Cena (MC “Scene Thief”). In her stage performance I observed in July 2013, she performed one of her hits “Ah, eu mato” (Oh, I’ll kill her). She sings the first line “Oh, I kill her,” letting the spectators repeat the line. It is possible to clearly hear women singing to the lyrics. Several of them even raise their hand in the shape of a gun, including Pocahontas. She continues, with the help of the women in the audience: “If I see any whore hitting on my man...” She turns around, does quick hip moves, and then goes back to singing, pointing to someone in the audience: “... beat the shit out of her!” The song, melody, beats, and lyrics, have a belligerent tone—in fact, it is possible to hear gunshots in the chorus, after the line “If I see any whore hitting on my man...” Curiously, the aggressiveness is at times mixed with sexy dance moves. At some point, MC Pocahontas sensually shakes her hips, coordinating the moves with the sound of gunshots. The song continues:

Pocahontas is speaking up, don’t give me bullshit

Real women are happy with what they got

Messing with others’ men,

This is fucked up

If you mess with mine, look what I’ll do to you

Oh, I’ll kill her

If I see any whore hitting on my man (MC Pocahontas “Ah, Eu Mato”)

Threatening the lives of other women because of men is not exclusive of MC Pocahontas. Many other female MCs have performed from the standpoint of the “faithful” or the wife.



Deize Tigrona (Deize The Tigress), for instance, has a song called *Bandida* (female gangster) in which she describes what she would do to a woman sleeping with her man.

While performing this song to a German crowd, at Berlin club NBI in 2008, Deize sings:

My husband is shameless  
Shameless is the mistress  
But I am faithful, working hard 24/7  
And the bitch still wants to mock me? I'll show her some disposition...  
If I were a gangster and had a gun in my hand  
I would shot the bitch several times with a G-3 toy  
Get the bitch, beat her up, make her run naked! (Man Recordings)

Deize Tigrona sings aggressively, enacting the actions suggested in the lyrics. Several times, she shapes her hands in the form of a gun, while making noises of shots with her mouth followed by the line “get the bitch!” By noting that she is faithful and works hard, this should be more than enough to earn another woman’s respect. Instead, the mistress mocks her. Thus, even though she recognizes that men are also guilty in a situation of infidelity, the focus in on the mistress: the main responsibility for being disloyal comes from the other woman.

MC Katia Fiel (Katia The Faithful) has made a career out of calling out women who “disrespect” other women by being with married men. The MC’s first hit, “The Husband Is Mine,” notes exactly this. In a 2007 show recorded as part of sound team Furacão 2000’s DVD called *Twister: Treme Tudo* (Twister: Shake It All Up), MC Katia reinforces that idea by starting the performance with a rhyme saying that she doesn’t,

“fight over men/I simply stand up for myself/ I’m a hard worker who takes care of the house and the children... And now she mocks me...?”

When I met MC Katia Fiel, she did indeed look tough and certainly intimidating. We were in a funk industry meeting, at a mall in Madureira, in the north side of Rio. She was wearing a blue hoodie, hiding her face, keeping it quiet. Only later I found out she was embarrassed because her hair had been ruined after a rainstorm that happened that night. But MC Katia’s performance of femininity does carry a distinct toughness that I encountered only in one other female performer, MC Deize Tigrona. What is intriguing about MC Katia is that though she seems to believe in what she sings about wives and mistresses off stage as well, her position might not be as morally stiff as it may suggest at first—that mistresses all deserve to be beaten up and shamed.

In a July 2013 personal interview, MC Katia talked about the focus on the wife versus mistress theme. She said, “It’s like how I identify in funk, defending faithful women (or wives), so I make songs about that... it, it’s my ‘marketing’” (personal interview). By making it a brand and not necessarily a moral stance that persists off stage, MC Katia may be relativizing her position as the aggressive wife who publicly shames and condemns women who become involved with committed men. Perhaps if she was so invested in that “anti-lover” position off stage as well, she would have not mentioned that one of the *funkeiras* she respects the most is MC Tati Quebra Barraco, who in turn performs songs from the standpoint of the mistress (“If you can’t handle him/I’ll kiss your husband”) (personal interview).

Songs from the standpoint of the lover are also fairly popular (Lopes 175). Perhaps the style was established in the mid-2000s with MC Katia Fiel and MC Nem,

who enact a wife versus mistress rhyming battle on stage called “Duel.” There is certainly power struggle in the battle, especially over imposing one’s morals on the other woman. This specific performance also denounces a contrast in femininities. MC Nem wears tight pants with a shiny belt and a cropped top in the shape of a bra. Her moves imitate sexual activity, while she sings in a high pitch, almost yelling tone, “I’m fucking your husband!” Distinctively, MC Katia maintains more masculine mannerisms, looking and sounding “tough” like a male rapper, though she dresses somewhat feminine: tight jeans, fit black top, a black beanie, and black pumps. At some point, she sings loudly and furiously, thumping her chest, “I’m not worried/‘cause the husband is *mine!*”

Though the general tone of the performance is belligerent, mockery is also present and part of the dynamic of making the other woman look morally defeated. From the standpoint of the mistress, MC Nem mocks faithful wives for staying at home, doing housework, while mistresses are sleeping with their men, a common joke used from the point of view of the lover. MC Katia, on the other hand, points out that the mistresses are the ones being fooled, since men are using them.

These stage “duels” featuring MC Katia and MC Nem gained different versions until the two stopped performing together. On the second version of the battle between faithful and lover, recorded live in another *Furacão 2000* DVD, MC Katia’s performance of femininity is certainly different from the first version. The mockery and the aggressiveness persist, but the MC invests more in a sensual performance. MC Katia is wearing a denim short skirt and a yellow top with generous cleavage. There are also plenty of sensual hip moves this time as well, contrasting with the rap style hand gestures

in the first duel, indicating that to sing from the standpoint of the wife, she does not need to perform femininity in more “appropriate,” discreet ways.

Another *funkeira* who also pokes fun at other women by hitting on their husbands is singer and dancer Andressa, from all-female funk group Fetixe (Fetish). When I met Andressa in July 2013, I asked her about the track “Me Bate, Me Xinga” (Hit Me, Call Me Names) in which there is a line saying: “To me, that’s how it works with a man/if you don’t have yours, you borrow one from another woman.” The song does not attack faithful women; instead, it emphasizes the sexual needs in finding a man, regardless of his relationship status. I asked Andressa if it was challenging to sing that song as a married woman. With no hesitation, she says, “Not at all.” Specifically, Andressa says that, “Singing about sleeping with another woman’s husband doesn’t mean that I’m actually doing it; it’s all an act” (Andressa Fetixe). The *funkeira* highlights throughout the interview how much funk relies not only on the embodiment of different characters on stage, but also on strong sexual content, as previously mentioned.

Lopes notes that the enactment of those two characters, the faithful and the mistress, reinforces the virgin/whore binary, which pervades the construction of women’s identities in the West (176). In the updated version of such old duality, Lopes emphasizes that the focus is on who is “sexually superior” (176). Furthermore, winning the battle depends on declaring who is inferior. Finally, she also states that these performances are necessarily non-feminist, since feminism emphasizes solidarity among women. Thus, feminine funk cannot represent a type of feminist funk (176).

Pinho calls the wife/mistress duality a “controversial” topic noted in interviews he conducted in a community in the outskirts of Rio, back in 2003 and 2004 (138). About the relationship between these two characters, Pinho says:

Several songs reference the “faithful,” the “lover,” and the one called “late night snack,” the woman a guy chooses at the end of the night to have sex—or simply make out, with no consequences. There is a high moral and evaluative investment in these figures. If the faithful... is a “family girl,” who is not very “active,” nor have “too many friendships with men,” does not use swear words, does not wear short clothes and it is eventually a virgin, the lover has no morals, nor she deserves respect because she is easy and goes with any guy just to satisfy his needs and eventually her own. (Pinho 138)

Unlike Lopes’ interpretation of the relationship between the faithful and the lover being about sexual performance, Pinho focuses more on the moral tensions the two positions instigate. Pinho is also careful in evaluating the characters in terms of feminism, but he does suggest that women have a “clear sense of the gender inequalities and oppression” that permeate their relationships as “they talk about it with passion and detail” (135), which is a standpoint that is somewhat present in Lopes when *funkeiras* recognize that men can do whatever they want. However, what this also indicates is that there is still little attention dedicated to the relationship among women in the funk movement.

Even though this type of rivalry between women seems to revolve around men’s needs, two other possibilities emerge in this process: the first one is that in a lot of the songs men are almost out of the picture, as if this were an issue of imposing one’s will while gaining respect from other women; second, though the performances suggest competition between wives and mistresses, each position also relies on the support of other women in the audience. These possibilities may weaken the idea of polarity in the

performances because at the forefront of the issue is the demand for respect. This would also inevitably question the *funkeiras*' reinforcing the virgin/whore binary Lopes suggests, as well as the non-feminist stance of competition, instead of solidarity.

In a radio interview and live performance with all-female group As Abysolutas (The Absolute) I witnessed in July 2013, they performed the song “É Melhor Tu Dividir” (“It’s Better You Divide”). Michelle, the lead singer, is sitting behind a round table while performing because she is eight months pregnant. Josy, the oldest member of the group, a curvy and muscular Afro-Brazilian woman, dances with her back facing the DJ, who blushes when she shakes her hips and buttocks in a tight space inside the studio. The song is a negotiation between two women in which Michelle suggests they share what the man possesses so no one will leave the relationship empty-handed: “His money is mine/His car is mine/You can have the rest” (As Abysolutas). The song contrasts with other ones in which women are more concerned with keeping the man’s body. What is also different in this song is the fact that it is not really clear from which standpoint Michelle is singing; that of the wife or of the mistress.

The binaries competition/solidarity and virgin/whore do not define the supposedly non-feminist stance of the wife/mistress duality because they are not opposite poles in the *funkeiras*' performances. From a performance and disidentificatory standpoint, those opposed realms coexist in nuanced ways. It is even possible to say that solidarity enables competition. When MC Katia and MC Nem take turns on stage with the line “let’s look at the faithful/lover’s face and mock her,” they are indeed asking for the support of the women in the audience. When I asked MC Katia who she thought her audience was, she did not pause to respond: “Mistresses!” I was visibly surprised when I replied, “Really?!”

