



Collective Identity and Racial Thought in São Paulo's Black Gospel Music Scene

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to push the literature on music and collective identity to examine how the cognitive dimension of collective identity gets constructed, this paper shifts away from the customary focus on lyrics, toward an analysis of the everyday discursive contexts of music scenes, such as rehearsals, informal commentary and training seminars. By examining such contexts within the black gospel music scene in São Paulo, Brazil, the paper discovers that a complex ideology of racial identity, infused with ideas drawn from North American history and the Bible, circulates within the scene. This ideology contributes, in turn, to the formation of a strong racial identity among black gospel artists. Evidence for the strength of both the ideology and identity include the relatively weaker sense of black identity among gospel rappers; and the translation of black gospel artists' racial identity in collective action and mobilization. This is politically significant given the otherwise low level of racial consciousness or mobilization among Brazil's Protestants.

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BEYOND LYRICS

Over the past twenty years, a growing body of scholarship has successfully shown how music helps people *feel* collective identity, by identifying and investigating processes such as symbolic embodiment, physical movement, and association with emotionally resonant places (e.g., Guilbault 2007; Daniels 2007; Biddle and Knight 2007; King 2006; Buchanan 2005; Whiteley 2005; Radano 2003; Connell 2002; Dowd 2000; Stokes 1995; Pratt 1990). This literature has been more limited, however, in its ability to show how music helps people to *think* about collective identity. The problem is that when analysts seek to portray how music shapes and expresses *ideas* about such things as collective power, inequality, ancestry and history, they generally limit themselves to examining *song lyrics* (e.g., Eyerman and Jameson 1998; Denisoff 1972; McLaurin & Peterson 1992; Roscigno, 2002; Flacks 1999). The disadvantage of this approach is that a great deal of intellectual labor having to do with collective identity takes place not in the world of lyrical composition, but in the music scene's many other discursive contexts: explanatory comments made extemporaneously during rehearsals; carefully planned lectures during music workshops; informal interpretations circulating among artists; the discussions that take place in study groups; verbal introductions to performances; on-stage commentaries between musical numbers; liner notes and the other texts that accompany tapes, CDs and records; and private contemplative moments accessible only through in-depth interviews (cf. Monson 1996). Put differently: while song lyrics are often sites for ideas about collective identity, they are far from the only one; indeed, as anyone who has interpreted song lyrics can attest, they are frequently perfectly opaque about collective identity, focusing instead on highly individual or universal aspects of human experience. Yet complex ideas about collective history, power, inequality, and destiny often circulate in these same music scene's other discursive contexts (e.g., Frith 1998).

This became clear to me when I sought to discover the extent to which ideas about collective ethno-racial identity might be circulating in the *black gospel music* scene in São Paulo¹. Initially I assumed that my task could be accomplished simply by reviewing as many lyrics of this genre's songs and hymns as possible. I soon discovered that these lyrics were focused entirely on the universal themes of salvation and redemption, and that no matter how sophisticated my interpretive strategy, finding in them anything having to do with *any* this-worldly, let alone racial, identity was a rather contrived stretch. It was only when I began to look beyond the lyrics to other discursive contexts that I began to encounter among black gospel artists a cluster of ideas about race and racial identity, developed through their everyday struggles to think about their art in relation to human and divine history.

In this paper I seek to do justice to this dense clustering of ideas among black gospel artists in São Paulo and to indicate some of that clustering's political consequences. I begin by reviewing the main outlines of Brazil's dominant race-ideological paradigm or racial project (Hanchard 1994; Winant 2001; Omi and Winant 1986). Then, relying on utterances I gathered in black gospel music's everyday discursive contexts, I describe three ways that black gospel music articulates a vision of blackness that opposes the dominant racial project. In order to highlight the distinctiveness of black

¹ "Black gospel music" refers to Christian-themed music built around the human voice singing in a style referred to in Brazil as "canto Black", or "Black singing", including belting, twang, melisma, and rapid timbral shifts (Williams-Jones 1975; Jungr 2002) "Gospel rap" refers to Christian-themed rap sung by baptized members of Protestant denominations (Pardue 2008)

gospel's cognitive vision, I contrast it with views that circulate in another group of Christian artists, *gospel rappers*. I then suggest that this contrast has real political effects: the strength of ethno-racial discourse among black gospel artists and its relative weakness among gospel rappers leads, I argue, to correspondingly different levels of enthusiasm for, and involvement in, black ethno-racial politics.