She went on to say that while faithful women feel MC Katia represents them, it is different with the mistresses because they look up to her (MC Katia, personal interview).

Another example of female solidarity happened during MC Pocahontas performance. A group of women watching the show in front of the stage were vigorously singing along the lyrics of “Oh, I’ll Kill Her,” with their hands in the shape of a gun, just like MC Pocahontas. This type of interaction happens in songs about the “envious woman” (the “recalcada”) as well, as I explore next, and it seems to facilitate the *funkeira*’s bonding with women in the audience. Moreover, it is not that there is no solidarity among women in these traditionally feminine and supposedly dual contexts; on the contrary, solidarity is a key element in forming alliances among women in *bailes*. Thus, more than being “active” in one’s own oppression, as implied in Lopes’ position (175), the *funkeiras* dynamically negotiate rivalry and alliances with other women on and off stage.

It is important to note that many of the female MCs and groups, Tati Quebra Barraco (“You are a whore now/I’ve been a whore for a long time”), MC Pocahontas (“Everything I have/your husband gave me”), and Gaiola das Popozudas (“wife my ass/you’re his little maid”) included, do not perform only from the perspective of the wife/committed women or the mistress/single women, hence undermining Lopes virgin/whore argument. This is a significant point because it would also mean that the *funkeiras* take turn in performing these roles, making them somewhat fluid and not necessarily opposite. More than singing from different perspectives, the way they perform femininity in those roles vary significantly, as previously exposed in MC Katia’s distinct performances of femininity in the first and second battle with MC Nem. She was

essentially enacting the same role, that of the faithful wife, but she negotiates femininity in those two performances in very distinct ways: on the first show, she looks more properly feminine and sounds and acts angrier and somewhat masculine; on the second one, her performance is more sexual and more feminine, conveying that the faithful wife does not have to perform the “virgin” or the morally pure woman.

Another side of female competition in the funk movement that has become increasingly popular is the idea of the “envious woman.” In this case, women compete over physical appearance, material possessions, and social status. Many of the active female funk performers analyzed in the present study are now popular because of songs about jealousy. Next, I analyze some of the general themes present in this facet of female rivalry, which, like the wife/mistress relationship, reinforces ideas of competition while also fostering solidarity among women, and the forming of female *bondes* (gang, crew). Another possible characteristic of this new segment in feminine funk in comparison to the wife/mistress duality is that men are for most part excluded from the songs.

### **“Recalque”: The Buzzword for “Envious Women”**

“You walk by my street

Don’t even look at me

When you’re with your gang

You want to make jokes

But this is because...

You’re jealous

You’re jealous



You want to be me  
You're a fan in disguise"

Tati Quebra Barraco

If the battles between committed and single women dominated the mid- to the end of the 2000s, in the 2010s, another topic in the female funk world is becoming increasingly popular: the “recalque” or envy women feel of one another. As mentioned above, this is not really a new phenomenon. Deize Tigrona (Deize The Tigress) says that back in the late 1990s, female stage battles were very popular in City of God. Teenage girls and their *bondes* (crew, gang) would go on stage to talk about each other’s clothes, hair, and appearance in general, always with a mix of aggression and scorn (Deize Tigrona). That trend turned into the sexual phase of the 2000s (Lopes 157), focused on the interactions of men and women, and did not pick up in the movement in terms of female rivalry until the songs about wives and mistresses became popular in the mid-2000s. Even though there are similarities between what Deize Tigrona lived and witnessed in City of God, the “jealous woman” has specific contextual characteristics, such as the increase in consumption by lower classes in Brazil (“In Brazil, An Emergent Middle Class”).

The “envious woman” trend is both similar and different from the faithful/lover segment. It is similar because the tension between competition and solidarity persists, and different as it is less grounded in sexual and moral choices women make in relationships with men. Because it is relatively new, I have no knowledge of research done in the topic. Consequently, this section will be somewhat descriptive, as I will rely on song lyrics and

interviews I conducted with the *funkeiras* to try and unpack the theme of the “jealous woman.”

“This envy thing is another topic... that one MC had the idea to talk about and then it started to propagate among the other women to change things up a little bit [in funk]. Tomorrow it will be something else” (Andressa Fetixe). The MC Andressa refers to is probably MC Beyonce (now MC Ludmilla), who in 2012 released the song “Fala Mal de Mim” (Say Shit About Me). After several attempts, I was still not able to contact MC Ludmilla, whom I found out later, used to be part of the same production company as MC Pocahontas (they are from the same area in Rio). MC Pocahontas told me that their then manager and Pocahontas’ fiancé, dropped MC Ludmilla from the production company, forcing her to give up the stage name, MC Beyonce. Because I did not interview Ludmilla nor have I seen one of her live performances, I will focus on what happened to the “envious woman” after her hit song.

“Fala Mal de Mim” (Say Shit About Me) generated responses from other women. The epigraph in this subsection, “Tu Quer Ser Eu” (You Wanna Be Me), a 2013 song by Tati Quebra Barraco references MC Ludmilla’s song by repeating the expression “fan in disguised.” Other women set out to provoke MC Ludmilla, such as MC Katia, who told me she was involved in a controversy with MC Ludmilla’s fans because of a response song to “Fala Mal de Mim.” According to Katia, it all started when she saw a news report on a student who had been beaten up right outside of school by another girl and two other women in her family, in what she called “bullying.” “That story marked me because I was bullied in school” (MC Katia).

Soon after the news story, Katia says MC Ludmilla's song started to play in the local *baile*, especially the chorus: "Don't look to the side, the gang is walking by/if you fuck it up/things will get ugly" (MC Beyonce "Fala Mal de Mim"). Katia felt that was setting a bad example for girls in the communities who were, according to her, reacting to little misunderstandings with other girls by beating them up in groups (or *bondes*). Her song, "Froxona" (Big Coward), challenges the idea of a group of women or young girls beating up a woman or girl by herself: "a real woman deals with her shit on her own" (MC Katia "Froxona"). After the song was posted on Youtube and it started to circulate, MC Ludmilla's fans were enraged as they started to attack Katia on social media—two Facebook accounts were deleted with the help of the platform's "report" system (MC Katia). MC Katia was obviously accused of being jealous of MC Ludmilla, who was gaining nationwide fame at the time (MC Katia).

Some of the *funkeiras* believe women in general are jealous of one another. MC Pocahontas, for instance, thinks that women do not compete with men in the funk movement; they compete amongst themselves, especially in terms of looks, possessions, and popularity (MC Pocahontas). In this trend, men are slowly out of the equation. Even though MC Pocahontas points out that this kind of competition pervades women's relationships in funk, it seems like she refers to it as a trait of their relationships, but not necessarily a defining one. This is something that happens among women, but it does not mean women are all enemies of one another. On the contrary, she needs other women to legitimate the feeling of being envied.

Halfway through MC Pocahontas's performance I attended, she started a conversation (the third of the night) with a woman in the audience by saying, "Are you

hot?” She continues by addressing the whole audience: “Wherever there are hot and powerful women, there are people bothered by it. Am I right?” It is possible to hear women in the audience screaming in agreement. And here there’s a lot of women who cause an impact, who are beautiful.” When the beat starts, as she also begin singing “She’s jealous of me/My presence bothers you/Sorry/Sorry/Sorry I’m hot.” While singing the lyrics, MC Pocahontas’ bodily performance is a mix of somewhat aggressive hand gestures towards the audience, as if sending them a message, and sensual hip moves while saying the line, “Sorry I’m hot.” The second portion of the song is performed in the first person of plural, instead of the singular, including other women in it. The performance translates well the tensions that surround women relationships in the funk movement: they are both moves by alliances with and opposition to other women, as also exposed by the previous section. Except that here, men are out of the equation.

The characteristic mockery present in other strands of the funk movement certainly persists in the “envious woman” trend. In fact, *funkeiras* such as Andressa from Fetixe and MC Pink both believe that, like with the wife/mistress topic, there is indeed a lot of playfulness among women when the topic is jealousy (Andressa Fetixe; MC Pink). MC Pink, who performs mostly “funk melody,” a romantic and melodic strand of funk, says “recalque” (jealously) is a humorous game: “I think it’s cool ‘cause they are there, talking about each other’s personalities, each other’s clothes, and it becomes a joke between them.” I ask MC Pink if she thinks this kind of topic in funk pushes women into disunion: “Not at all! They are more than united! They enact this little war on stage, but after the show they are hugging. It’s between women. They understand each other and solve things between them. It’s not like it’s a man that comes to them and says things...

it's different [when men talk to women]. We, women, we know how to talk to each other" (MC Pink).

The two *funkeiras* bring up an important point about the relationship between women in funk: what are the possible ways women relate to one another in the backstage besides being competitive (or competing for men)? The recognition of funk's characteristic playfulness exists both in terms of funk as a popular/folk genre (which usually considers only men) (Herschmann and Freire Filho 64; Lopes 158) and in the relationships between men and women (Herschmann and Freire Filho 64). However, I have not yet encountered studies recognizing that the genre's friskiness includes the *funkeiras'* performances. MC Pink's testimonial confirms that humor is an important element for feminine funk as well. Accordingly, humor serves both to shed light into the performative aspects of gender role-playing, as well to expose their ridiculousness.

The fact is that this strand of funk has put women back in the corporate media spotlight. Though MCs such as Pocahontas, Beyonce, and the group Gaiola das Popozudas (Big Trunk's Cage) were fairly popular in mid-2013, it was nothing compared to former *funkeira* turned pop star Anitta and her "Show das Poderosas" (Powerful Women's Show). It was then that the topic "jealously" crossed the boundaries of *bailes* (Antunes "Could Brazil's Latest Music"). Anitta was already out of the funk circuit in mid-2013, though the popularity of her song remained—every single *baile* I attended between June and August 2013 played her hit song.

It was around the same time, in July 2013, that Valesca Popozuda, leader of Gaiola das Popozudas, released her first single as a solo artist, even though she was still performing with the Cage until the end of August. "Beijinho no Ombro" (Kiss on the

Shoulder) works as a message to envious women when it suggests they “pick up your jealousy and go fuck yourself” (Vianna, Vieira, and Pardal 2013). The song invokes the common elements in this strand of funk, notably humor (“I can’t barely see you from the VIP area”) and belligerence (“If we clash, there will be gunshots, beat ups, and bombs”). “Beijinho no Ombro” became one of five hits in Brazil’s 2014 carnival (Faria “Lepo Lepo e Beijinho no Ombro São os Hits de Carnaval”), turning Valesca into the most famous *funkeira* in the country (Bergamo “Valesca Popozuda Está Cobrando R\$ 45 mil”). Because this is an event that is happening right now, it would be difficult to predict what it represents to women in the funk movement.

Based on this section’s analysis, it is possible to conclude that the way *funkeiras* negotiate femininity with one another involves not only traditionally feminine roles, such as wives and mistresses, but it also contains doses of aggressiveness and humor. Therefore, they do not simply perform in one corner of the gender polarity. Hence, it is limiting to interpret the ways they play and dwell with femininity in dichotomous manners. Muñoz warns us that invoking traditional notions of identification that prioritize metaphorical processes, such as song lyrics, translating them into tidy systems of identity limits the ambiguous possibilities certain performances suggest (12).

Acknowledging that competition and solidarity happen concurrently is in line with disidentification’s recognition that contradictory elements coexist in certain individual and group performances (Muñoz 12). This approach does not suggest that the *funkeiras* do not conform to systems of domination, such as patriarchy under capitalism, as suggested by Aragão, Lopes, and E. Oliveira. It does, however, question the hasty conclusions based mostly on lyrical analyses. Above all, what I also demonstrate here is

that *funkeiras* negotiate relationships with other women in diverse ways, from opposition to solidarity, which ultimately emphasizes the heterogeneity in their gender performances.

I would like to close this section highlighting possible demonstrations of solidarity among women in funk that came up during the interviews. To my surprise, *funkeiras* often praise each other's work. MC Pocahontas, for instance, told me how much she likes MC Marcelly's "neurotic" style (in the sense of "cool," "sick") (MC Pocahontas). Andressa from Fetixe spent about five minutes talking about her pal, Mulher Melancia (Watermelon Woman), who, she points out, is often criticized for singing sexual songs in skimpy clothes: "I admire Andressa [Mulher Melancia] so much. She puts her body on the line. She is out there, performing in her tiny shorts, always in the media. This is what's being a *funkeira*, this is what it means to put oneself on the line" (Andressa Fetixe). Andressa Fetixe also highlights that she never judges women for what they do on stage. MC Paloma says Valesca Popozuda can and should sing "Today, I won't give/ I'll distribute" (Gaiola das Popozudas), a song that references the frequency with which the *funkeira* will have sex, because "she'll distribute what is hers!" (MC Paloma, personal interview). MC Katia and MC Dandara praised Tati Quebra Barraco's boldness in the early years of women in the funk movement, and MC Pink says she likes MC Pocahontas' song "Powerful Woman" so much that she performs it in her own show (MC Pink).

Especially since the late 2000s, women have been coming together to challenge men in various ways: from questioning their sexual power and free pass to cheat, to declaring financial independence from them. In the final section of this chapter, I explore

how the *funkeiras* perform femininity in relation to men. Specifically, I examine romantic and sexual relationships, as well as women's financial dependence/independence and autonomy within the movement.

### *The Relationship with Men: Love, Sex, and Business*

After years of struggle against criminalization during the 1990s, where *funkeiros* were represented as the "cause of several social ills" (Lopes 41), as well as occasional popularity in mainstream media, funk changed in the 2000s. The change was not only in the content of the lyrics; Rio's funk was also moving from the beats of Miami Bass to the both indigenous and hybrid *tamborzão*. To accompany the new beat, lyrics with erotic and sexual content, as well as a more visible involvement of female MCs with the movement.

Though this new trend was consolidated in the 2000s, some *funkeiras* argue they were already part of the movement in the 1990s. Deize Tigrone, specifically, says that she was already singing songs with sexual undertones in the late 1990s, when corridor *balies* were popular. At the time, it was very common for funk parties in favelas to have fights. In City of God, however, they had a *baile* that was not a corridor type, the Coroado. DJ Duda, the man several MCs point out as being the creator of *tamborzão*, started to organize a stage battle between female groups, or *bondes*, particularly between Bonde das Bad Girls (Bad Girls' Gang) and Bonde do Fervo (Hotness Gang). The girls would rap in each other's face, as though they were performing a battle. Deize points out that there were not real fights involve, they were just "rhyme battles." It was in one of



those battles that girls started to sing about sex (Deize Tigrana). The *funkeira* claim, thus, that women were the ones who actually started this trend.

Performances about sex definitely became funk's mark in the 2000s. Lopes argues that the "erotization of Rio's funk" cannot be seen as an isolated phenomenon for a two of reasons: the first one is that double-meanings and parodies are common in Brazilian folk culture, especially when the topic is sex (158). Similarly, Herschmann and Freire Filho state that "eroticism and scorn—middle class wanting or not—are part of the culture and the lifestyle of working class people" (64-65). The authors also emphasize that, "funk, like other folk culture expressions, it is not, and has never been, politically correct... young women have a playful relationship with songs like 'Little Slap'... and others that would be considered offensive to [middle class] women" (65).

Also related with the erotization of Rio's funk is the "expansion of the means of production and distribution" of pornography (Lopes 159). In the late 1980s, Brazilian music industry was flooded with sexually suggestive songs. Thus, according to Lopes, this combination of factors, which are not exclusive to funk, explain the third phase of Rio's funk, while Herschmann and Freire Filho contend that class difference is what makes funk songs with sexual content morally offensive. Next, I explore this issue more deeply in regards to what has remained the same and what has change for women in the funk movement.

### **Love/Sex Relationships: From Seduction to Mockery**

“Who doesn’t wanna know  
about feelings today make  
some noise!  
This one goes to all honest  
women  
I really like honest women...  
Because a women when she’s  
honest  
She looks at the guy  
And keep it real:  
‘Feelings my ass  
What I really like is sex!’”

MC Pocahontas

The first years of the 2000s were filled with songs performed by men, with brief female participations, as mentioned in chapter two. Many of those songs caused controversy for being degrading to women (Aragão “O Discurso e a Construção da Imagem”). This impression had not yet changed in the late 2000s, based on E. Oliveira’s work (“A Identidade Feminina no Gênero Textual”). Herschmann and Freire Filho contend that the “moral panic” funk causes in especially Rio’s middle class has historical and affective roots (69). Historically, there has been a fear of and amazement with the bodies of poor and/or Black women in Brazil (Soihet “A Sensualidade em Festa”). The fear of moral corruption has been too linked to women’s sexuality. Funk is one of those

cultural expressions that trigger that fear and amazement, especially women's performances.

In this subsection, I examine the ways the *funkeiras* perform (hyper) sexuality. Particularly, I investigate the ways they perform about enticing men with their sexual powers, as well as how they challenge men's privileged position in heterosexual relationships. Here, I once more demonstrate how women in Rio's funk use aggressiveness and scorn to negotiate femininity, this time in relation to men.

After waiting for about 30 minutes outside of a club in West side of Rio, I see MC Pocahontas coming towards me. We greet each other with two kisses on the cheeks. Her producer, her DJ, her mother, and a friend accompany her. We all go inside to wait for her time to perform. This place has no actual backstage, so we stand on the left side of the stage. She takes pictures with fans, both men and women, until she is ready to perform. An assembly funk starts playing, which is comprised by the *tamborzão* and male voice in loop inviting MC Pocahontas on stage. On the way up to the stage, she starts rhyming. "Hear what I'm saying/If not, whatever/Raise your hand if you don't care about marriage." The audience cheers, especially the women. The MC opens the show with her hit song "Agora Eu Tô Assim" ("Now I'm Like This), mentioned earlier in the chapter.

The song's lyrics matches the playful whistle-like effect that takes turns with her singing. In between her lines, MC Pocahontas also dances in a sensual and mischievous way, moving to the sides shaking her hips and occasionally turning her back to the audience, subtly shaking her buttocks. She continues, using rapping movements as though in a conversation with the audience:

I ask him to go out

He doesn't wanna take me with him  
If I ask him to go by myself  
He won't let me...  
I put him in bed  
Give him a miraculous tea...  
He sleeps all night  
Like a little angel  
While I sneak away

As noted earlier in the chapter, MC Pocahontas performs this song for her fiancé's sister, who feels trapped in her marriage, not having as much freedom and autonomy as the MC. The song recognizes that the man has control over the relationship, since she has to ask for his permission to go out. Lopes notes that in Rio's funk there is a polarization of gender relations: on one side there is marriage and commitment and on the opposite pole, there is sexuality (171). This opposition also highlights the disparity present in gender relations, with men being more powerful than women. One way this was confirmed in my interviews is when some of the women contend that men are "natural" cheaters. MC Pocahontas says men know how to do two things: "to sleep and to cheat" (MC Pocahontas). Similarly, when I asked MC Katia about why women should challenge other women instead of men in the case of infidelity, she replied: "No, you have to challenge men too. But men are shameless, right? Men are a disgrace... There are a lot of lovers who don't even know the guy is married. A lot of men have no capacity to be

upfront about being married” (MC Katia). Though some of the *funkeiras* treat male infidelity as a given, they are also less passive about it by not just simply accepting it.

The *funkeiras* indeed find ways to work around male domination, as MC Pocahontas’ song shows. The character in her song drugs her husband in order to go out and have fun with her friends. Whether or not she will go out with other men is not clear in the lyrics. Moreover, because there have been enough women directly or implicitly challenging men’s sexual privileges in Rio’s funk since the mid-2000s, when most of Lopes’ fieldwork was conducted, the dynamics of the funk movement are changing. The commitment/infidelity and marriage/single life dynamics, for instance, are now performed by women in multiple ways: from just finding ways to fool the husband to go out and have fun, to wanting their sexual needs met, while not interested in relationships, cheating on men as a form of revenge, making fun of men’s sexuality, using men for their money, to not accepting a situation of abuse, among others.