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: THE MYTH OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

For the better part of the last century, the reigning ideology about race in Brazil, known as "*democracia racial*" has included the following main ideas: that Brazilian slavery was easy-going and cordial; that Brazil's high rate of miscegenation generated indifference to race; that inequality in Brazil is due not to racial, but to economic discrimination; that Brazilian blacks are content; and that Black racial politics do not belong in Brazilian society (Sansone 2003; Telles 2004; Daniel 2006). The past generation, however, has seen robust challenges to these ideas, as a growing number of activists, academics and politicians have argued that Brazilian slavery was in fact terribly dehumanizing; that miscegenation walks hand in hand with white supremacy; and that Black racial politics are necessary to forge true racial justice in Brazil. Especially since the early 2000s, the question of racism has burst onto the national scene, as black movement organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the Brazilian state have engaged in unprecedented debates about affirmative action, quotas, educational policy, and equal rights statutes (Htun 2005; Martins 2004).

In this context, it is important to ask: what do Brazilians at the grassroots think and feel about race, racism and Blackness? While a growing number of studies investigate this question, there remains a big gap in this literature, around the ideas and attitudes of evangelical Protestants. While numerous works explore the impact of the Catholic Church and Afro-Brazilian religions on everyday racial ideas and attitudes, far fewer have investigated the role evangelical Protestantism plays in Brazil's racial politics. This is unfortunate because evangelical Protestantism is the fastest growing religion in Brazil (Bastian 2006).² Yet it is also understandable, given the widespread perception that Brazilian Protestants want nothing to do with race. Those few analysts who have listened more closely to Brazil's evangelical Protestants have encountered a decided lack of interest in racial politics. What they hear is that racial identity is of little importance to *them*, since the only identity that really matters is the brotherhood of the born-again in Christ; that fighting racism is not a priority for *them*, because involvement in any cause other than Jesus is a waste of time; and that even if racism were a real problem, the best way to resolve it is to convert people to Jesus (Reinhardt 2007; Prandi 2004; Pierucci 2006).

While this is an accurate depiction of dominant strains in evangelical thought, a counter-trend is afoot: a growing number of researchers have discovered clusters and networks of evangelical Protestant faithful embracing racial pride, concern about racism in the church, and criticism of the ideology of *democracia racial* (Burdick 2005; Selka 2007; Collins 2005; Aquino 2007). Though these clusters are a small minority, they are still very important. How did they arise and where do they find shelter? What are the ideas being articulated by them? What is their potential for chipping away at evangelical Protestantism's aversion to racial discourse?

² I use the term "evangelical Protestant" to refer to churches and their members that embrace the mission of active, daily evangelization, and approve as desirable the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

With such questions in mind, I was drawn to a musical movement that highlighted Blackness in its very name: hundreds of evangelical music groups that have, since the early 1990s, begun to play a style they call (in accented English) “*black music gospel*” (Burdick 2008; Pinheiro 2005, 2008; Ulba 2005). Breaking with European and white North American traditions of church music, these groups thundered out religiously-themed soul, funk, gospel, R&B, gospel blues, rap, and samba. São Paulo is home to more than thirty organized Black gospel choirs, over one hundred bands specializing in Black gospel, gospel blues, and Christian R & B, a dozen gospel samba groups, and at least two hundred Christian rap groups. In what ways did involvement in this movement affect participants’ views about race and racial identity?

To investigate this question, I conducted interviews with over one hundred musicians, participant-observed in six congregations, and accompanied the performances, rehearsals, and backstage gatherings of six Black gospel, six gospel rap, and three gospel samba groups. Guided by the methodological approach outlined in the introduction of this article, I set out to see how the varieties of *black music gospel*, through their respective practices of training, informal commentary, and rehearsal contribute to the formation of racial ideas.