“I Sit Shaking My Hips” is an example of song in which a woman just needs her sexual desires met for that moment. MC Pocahontas stands at the front edge of the stage. She casually talks to women in the audience, looking down at them:

Look deeply into his eyes, and tell him, but let him know that it’s just for tonight. There’s no point in calling you tomorrow, ‘cause you won’t answer him. ‘Ugh, what an annoying that keeps calling me!’... So tell him it’s just for tonight... Tonight I’ll be your woman/And you’ll be man! I sit shaking my hips”

The tone in MC Pocahontas’ voice changes significantly from when she is talking to the audience until she enunciates the lyrics; she sounds smoother, sexier; her voice sounds almost like a moan. She goes down shaking her hips when that is what the lyrics suggest.

She takes turns with women in the audience with the lines “I’ll be your woman,” letting them complete the lyrics with “And You’ll be my man.”

Traditional femininity has been historically subordinated to traditional masculinity and both are connected to heterosexuality (Yep 19). Women *should* desire men if heteronormativity is to be naturalized and reinforced. However, there are appropriate ways to display heterosexual desires, since women are “the moral guardians of society whose behaviour must set the standard for men...” (Arthurs 141). The gender subordination of heterosexual desires is subverted when MC Pocahontas openly displays her sexual needs while rejecting a committed relationship. Particularly, she is challenging both gender and sexuality performances because a woman is not supposed to actively demonstrate her sexual needs, as she should also not be having sex casually. Ultimately, the *funkeira* is not *just* singing about sex, she is also determining what kind of emotional arrangements (or lack there of) are present in the sexual encounter, which in a heteronormative relationship, is usually a men’s decision. Furthermore, MC Pocahontas performs heterosexual femininity in “distorted” manner that is possibly queer.

MC Pocahontas is not the only *funkeira* to enact this type of non-normative feminine heterosexuality. Many others, in fact, became famous for demanding sex at their own convenience, not men’s. The song “A Porra da Buceta É Minha” (The Fucking Pussy Is Mine), for instance, has been performed by a number of *funkeiras*, including Juliana e As Fogosas, Deize Tigrona (Lopes 180), and Gaiola das Popozudas, and it sends a message to men: “I fuck whom I want/’Cause the fucking pussy is mine.” The track is constantly performed in an aggressive tone, with the women shouting the lines. Another example is Tati Quebra Barraco’s “Cachorra Solta” (Bitch Unleashed) in which

the MC makes fun of a man for thinking that getting her pregnant would “trap” her into a monogamous relationship, inverting the common sense assumption that women are the ones interested in using pregnancy to “trap” men: “I’m a bitch unleashed/You’re not going to trap me/I’m going to the orgy and you’ll be the one watching the baby!” (Tati Quebra Barraco).

By performing the above examples, the *funkeiras* are queering heterosexual femininity because they disrupt heteronormative desires and practices. If men and patriarchal institutions are the ones regulating women’s sexualities in a heteronormative context (Yep 30), stating that their “fucking pussy” is theirs or that men will be ones “watching the baby” while Tati goes “to the orgy” confront patriarchal values of ownership and control men should have over women’s bodies. The *funkeiras*’ way to defy heteronormativity in their performances could still be deemed abject. The use of explicit words and the suggestion that sex is more important than motherhood are all but normative. Complicating their performances of abjection even more is Cohen’s point on poor women of color’s gender enactments and sexualities as pathological practices (40).

Rhyme battles are becoming increasingly popular in funk, especially as the movement spreads throughout the rest of Brazil. Women participate in stage battles not only to confront other women, like in MC Katia The Faithful and MC Nem The Lover “Duel,” or in Deize Tigrone’s narrative about the female *bondes*. MC Marcelly and *funkeiro* MC Maquinho perform a battle in 2012 especially for Marcelly’s live DVD. MC Marcelly wears black pants with a white strip on the sides, a yellow and red Wonder Woman top, and a pink light cardigan. Her curly mid-back length hair is loose, and she wears a headband. Her gestures are firm; her voice is strong and belligerent. In

comparison to MC Maikinho's voice, an Afro-Brazilian young man, Marcelly's voice is actually deeper. This performance addresses both women cheating on men as a form of revenge, as well as challenging a situation of abuse.

While the MCs perform their first introducing rhymes there are gunshot-like sound effects in between their spoken words. After a minute of playful introductions, MC Marcelly suggests:

A real man doesn't go back and forth  
He knows how to appreciate  
The beautiful woman he has  
Don't complain later  
Saying things about me in the street  
Wants to belong to several women  
Can't handle none of them  
The rights are equal  
Check this out, honey  
If men are gonna cheat  
Women will cheat too

MC Marcelly arouses women in the audience, who make noises with their hands up, in the shape of guns, while the gunshot-like sound effects continue. MC Maikinho reacts by claiming that there's no such thing as equal rights, as women are not allowed to cheat:

Women here tonight  
You're full of shit  
If you talk about cheating



Ask to be beaten  
I'm Maquinho from South Side  
And I'm the one with the mic  
As of today  
Cheating is just for men!

While women in the audience booed MC Maquinho when he rapped about violence, men were cheering when he decreed only guys could cheat. A couple of things happened in this tense exchange. Suggesting men and women have equal rights when the topic is infidelity hints that being unfaithful is a *right* that men already have and that women are now trying to achieve. This idea is not exclusive of MC Marcelly's rapping. Tati Quebra Barraco released a song in 2013 that also proposes that, "The rights are equal/If men cheat/Women will cheat more" (Tati Quebra Barraco "The Rights Are Equal). Many of the songs addressing issues of unfaithfulness are about the relationship between men and women, and not just about the faithful/lover dynamics. From the point of view of men, they emphasize that they will cheat, period. From women's perspectives, the same thing happens, but there is also a type of "reactive cheating," in which women threaten to/or actually find other men when their partners are being disloyal. The same aggressive tone women use to intimidate and scorn mistresses is also used to address men.

Another issue that comes up in this portion of the battle is how MC Maquinho indicates women who insist on cheating should be beaten. Bringing back Herschmann and Freire Filho's quote mentioned earlier in this section, one could say that in folk/popular culture, women do not take songs that suggest violence against them in a

serious manner. Indeed, MC Marcelly ends the performance reaffirming that what the audience had just seen was a staged battle. While this is a possibility, it would be problematic to disregard that the suggestion of violence against women is not grounded in any sort of cultural beliefs and life experiences. So much so that women have started to react to men's intimidation. Here I return to Rio's funk vernacular discourse use of scorn and an in-your-face attitude: women have been reacting using those elements especially in their performances of gender and sexuality: they would first mock the abuser, and then leave him for casual sex with other men. Instead of simply being just direct with men about their sexual needs, women tend to also use sarcasm to go about the situation.

The all-female group Gaiola das Popozudas, for instance, also relies in this strategy in their song "Larguei Meu Marido/Virei Puta" ("I Dumped My Husband/I Became a Whore"), in which the lead singer, Valesca, report a situation of female submission and male abuse ("You would only beat me up/Going out to party/I would stay home waiting for you... Thanks a lot, but now I'm a whore"). Similarly, MC Marcelly responds to MC Maikinho as follows:

There's no beating

What the hell are you talking about, Maikinho?

Women like to be spanked

In bed, behind closed doors

Every cheated man

Has this "angry dude" pose

Always out in the streets

Picking up leftovers

Better be careful with female anger

Women don't cheat...

MC Marcelly raises the microphone, letting women in the audience complete the verse “Women take revenge!” She repeats the rhyme with the help of the spectators, and for a brief period, the gunshot-like sound effects turn into the *tamborzão*. The dynamics of the stage, the “war of the sexes” type of rivalry, is extended to the audience: men support MC Maikinho and women loudly back MC Marcelly.

To counter argue MC Maikinho's threat to beat an unfaithful woman by suggesting that they only accept being “spanked” in bed, and then implying women do not cheat, women take revenge indicates a disidentificatory move on the part of the *funkeira*. MC Marcelly conforms to gender hierarchies by asserting that women will only cheat in response to men's infidelity, and not because they want to. Thus, the fate of the relationship depends upon men's choices. At the same time, Marcelly dismisses MC Maikinho's threats while blatantly reaffirming her sexually, as she also mocks his performance of masculinity, highlighting the ridicule of his “the angry dude pose.” Thus, MC Marcelly affirms gender hierarchies by letting the men lead the relationship while resisting it by using her display of hyper-heterosexuality—enjoying being spanked—to disregard threats of male violence.

Hyper-femininity and hyper-heterosexuality have been historically linked with discourses about lower class and non-white women. As Soihet (“A Sensualidade em Festa”), Batista (“Na Periferia do Medo”), and Herchmann and Freire Filho (69) hint, Brazilian elite and middle class have a permanent “fear of the uncontrollable” that emerged in colonial times, persisting in contemporary Brazil, especially when it comes to

the sexuality of poor black and brown women. Accordingly, poor women of color's performances of gender and sexuality have long been deemed improper and repulsive from a dominant standpoint (Côrrea "A Invenção da Mulata"). The category "women," hence, was both inclusive and exclusive of certain performances of femininity, with white bourgeois femininity at the top of the normative gender hierarchy. Butler reminds us that identities can be used to affirm and pathologize (Butler qtd. in Yep 40). That is precisely why investigating how bodily performances break with official identities has such a promising possibility for women whose femininity have been historically marginalized.

To illuminate how the *funkeiras* openly talk about using their bodies to take advantage of men, I examine Gaiola das Popozudas' performance of "Minha Buceta É o Poder" ("My Pussy Is The Power"). In the show I attended in July 2013, Valesca and her Cage, wearing their already mentioned shiny green outfit, I stood very close to the stage. The stage was about my height, 5.9 ft. When she started singing the lyrics to the song, she was standing right in front of me. She squatted and extended her hand to a male fan standing right next to me while singing: "In bed I do everything." The music was so loud that the sound seemed distorted, especially the bass. Valesca stood back up and continued: "I'm the one giving you pleasure/I'm a sex pro and I'll show you why." The tone in her voice sounded somewhat smooth, considering her voice is deep and husky. That changed as soon as she started singing the chorus: "My pussy is the power" (repeated three times). With one hand holding the microphone, and the other arm raised, she sings loudly, with her eyes closed, almost as though she was preaching.

The lyrics expose how Valesca can have anything she wants from a man based on the power of her vagina. She performs the song in first person, squatting several times to

talk to people in the audience, teaching other women how to use and take advantage of the power of having a “pussy”:

Stupid women remain poor  
But I’ll tell you why  
If she’s smart, might even get rich  
My pussy is the power  
For “her” men cry  
For “her” men spend  
For “her” men kill  
For “her” men go crazy”

The performance goes on as she enumerates the material advantages of the power brought by her vagina, pointing out to people at the audience, who sing along with the *funkeira*: car, apartment, liposuction, “an actress face,” silicone implants, and hair extensions (Gaiola das Popozudas, “Minha Buceta É O Poder”).

Valesca scorns both men and women by suggesting women should take advantage of men financially, while the ones who do not do that are being stupid. Instead of relying on euphemisms to illuminate her success with men, she unashamedly exposes how she uses her hyper-heterosexuality to teach the “smart” woman formula: having sex for material gain. While this could be reaffirming patriarchy, an example of the “woman ready for sex” or ready to please men Aragão talks about (78), it could be simultaneously empowering: Valesca benefits from these arrangements by not only possibly enjoying the sex, but also by achieving various other possibilities—including maintaining the financial relationships she has already established. On similar note, Valesca’s “pussy” is indeed the

power since she sells sex and sensuality through her embodied performances, live or otherwise, and a lot of those who consume what she sells, other than music, are men. Therefore, she is certainly following the “smart” women formula by taking benefit of men through the use of her body, sensuality, and heterosexuality.

Valesca’s performance is ambiguous. She affirms and protests traditional understandings of femininity. Like other *funkeiras*, the way she expresses her relationship with men and other women, as well as how she positions herself in moral terms is marked by disidentification and a certain cultural syncretism. The idea of femininity promoted by Valesca and other *funkeiras* is localized, while still in a dialogic relationship with hegemonic notions of what it means to be a woman. In fact, the way the *funkeiras* construct womanhood is by picking up fragments from both their own localized context and from dominant discourses, placing them together to form their vernacular.

Equally important to understand Valesca's performance of femininity is the role of her body, as it affects her stage performances and image in the media. The *funkeira*'s body is a set of confronting and clashing categories, such as hyper femininity with masculine traits, brownness and whiteness. The blond extensions and the blue contacts seem to be an attempt to be in conformation with the European ideal of beauty and femininity. However, her brownness complicates the expectation of having white skin that would go with the blonde/blue eyes model. That along with the muscles and the exaggerated, curvy, feminine forms, namely large breasts and buttocks, makes Valesca's body a troubling mix of different races and ideals of beauty. It is a mix of hyper femininity with masculine features. She is not solely feminine or masculine. She is also not androgynous. She is a confluence of different types of femininities and masculinities,

all together. Valesca embodies what she sings: multiplicity and tension; a tension that cannot be explicated in simplistic dual terms; a tension that does not entail just conformation or resistance.

Women have achieved more space in the funk movement within the last ten years. Not just in terms of actual visibility, but especially in the way they relate to men, the ones still controlling the movement for most part. Challenging men on stage and being successful doing so seems to be slowly having an impact in their role within Rio's funk. Of course, that is not say women have reached equality in relation to men in funk. But a lot of them recognize their potential to confront men's power in both their personal and professional lives, and the need for more women in funk (Andressa Fetixe; MC Paloma TransTornada do Funk; Deize Tigrona; As Abysolutas do Funk), as I show next.

**Independence/Dependence and Self-Reliance: "I Don't Depend on Men for Shit!"**

“Where are the independent  
women here tonight?  
That woman who doesn't  
depend on man for anything  
Who doesn't need a man to  
pay for our hair  
Who doesn't depend on men  
to get our nails done

Those independent women

who proudly say:

I don't depend on man for

shit!"

Maysa Abusada

Women did not talk about financial independence in songs from the mid-2000s, as the work of Lopes, Aragão, and E. Oliveira show. Considering that was the time they started to gain visibility, this could have been an indication of how male-dominated funk was, and perhaps still is, even though women are in a better position now than ten years ago. In this subsection, I investigate the stage and everyday performances of women in regards to financial independence and professional autonomy in order to establish where they stand in relation to *funkeiros* and the movement in general. I draw mostly from personal interviews with the *funkeiras*, but I also reference Lopes' research, since it is fairly thorough for the time, the mid- to the late 2000s. Many of the issues Lopes reports persist, while others have had significant changes, such as the power of female MCs in comparison to males.

Besides being artists who want visibility and have fun performing in funk, men and women in the movement are also looking for a source of income (Lopes 162). This is also something I noticed during fieldwork. *Funkeiras* have a very pragmatic reason to perform: they need the money. Funk artists certainly work a lot, which is something that both Lopes and I agree on (Lopes 163). Some of the most popular artists perform at as many as eight different venues per night, especially over the weekends (Lopes 163; MC



Pocahontas, personal interview). A lot of women also have or had other day jobs in order to make ends meet. MC Dandara has a small kiosk in her community; Deize Tigrone used to work as a maid and a factory worker; MC Paloma is also an esthetician.

Some of the issues women face pertain to funk in general, such as the authorship of songs, the complicated relationship with the few companies that dominate the industry—having to pay to be played, as well as having less and less space to perform since Rio's military police occupied favelas that now no longer have *bailes*, as shown in Chapter Two. Authorship of songs is a complicated matter in funk, as I could attest to during fieldwork. Two of them *funkeiras*, MC Dandara and Deize Tigrone, have had issues with other artists and/or their managers when it comes to not receiving credit for a song they wrote (MC Dandara; Deize Tigrone). MC Dandara says she could have been more successful if either she had recorded the songs herself, or if the people who became popular performing them would have given her the credit for authorship. In funk, it is very common for one person to write the lyrics, while a DJ produces the music, and usually the DJ, a manager, or the owner of a big company, such as Furacão 2000 and DJ Marlboro, actually registers the song. Hence, owning the rights to a song does not mean being the actual author of the track.

Many of them also complained about the monopoly of the two big production companies that dominate the industry, especially in Rio. And, of course, those who own these companies are men. This has not changed much since Lopes' work, but it might change within the next couple of years. Right now, the two big companies and their DJs do not determine everything that becomes a hit in funk. Some of the *funkeiras* pointed out how dependent their work is on social media, especially the young ones, such as MC

Pocahontas. Almost all women I interviewed, except for two, are active on social media, promoting their songs and videos on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. As funk moves to other places in the country, where the big Rio companies are not as powerful, social media might become a determining factor in the *funkeiras*' popularity.

Other matters are definitely gendered. Those are the ones I focus on this subsection. Specifically, I address the reports of *funkeiras* that men try to take advantage of women by promising to help them out in exchange for sexual favors, as well as the relationships of women with their managers, who are mostly all men, and sometimes their romantic partners.

Almost all of the women I interviewed report that it is very common for those in power, which are mostly men, to offer help to women, as long as they provide sexual favors in return. Andressa from all-female group Fetixe reflects on why there are still more men than women in funk' spotlight: "I don't know if they don't have the courage, if it's fear, or they just don't have access to funk. Women are afraid of being abused." Similarly, MC Paloma states that, "There's something really bad that happens in funk with me and my female friends: people want to help you, but you know how? By taking you to bed. But, one thing: they *can't* help you out. They try to fool you. This is the big issue. There are people who like this, who wants to do it. But *funkeira* is one thing; a prostitute is another." A lot of them acknowledge that this is a factor in pushing women out of the movement. They also recognize that having more women in the movement would be empowering for all of them.

This situation is certainly different than choosing to manipulate men using the body, like in the performances of Valesca and other *funkeiras*, as it serves to maintain not

just power imbalances between artists and managers in Rio's funk, but also gender inequalities. Lopes contends that in Rio's funk artists in general "are vulnerable to the decisions of managers" (164). The same happens with women, she says, that also usually are managed by men who are related to them (husbands, brothers, etc.) (164). Because women are mostly MCs and dancers, and rarely DJs, producers, and managers, their performances are many times the result of men's final decisions (Lopes 165).

While, I tend to agree with Lopes, I have witnessed some of those relationships in fieldwork and the power imbalances are certainly not as great as she reports—at least in the artist-manager relationship. While talking about the tendency of men to ask women for sexual favors, some of the *funkeiras* suggested that women are not always victims in those situations. Like in "My Pussy Is The Power," there are instances where men think they have control over the situation, when in reality women are taking advantage of them, either their money or network. Particularly, *funkeiras* call men "stupid" because women are very good at manipulating them for their own benefit (Andressa Fetixe, personal interview; MC Paloma TransTornado do Funk, personal interview). How much power do women have in this situation? Certainly more than when they feel pressured and humiliated for having to exchange sexual favors.

During fieldwork, managers and producers were present in five out of eight the interviews I conducted, considering two of the women did not have managers. I was able to both directly observe the interactions between artists and managers as well as to ask women about professional autonomy. Out of the six women with managers, half of them are/were also romantically involved with the men. Overall, the relationships of power between men and women, manager and artist, seem to have changed since Lopes'

research. This could be due to the overall advances women have made within the movement, becoming integral part of funk's mainstream image.

When asked if they had autonomy over their careers, the women I interviewed were unanimous in saying that, yes, they do. That autonomy is mostly related to the manager/artist relationship, as well as to what sorts of sacrifices they are willing to make for their careers. This autonomy could be partial or negotiated, as in the case of MC Pocahontas, who was 18, about to turn 19 years old at the time of the interview, and whose manager was also her fiancé. "We work together," she says (MC Pocahontas). Even though MC Pocahontas says she is "on the same page" as her manager/fiancé, she narrates at least two situations that happened in the beginning of her career in which she did not want to sing certain lyrics, but was "convinced" to do so. One of the songs is "Your Husband Is Paying," in which she tells another woman that her husband is giving his lover, MC Pocahontas, the good life while providing a cheap life for his wife. The original recording of the song, from February 2012, indicates that Pocahontas had just turned 17 years old. Thus, now, almost two years later, with a reasonable popularity, and a fiancé as her manager (something that may have already changed, since they broke up a few times before), the MC says that now it is easier to negotiate the direction of her career.

Older MCs, such as MC Katia, MC Dandara, and Deize Tigrone, all of whom are in their 30s and 40s, and with over 10 years in funk, say they have autonomy in their relationship with managers. MC Katia's DJ and manager is also her husband. He looks considerably younger than her. Observing their interactions, it is not hard to notice she indeed has the last word over her career. In fact, being married to her manager in this

case might actually be an advantage, as the relationship is not only based on financial interests. This complicates the manager/artist relationship, but it also makes it more negotiable for women: they can bargain using emotional appeal and sex, without feeling their morality is compromised.