BLACK GOSPEL MUSIC AND THE COGNITIVE FRAMING OF HISTORY

In São Paulo, a key feature of how Black gospel artists master their craft is by talking and thinking about Black music history, with an emphasis on North American Black music history. Over the course of nine months in the field, I heard Black gospel artists speak about this history a great deal. Without claiming that every Black gospel artist walked around with a perfectly formed historical narrative in his or her head, I was able to piece together from remarks during performances, rehearsals, private lessons, workshops, lectures, everyday banter, and interviews, the outlines of a relatively consistent and widespread view of Black musical history

THE SLAVE NARRATIVE

The story went like this. In chapter one, enslaved Africans brought to the New World a love for percussion, inherited from African musical styles. In Brazil, irresponsible, indifferent masters allowed the slaves to continue playing their drums, while in North America, masters banned them, because as good Protestants, they were more dedicated than Brazil’s Catholics to wiping out the remnant of African culture. (None of my informants approved of the banning of drums, which they valued musically; but they understood why the masters had banned them). This contrast in policy had important consequences. While Brazilian slaves, free to continue beating their drums, had no incentive to develop vocal skill, North American slaves, eager to satisfy their longing for percussion, developed a diverse percussive vocal repertoire, from melismas to belting. “That is why,” explained David Ramos, a well-known pastor and Black gospel choir director, during a rehearsal, “we here in Brazil never developed our singing like the Blacks did in America. Here we just played drums, we got lazy and never needed to develop our voices.”

How different were those intrepid North American slaves! The Black gospel voice instructors I met worked into their teaching about the origins of Black gospel verbal pictures of North American slaves’ ring shouts, field hollers, work songs, and brush arbor songs. The voice coach Isabeh, for example, while running a voice workshop for a group of young singers, played a prized videotape of Mahalia Jackson singing in a big church in Georgia. “I really love this one,” he said, his fingers lightly touching

the small TV monitor. “Listen to this, listen to this!” When Jackson broke into a belt, Isabeh launched into a fifteen-minute lecture on how gospel singing depended on the lower diaphragm, because it had started in the United States in large open fields, as “a way to cry to heaven and have other slaves hear you, in the plantation work songs and spirituals”. Felipe, a guitarist, made the same point during a rehearsal of the Black gospel Azusa band. Trying to motivate a singer to project more forcefully, he drew a vivid picture of slaves calling back and forth on North American cotton plantations. “That’s where this all started,” he declared, “in those huge cotton fields. They wanted to make themselves heard, but couldn’t see each other, they were all spread out. So you really have to project!”

On to chapter two. In this part of the narrative, Brazil’s slaves, suffering from the neglect of their good-for-nothing Catholic masters, satisfy their musical needs at night and on weekends, playing drums in un-Christian gatherings where they worship demons. In contrast, North American slaves are exposed by their masters to the evangelization of Protestant ministers. Brazilian blacks remain mired in superstition, while North American blacks become good Christians and set about living lives pleasing to the Lord. “The Americans were hundreds of years ahead of us in finding the Lord,” explained Black gospel musical promoter Ferrisbeck during a rehearsal. “Here in Brazil we were worshipping idols and drumming *candomblé*. There in the US they were building churches, and singing praises to the Lord. So of course this music became strong there and not here.”

Finally, chapter three. In North America, slaves combined their inherited musical prowess with their newly won knowledge of the Bible, to create that jewel of North American music, the spirituals. “Of course spirituals began in America and not Brazil,” explained Sergio Saas, in an interview with me, “because your Blacks already knew the Bible, and ours did not.” What were Brazilian slaves doing in the meantime? “They were inventing samba.” For Black gospel musicians, samba is closely associated with the urban world of bars, dancing, Carnival, the erotic, and the lusty mulata, the world of secularism and sin, a world at odds with the church. Several informants insisted that their critique of samba—widely identified as Brazil’s national music—had nothing to do with a lack of national pride or patriotism; it had, rather, to do with samba’s immorality. “I could never accept samba,” said Daniel, the Black gospel choir singer. “When you look at the history of that, it has always been surrounded by drinking, sex, and drugs.”