MC Dandara says she does not have a manager, but a business partner, which ultimately gives her freedom to decide which way she wants to go. Deize Tigrone confirms that though she has had a rough path in funk, mostly because of health issues, she has always been the one deciding on the future of her career. Now, her husband and her sister manage contracts and other administrative aspects of her career, but the *funkeira* makes it clear she is the one guiding them through the business aspect, since she has more experience (Deize Tigrone).

Of course the *funkeiras* pay a price for being in charge of their careers. Funk is still male-dominated and refusing to follow some of the rules established by powerful men and their companies mean they will not be as popular as other artists who choose to conform. Andressa says she is indeed not willing to compromise her morals in order to be more successful in funk (Andressa Fetixe). MC Pink rejects the suggestion of male managers who keep trying to change her style to look sexier, which ultimately affects her popularity within the movement (MC Pink).

Even with all the barriers a male-dominated funk imposes on women, they are still able to negotiate and/or divert from those obstacles, and achieve professional autonomy and some financial independence. MC Pocahontas states that she always signs her own contracts and always knows how much she is making per show. Being on top of the financial gains her career generates has allowed her to be independent since she was

16 years old (MC Pocahontas). Now, the MC supports many family members, something common among poor women in general and *funkeiras* specifically (Lopes 162). Deize Tigrone says that funk helped her buy many of the small properties she owns inside City of God. The women from Abysolutas also state that they are now able to live off of their careers.

It is now not rare to see *funkeiras* asking women in the audience, during their performances, if there are independent from men, like the epigraph from Maysa Abusada suggests. Similarly, MC Marcelly opened the battle with MC Maikinho described above saying “I wanna hear women who are independent and think rights are equal make some noise... of women who don’t need men to pay their bills.” The transformation in the performances of the *funkeiras* and the changes that happened in funk’s backstage are deeply related. It is hard to track what started or what drove what. It is possible, however, to establish their relationship. Women have been singing more empowering and female-centered songs; at the same time, they have more saying in the direction and future of their careers.

### **Final Thoughts: The *Funkeiras* Matter**

“To wash,

To iron,

To cook

My ass

While you’re getting drunk

I’m fucking another man out

in the street”

MC Dandara, “Homem Não

Manda em Mulher”

Rio’s funk movement has been recognized as an important cultural expression from the favelas. More than a means of cheap and accessible entertainment, funk is a means of survival, both material and symbolic. Especially since the 1990s, the movement has established an industry that became a source of income for many men and women, especially the young ones, living in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro (Lopes 102-103). The movement has also been giving visibility to those whose voices have been historically excluded from Rio’s public sphere. Hence, though Rio’s funk circulates in mainstream culture, it is still very much connected to the favelas.

As I established in chapter two, the movement exists in the intersection of praise and condemnation in dominant culture. Like other cultural expressions that have emerged in the favelas, Rio's funk is simultaneously welcomed in mainstream media, while it is also often criminalized and regarded as immoral by the state with the help of that same media. Academic research became one of the ways through which funk has been legitimized as a form of culture within some dimensions of public sphere.

The most successful example yet of a political move that resulted in policy change happened in 2009, with the organization APAFunk<sup>18</sup> ("Rio Aprova Lei"). They detailed in a manifesto specific demands aiming to establish funk as part of the city's cultural legacy ("Manifesto do Movimento"). The organization is the result of an innovative partnership between *funkeiros* and Rio's progressive politicians and intellectuals from the Left that brought a new type of political visibility to the movement (Lopes 152-153). Along with other groups, these activists exposed the hardships professionals involved with Rio's funk face at the hands of record companies monopolies and state criminalization. Accordingly, they called for a law converting funk into a folk cultural movement—and, therefore, able to benefit from state's incentives (N. Oliveira "Rio Reconhece o Funk").

They suggest, "Then, instead of social critique, the sameness of 'dirty,' with lyrics that have pornography as a single theme" ("Manifesto do Movimento"). It is interesting to note that the organization does not see dirty funk as social critique. The subgenre is, then, condemned not only by mainstream media and investigated by the state, as

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<sup>18</sup>. APAFunk stands for Association of Professionals and Friends of Funk ("APAFunk.org")



discussed in Chapters Two and Five, but also by other members of the movement. As a result, female MCs and dancers are not only absent from those initiatives, but they are also excluded from possible political legitimacy the APAFunk might bring to certain sections of the funk movement (Lopes 154).

The first step to legitimization is also the first research question I propose to answer in the present work: What is the role and contributions of women in the funk movement? “Women have been breaking taboos in all areas, even in funk. But we’re still behind in comparison to men” (Andressa Fetixe). Andressa’s statement was corroborated by most of the *funkeiras* in the interviews I conducted during fieldwork. Thus, they seemed certain that women are an important part of the funk movement, as they also stated that they feel they have the same opportunities as men to do well in funk. At the same time, they also acknowledged that women’s success may be limited by the power men and money have to decide who makes it in the industry (Andressa Fetixe; Deize Tigrona; MC Dandara; MC Katia; MC Paloma; MC Pink; MC Pocahontas). Moreover, women are becoming popular because and despite of the relations of production established in Rio’s funk.

One aspect of the work of the *funkeiras* that is also common to men and important to keep in sight is that funk fulfills, even if in part, their financial needs. Thus, it is not that the APAFunk manifesto has no grounds in reality when they criticize the unfair conditions imposed by managers and producers of the few big companies dominating funk (“Manifesto do Movimento”). Men are the ones controlling these companies. Hence, simply condemning dirty funk seems moralistic and even sexist, as it also condemns the part of the movement that gives women visibility, which is dirty funk. If the organization

is truly concerned with the vulnerable positions of the *funkeiros* in relation to the dominating record companies, then women should be considered in those propositions.

The analyses that place women in a position of passivity or only acting within the oppressive rules funk industry imposes do not account for the diverse and complicated ways the *funkeiras* contribute to the funk movement. Based on the interviews I conducted, women negotiate gender and industry-related constraints in several ways. From Deize Tigrana claiming women started the *bondes* as groups who perform double-meaning and dirty funk, to MC Dandara winning a funk festival in her community in the 1990s being the only women, to MC Paloma asserting herself as a trans woman in funk, and to many of them writing songs to other *funkeiros*, the fact is that women do find ways to either dialogue with or confront these limitations, be it by themselves or through other men, especially partners/boyfriends/husbands/fiancés who are also their managers. The fact that men might negotiate most of these limitations to women does not mean the *funkeiras* are powerless because they tend to dominate those romantic partner/manager relationships. They rely on men's privilege of voice to set forth their own interests.

This study not only intends to questions these approaches from academia, as well as from mainstream media and state, but also to legitimize what the *funkeiras* do as social critique. Keeping women's participation and influences in the movement invisible surely contributes to their limited position in Rio's funk. I believe one way to do this is precisely through academic research. Furthermore, this study is committed not only to the analysis of the *funkeiras'* performances, but also to highlighting and legitimizing those contributions in order to make them visible. Of course, this is not something one study alone can accomplish. My expectation is that the scarcity of research on the *funkeiras*

will not last much longer as they become more and more popular. Thus, this study is also a call that will hopefully spark the interest of other researchers.

### *Queering Performances of Heterosexual Femininity*

When I started to do research in the *funkeiras*, back in 2009, I bumped into an interview with Deize Tigrone and Tati Quebra Barraco about whether or not their performances could be considered feminist. Deize addressed the question with the following statement: “I’m not a feminist, and I don’t even have power to be that” (Fernandes and Granato, “Mulheres de Respeito”). I was intrigued with Deize’s answer. I could not stop thinking that the fact the *funkeira* associates being a feminist with having power, which can be interpreted as if feminism, in her understanding, was something distant from her social reality. That assertion has been accompanying my research since then. I realized there was a demand to understand the *funkeiras*’ performances in terms of being or not being feminist. This, as a primary concern, seemed to lead other researchers to stiff and definite conclusions about something that was and still is constantly changing. Thus, instead of starting with the question regarding feminism, I wanted to first understand what kind of femininity and heterosexuality women in Rio’s funk were enacting. Hence my second research question was: How do the *funkeiras* negotiate femininity and heterosexuality through performance? Moreover, I was also interested in discovering if there were distinctions between their stage and everyday performances. Going to fieldwork, these were my goals.

The stage is, for most part, an empowering space. It is a space where they complicate tidy identity categories, such as those of “women” and “heterosexual.” And

they know it. It is on stage that they enact different and at times contradictory versions of femininity, such as the faithful wife and the woman who imposes her sexual desires on men. In one performative moment, Deize Tigrana may be singing on how she demands the respect of the mistress dating her husband through violence (Deize Tigrana “Bandida”); she could be next performing “Lulu’s Miniature,” a song that shames men with small penises, saying that “Not even the lovers want you” (Deize Tigrana “Miniatura de Lulu”), or she could be expressing her feelings of frustration when she is not able to perform sexually explicit songs in mainstream spaces (Deize Tigrana). These are all distinct dimensions of Deize’s everyday and stage performances that are common to most of the *funkeiras* I interviewed.

It is in those different bits of performances pieced together that the *funkeiras* mimic dominant culture while simultaneously presenting diverse, ambiguous versions of it. They indeed move “back and forth between reception and production” (Muñoz 161), complicating the make up of their identities. Accordingly, though I found to be important to understand how they negotiate femininity and heterosexuality in their everyday lives, I recognize the stage as a privileged space for performative experimentation. It is in that space that they recycle and rethink “encoded meaning[s]” of feminine heterosexuality (Muñoz 31). This is an opportunity not many poor women, specifically poor women of color, have in Brazil: a space to publicly complicate gender and sexuality traditional roles. Performance, thus, plays a vital position in the idea of the stage as a mostly empowering space.

“Mostly” is in fact an important word in the above sentence. I certainly do not want to run the risk of reproducing analyses that romanticize the performances of the

*funkeiras*, as though the women themselves did not take any issue with enacting certain roles on stage. This point actually strengthens my use of Muñoz' disidentifications. For some of the women, like MC Dandara and MC Pink, having to sing about sex is more limiting than empowering—with the difference that MC Dandara actually performs songs with blatant sexual content. MC Dandara asserts that focusing on sex-related topics is her way to staying relevant to the people (men, actually) controlling the movement. She feels she is pushed into performing that type of music, a feeling Muñoz termed the “burden of liveness.” This might not be exclusive of women in the movement. Rio's funk is made up of phases that change quickly, working similarly to mainstream culture industry: an MC is popular for a couple of months and she or he may never again achieve the same success. Regardless, men do have more opportunities to perform about diverse topics.

The stage represents a place where the *funkeiras* play with femininity and heterosexuality, since their everyday performances of heterosexual femininity seem to be more stable. Stage performances are the fundamental loci enabling different subject positions. But could those different characters be disruptive of traditional femininity and heteronormativity?

The way the *funkeiras* interpret their artistic performances is a vital aspect to understand the transgressive and resistive ways they negotiate feminine heterosexuality, as it exposes the differences in relation to their everyday, stable gender and sexuality performances. Accordingly, they sometimes question and challenge moral standings, such as when Andressa interrogates why women are judged harshly for performing in certain ways on stage (Andressa Fetixe). Other times, perhaps most of the time, they just want to feel they are in good moral standing in comparison to other women, which

signals some of them want to conform to what they perceive to be traditional ideas of heterosexual femininity. But that does not mean, however, their performances are normative: even when the *funkeiras* want to demonstrate that what they are doing is not morally questionable, a look at their performances suggests that they are still crossing the boundaries of proper femininity and heterosexuality.

This rather ambiguous movement also might entail a survival strategy within the funk movement: positioning themselves as not-the-other-woman who performs in inappropriate ways could be a way to avoid the judgment of both other women and men and the sexual advances of the latter. Simultaneously, they also recognize that their performances are judged in mainstream culture as exaggerated and inappropriate ways to display femininity and heterosexuality. Even the *funkeiras* who try to distinguish themselves from other artists still acknowledge that being poor (and, not as frequently, Afro-Brazilian) or being involved with funk, which is linked to the favelas, brings them negative attention and sometimes criminalization from dominant culture.

Still intrigued by the media report mentioned in the beginning of this subsection, I asked Deize Tigrana at the end of our interview, which coincided with the end of my fieldwork period, if she or other people thought her performances were feminist. Deize told me that being on stage openly singing about sex shows she has “courage” (Deize Tigrana). Personally, she doesn’t see as a “feminist thing”; she’s too emotionally involved in her stage performances to evaluate that; but she does think that is how people perceive what she does.

It is difficult indeed to establish whether or not their performances of abject femininity and heterosexuality are purposeful. On the one hand, most of them claim to be

characters on stage, which could suggest that they intentionally perform heterosexual femininity in abject ways; on the other hand, they understand that their positions of marginality follows them on and off stage, and trying to conform to normative notions of appropriate gender and sexuality, off stage at least, is an everyday tactic.

In their artistic performances, the *funkeiras* challenge other women for their respect; they build alliances with other women when dealing with of infidelity; they subvert notions of the sexually repressed wife who accepts the husband's infidelity and of the mistress whose "real" wish is to be married; they impose their sexual desires on men, as well as define the types of affective arrangements they want to engage in; they also mock men who try to dominate them via violence, money, and/or sex; finally, the *funkeiras* are becoming increasingly assertive when it comes to their financial independence from men. All of these non-normative markers I encountered in the performances I observed are not only transgressive of patriarchal gender and sexuality norms, but they are also possibly queer, following Cohen's understanding.

This study hopes to strengthen Cohen's point that heterosexuality does not automatically grants privilege and that queer politics can be imagined across sexual categories, based on "identities as they are invested with varying degrees of normative power" (Cohen 37). The bodies and desires of poor Black and Brown women, such as the *funkeiras*, are constantly under moral scrutinizing and call for control. The fact their performances of feminine heterosexuality are targeted as inappropriate and non-normative signals that they are indeed challenging heteronormative femininity, thus providing performative possibilities for women and other marginalized folks.

This study also presents an opportunity to queer feminism, as femininity should not be invariably apprehended as a cohesive set of performative acts. Abject femininity proves otherwise, as it also opens up the path to a feminist approach to femininity, coming from the understanding that femininity affects women differently and it is, consequently, negotiated in distinct ways. It is important to ground investigations on performances of femininity, especially as it is affected by other identity markers, such as class and race, but also sexuality.

### *Keeping the Tools of Vernacular Discourse Local*

Developed on the fringes of culture industry, Rio's funk maintains that ambiguous position of a marginalized cultural expression that works in the molds of mainstream music industry (Sá 3). As a genre that is fundamentally hybrid (Laignier "Por Uma Economia Política do Funk" 72), funk lies in the intersections between mass and folk music. Similarly, as a cultural expression, Rio's funk faces both endorsement and criminalization especially from the state and the media. The same is true for women in the movement. In this study, my intention was also to understand how the performances of the *funkeiras* operate as part of Rio's vernacular discourse.

But Ono and Sloop make an important point when they argue that uncovering these marginalized discourses is not enough. Neither is examining power solely or mostly from an "evil power" perspective, which they claim, writes "out of history" other texts that empowered and shaped "local cultures first, then affect[ed], through the sheer number of local communities, cultures at large" (Ono and Sloop 19). Thus, in this study, more than reveling and describing the performances of the *funkeiras*, I focused on



analyzing them not from the perspective of dominant power, but from the standpoint of their own productions, which are inevitably in a tense dialogue with the institutions of mainstream culture. Accordingly, I also understood Calafell and Delgado's call for "meeting a text on its terms" (18) by not constraining the multiple possibilities of the *funkeiras*' work through the use of stiff and definite categories.

As an important part of Rio's vernacular, the performances by the *funkeiras* serve to further complicate gender relations within and outside of the movement. This is because more than rejecting dominant culture while affirming their own, the *funkeiras* negotiate with dominant understandings of feminine heterosexuality, both to submit to and to oppose normativity. Thus, the cultural syncretism of the *funkeiras* suggest that the inevitable interactions with dominant culture affect the ways they enact femininity. Pointing out the apparent contradictions in those performances is, then, one way to demonstrate how Rio's funk operates as vernacular discourse that relies on dominant and marginal assumptions on femininity. Vernacular discourse, in this sense, rejects and accepts mainstream cultural values, affirming a cultural form that is the result of that negotiation.

Vernacular discourse's tools need to remain localized, as the texts being studied. The need to adapt cultural syncretism and/or pastiche indicates that those tools need to be tied more to the analysis than to the framework. Engaged in localized and marginalized discourses could also mean that new tools might be needed, depending on the study. An aspect of Rio's funk vernacular that was briefly exposed in this research, the use of scorn along with an in-your-face tone in the *funkeiras*' performances, perhaps could be apprehended as a form of cultural syncretism; but maybe a new tool is necessary to fully

understand this rhetorical strategy that is so present in women's performances. Therefore, vernacular discourse as a framework that is concerned with texts "that resonates within local communities" (Ono and Sloop 20) needs to adapt to the specific demands of those non-traditional forms of rhetoric.

*The Challenges of Fieldwork: Notes on a Researcher's Positionality*

The knowledge generated by ethnography about Others has a direct connection to the discourses produced about marginalized folks (Fiske 330). In the case of the *funkeiras*, this discursive production is still being built in academia, since there are so few works dealing with discourses that are either about or produced by them. This study relied on performance ethnography to, like vernacular discourse, privilege the rhetorical production from local cultures. As a method, performance ethnography is driven by the idea of an "ethical responsibility" of the researcher, which Madison explains as "a compelling sense of duty commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being" (5). As part of the discursive production on the *funkeiras*, this study took into consideration the ethical implications of fieldwork, specifically the relationships between researcher and interlocutors.

Having access to the *funkeiras* is not an easy task, especially while leaving outside of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. The best way to contact these women is through attending *bailes* and meetings, and knowing other *funkeiros*. The latter was especially important during my fieldwork. I was lucky enough to have acquaintances turned friends in City of God, a vital space for the development of Rio's funk. Michel and Mingau, two childhood friends who used to be an MC duo in the early 2000s, were my main

interlocutors during fieldwork. It was through them and their contacts that I was able to interview seven out of the eight artists I met during my observation period. For instance, Michel asked around the community for Deize Tigrone's contact and also invited me to a meeting of *funkeiros* that allowed me to contact two MCs and one *bonde*. Mingau and his friends gave me MC Pink, Andressa Fetixe, and MC Dandara's contact.

Being involved with movement and meeting people is essential to have access to the *funkeiras*, but that is just the first step toward a performance-centered ethnography. Conquergood reminds us that, "The performance paradigm insists on face-to-face encounters instead of abstractions and reductions" (189). Being able to get to know the *funkeiras*, playing with MC Katia's dog, eating lunch with MC Pocahontas, sharing snacks with MC Dandara, taking "selfies" with MC Pink, or giving a ride to Andressa Fetixe were all vital aspects of my interactions with them. Of course, listening is the most important outcome of my time with the *funkeiras*. If there was something missing from the little research done on them, it was certainly their voices. Accordingly, my focus while interacting with the *funkeiras* was to let them talk; for as long as they wished, about any matter they considered relevant, even if not directly related to performances of femininity and heterosexuality. By allowing them to dominate our conversations, I was able to identify important issues that helped guide this study.

At times, a researcher is so involved in her fieldwork that she might lose sight of self-reflexivity. Those rare moments when I realized I did not really belong, that I was an "outsider," were usually accompanied by a tension of some sort, or a feeling of awkwardness. There is something peculiar about the interactions with the *funkeiras*: though many of these women are poor or still live in favelas, they are also artists. A lot of

them carry a sense of confidence that is very intimidating and that somewhat complicates assumptions about power relations.

My first interview, with MC Pocahontas, involved a mix of anxiety and uneasiness. MC Pocahontas is a fairly popular artist who is used to media appearances. The first few minutes of our encounter were marked by her total disregard of my presence. As a researcher, I carried this sense of importance and awareness of my privileged position. But the reality is that often those women were not bothered or intimidated by my presence. I was just a researcher—there was always disappointment when I clarified that I was not a journalist working for a media outlet. Those moments functioned as an important reality check for me: I needed them more than they needed me. However, not all *funkeiras* embody that self-confidence. In the rare instances where I was regarded as the powerful person in the room, I had to consciously make an effort to show the women they were indeed important, that I was genuinely interested in their life story. Thus, the most important lesson I took from fieldwork is that self-reflexivity also means staying open to understand shifting power relations, and consequently, being open to adapt to different, unplanned situations.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

The theories, method, and analysis I expose in this study have all been informed by both the preliminary research I had done in the *funkeiras*, as well as by data I collected during fieldwork. Still, this is also the result of theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices. As such, this study also presents limitations. The first and perhaps the most apparent limitation of this research is geographical restriction, which ultimately affected

the time I was able to dedicate to fieldwork. I was able to track the news related to funk in general and some of the *funkeiras*, as well as to follow artists and producers on social media, even though some of the women are not active in those websites. Geography, then, would be the most blatant limitation this study presents.

Funk is always changing. I have repeated this sentence exhaustively during this research. This seems to be a common limitation in the study: by the time research becomes accessible, it might already be somewhat dated. Indeed, some of the works on the *funkeiras* were perhaps more obsolete than necessarily problematic. Thinking about the *funkeiras* specifically, since the time I proposed this study in 2009, a lot has changed in terms of what and who is popular. Keeping up with the constant changes in Rio's is something some of the *funkeiras* identified to be difficult even for themselves, who are part of it (MC Dandara; MC Pink; Andressa Fetixe). Thus, keeping research current it is not an easy task for those investigating Rio's funk, myself included.

The other possible limitations this study presents are also opportunities for future directions in the study of the *funkeiras*, of abject femininity, and a transformational queer politics, as proposed by Cohen. This study is, in many ways, a response to academic and media demands to understand the performances of the *funkeiras* in terms of gender. But there are, of course, other aspects of their daily and artistic lives that could be examined. An analysis focusing on dancers and performances of feminine heterosexuality, for instance, could give researchers better insights on the potential of bodily performances to queer heterosexual femininity. Moreover, the performances of female dancers could be compared to other forms of dancing emerging in the funk movement, such as the male dominated Passinho.

Speaking of impact, I have received inquiries before about the effect of the *funkeiras*' performances in their communities and among funk fans. It would be important to investigate whether the empowerment the female artists feel is something this pass on to other women in the audience. A study of this magnitude should be conducted by a group of researchers that would be willing to both attend different *bailes*, as well as to become involved in diverse communities, not necessarily only the low income ones, in order to interview funk fans, especially girls and women. Then, more general claims about the impact of the *funkeiras*' performances would be possible.

Here I would like to also acknowledge the importance of other researchers' works to this present study. Though I have constantly emphasized through this investigation the lack of research on the *funkeiras*, the few ones I encountered were vital to the completion of this study. Specifically, Aragão's and E. Oliveira's essays, both concerned with textual analyses of dirty funk lyrics, were an important starting point to my own research. These essays made valid points on how women were represented as sexual objects in the songs popular in the early and mid-2000s. Lyra's work also matters to my research in the *funkeiras* as she presented a compelling counterpoint to the aforementioned essays by arguing that the *funkeiras* subvert gender positions in their lyrics, which make them the new voice Brazilian feminism. Up until then, there was an overwhelming focus on language, with no sight of the *funkeiras*' voice. It was not until the release of Lopes book in 2011 that the *funkeiras*' voices were given space in an academic work. Thus, Lopes' study, which focuses on the funk movement in general, marks an important change in the way the *funkeiras* are analyzed, as she also considers some performative aspects, besides textual analysis.

As of now, I am aware of at least two other researchers who are either starting or have already started to study funk and gender. One of them, Mariana Gomes, is focusing her study mostly on Valesca Popozuda, identity and representation. The other researcher wants to understand the ways trans women and gay men circulate in the *baiões*, and they may borrow feminine performances from the *funkeiras*. As women in funk achieve mainstream popularity, they should be also sparking interest in other researchers who, like me, will be enticed by their complicated performances. This should be just the beginning.

Finally, I wanted to suggest that studies on abject femininity would benefit from Cohen's call to expand the notion of "queer politics," and vice and versa. A proper articulation of abject femininity and queerness is much needed, if it had not yet been done, because it could represent a revitalizing opportunity for a truly intersectional queer feminist politics. Abjection, thus, could be the binding element that expands marginality across different identities. Moreover, it is important to layout how would that look like as transformational politics. Queerness and feminism need to be constantly challenged in order to be truly inclusive and defying of normative practices and structures. Women like the *funkeiras*, then, are the ones questioning the limits and furthering the political possibilities of queer and feminist politics.

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## Appendix A: Interview Script (Portuguese)

### Part I: Biography and career information

- Where were you born, raised, where do you live.
- How did you become involve with funk? Did anyone inspire you? How about your stage name, how did you acquire it?
- Do you face any specific issues for being a funk artist? How about for being a *funkeira*?
- Do you think you have autonomy over your career? Who makes the decisions regarding the directions your career should take?
- Do you have a specific audience other than *funkeiros* in general?

### Parte II: Being *funkeira*

- Do women in funk face any specific issue in comparison to men in funk?
- Is there any type of rivalry between men and women in funk? Explain.
- How about between women? Is there any competition among *funkeiras*? If so, what are they competing about?
- Do men and women sing about different things? What are some of the main topics you talk about in your songs?
- Do you write your own songs?
- What do you think about double-meaning and “dirty funk”? Do you think these songs are still popular? Why do you think women become successful singing these songs?
- 

### Parte III: Stage

- How do you feel on stage?
- Do you search for inspiration to be on stage?
- How important is it what you are wearing?
- Is dancing on stage important for you? Which one do you enjoy the most, singing or dancing?
- Are there differences between stages and audiences, geographically speaking?

## **Appendix B: Consent Form (Portuguese)**

### **Universidade de Denver Folha Informativa para Pesquisa Isenta de Revisão Completa**

**TÍTULO: O Papel das Mulheres no Movimento Funk do Rio de Janeiro**

**Investigador Principal: Raquel Moreira**

**Protocolo #:**

**Data de Aprovação:**

Você está sendo convidado para participar de uma pesquisa. Este formulário fornece informações sobre o estudo. Por favor, leia as informações abaixo e faça perguntas sobre qualquer ponto que você não entenda, antes de decidir se quer ou não participar.

Você está convidado a participar de um estudo sobre o papel das mulheres no movimento funk. O funk carioca tem sido amplamente reconhecido como movimento cultural e musical de resistência à opressão racial e socioeconômica, ao mesmo tempo em que é considerado uma forma legítima de expressão artística que se iniciou em áreas periféricas, tornando-se popular em meios de massa. No entanto, artistas mulheres dentro do movimento têm sido constantemente ignoradas pelo meio acadêmico. Este projeto tem como objetivo abordar essa invisibilidade, tornando as mulheres no funk do Rio de Janeiro o foco do estudo. Uma parte fundamental do estudo é priorizar as vozes das funkeiras, estratégia que foi concedida a artistas do sexo masculino e que, de fato, forneceu-lhes visibilidade e validade no meio acadêmico.

Se você concordar em fazer parte da pesquisa, você será solicitada a conceder entrevistas à pesquisadora principal em que o seu nome não será mantido em sigilo e suas respostas serão associadas ao seu nome. A pesquisadora principal também vai assistir a performances das artistas como parte da coleta de dados.

Riscos em potencial e desconforto podem incluir temas relacionados à sexualidade, embora eles não sejam diferentes daqueles abordados pelas artistas em suas canções.

Ao fazer essa pesquisa, esperamos aprender sobre a contribuição das mulheres para o movimento funk, especificamente em relação à moralidade, à sexualidade e à feminilidade.

A participação neste estudo é totalmente voluntária. Mesmo se você decidir participar agora, você pode mudar de ideia e parar a qualquer momento. Você pode optar por não responder a perguntas específicas, ou mesmo parar a entrevista, por qualquer motivo.

Se você tiver dúvidas sobre esta pesquisa, você pode entrar em contato com Raquel Moreira, número de telefone 21 9572-1222 e e-mail [raquelportilho@gmail.com](mailto:raquelportilho@gmail.com) ou Bernadette Calafell, email [Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu](mailto:Bernadette.Calafell@du.edu).

Se você tiver alguma dúvida ou reclamação sobre como foi tratada durante a participação na pesquisa, entre em contato com Paul Olk, Presidente do Conselho de Revisão Institucional para a Proteção dos Seres Humanos, em +1 303-871-4531, ou você pode contatar o Escritório de Pesquisa e Fundos por e-mail, [du-irb@du.edu](mailto:du-irb@du.edu), ou ligue para +1 303-871-4052 ou escreva para a Universidade de Denver, Escritório de Programas de Pesquisa e Fundos, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

O Comitê de Revisão Institucional da Universidade de Denver determinou que este estudo qualifica como isento da fiscalização completa de seu comitê.

Você deve receber uma cópia deste formulário para seus registros. Favor assinar a página seguinte se você entende e concorda com o que foi dito acima. Se você não entender qualquer parte da declaração acima, por favor, pergunte ao pesquisador quaisquer dúvidas que você tenha.

### **Acordo para estar neste estudo**

Eu li este artigo sobre o estudo ou foi lido para mim. Eu entendo os possíveis riscos e benefícios do presente estudo. Eu entendo que minha participação neste estudo é voluntária. Se eu optar por participar deste estudo, eu receberei uma cópia deste formulário de consentimento.

Por favor, rubrique nas caixas apropriadas:

Eu concordo em ter o áudio da entrevista gravado para fins de pesquisa.

Eu concordo em ser filmada para fins de pesquisa.

Eu concordo em ter meu nome divulgado e associado com as minhas respostas para fins de investigação.

Por favor, rubrique esta caixa se dados deste estudo podem ser utilizados para futuras pesquisas.

Por favor, rubrique esta caixa se quiser fornecer um e-mail válido (ou postal) ou endereço, caso você queria um resumo dos resultados deste estudo. \_\_\_\_\_

Assinatura: \_\_\_\_\_

Data \_\_\_\_\_

Nome Impresso: \_\_\_\_\_