Now, whether or not it is accurate, recounting this history is important to Black gospel artists. During my fieldwork in rehearsals and trainings and workshops, not a day passed without one of them invoking some element of this narrative. I believe they saw the narrative as an important means for legitimizing their music in the eyes of skeptical pastors, who regarded black gospel music as conducive to self-promotion and pride. “Pastors are always saying this music makes people forget about God,” said Isabeh during a singing workshop. “They think all we care about is astonishing vocal feats, that it is a kind of idolatry.” History was the antidote. “When our singers know the history of the music,” he continued, “they can show our ministers that we are rooted in the spiritual, that it is all about God. Because this music was born and grew up in the Lord, it grew up in churches.” Artist after artist insisted on this point: that they “needed to show” that their music originated *not* in bars, secular dances, or the street, but in the ring shouts, spirituals and Protestant congregations of the North American South.

The second main reason offered by my informants for knowing this history was their conviction that the secret to the brilliance of North American Black music lay in a past whose musical lessons were applicable to the present. “We have to understand how they came to sing this way,” said Michael Santiago, the choir director for Church of God in Christ, as he welcomed a new class of singing recruits. “If we are going to sing like them, we must know everything we can about the history of their music.” When I asked Robson Nascimento why he felt it was so important to recount North American Black musical history into his singing workshops, he shook his head serenely. “When you know the history of the essence,” he said, “your manner of execution is going to be much different, more committed, it will be fuller of the feeling that has been present through the whole history of the music... You sing thinking about all of that, it makes you a better singer. You take the music more seriously... When you know what has come before, you feel a responsibility to the tradition, you know that this is not just a passing thing, not a fashion statement.”

THE CIVIL RIGHTS NARRATIVE

The idea that Black music emerged out of suffering, a view taken for granted in American culture (Middleton 2006; Radano 2000; Gilroy 1993), challenges the view in Brazil that Afro-Brazilian music arose from Africans’ affinity to playfulness and percussion. Singing in the American cotton fields, Isabeh declared, “was a way for slaves to survive hard work and beatings.” Waving his arms on stage, he exhorted his audience to heed the message of freedom of the spirituals. “The slaves placed indirect messages about escape there,” he said, “because if the master knew that they were trying to escape, he would have laid the whip on them.” Sergio Saas explained during a rehearsal that “Go Down Moses” was about “Black people identifying with the Old Testament, with the people of Israel who suffered”, and devoted stage time to reminding audiences that “this music was brought over by our ancestors on slave ships.” In concert, gospel group Fat Family’s lead singer, Deise, launched regularly into explaining why slaves in the US used the spirituals as a guide to freedom. “Listen to the words of this song, ‘Sorrow,’” she said. “Listen, and you’ll hear the secret directions for getting on the underground railroad to the North.”

Brazilian Black gospel singers also learn that their music played a key role in the twentieth century struggle for civil rights. The Black gospel teachers I met all knew that Black church hymns inspired the movement’s freedom songs, that Martin Luther King loved Mahalia Jackson, that common gospel songs were on protesters’ lips. “For those of you who don’t know,” Isabeh lectured, “Martin Luther King was a Protestant pastor. That’s right! A pastor who fought so that there could be equality in the United States. They could not have done this without their music.”

These things, it turns out, were revelations that unleashed new questions, new strains of thought, and ultimately a desire to expose their compatriots to US political history. Joilson, music promoter in a church in the poor north-zone neighborhood of Guarulhos, recalled that when he learned of the connection between music and the civil rights struggle, he began to “read, read anything I could, on Martin Luther King, I began to see how this whole movement of theirs was in the church. That the church really made a difference.” He began to set aside occasional weekend evenings to expose his church to North American political Black history. Between sets of Christian funk, soul and gospel, he and his resident historian, Sidney, would sit on stools in front of the packed church, and speak about marches, sit-ins and demonstrations in the name of racial justice. “This music didn’t appear out of thin

air,” said Joilson to the crowd. “It was part of a movement, it was a way for American Blacks to fight for their rights.”

Rafael, the gospel guitarist, tread a more radical path. His story began with a memory of complaining as a teenager to his music teacher. “I said to him, everyone thinks the music I play is from outside the church.” His teacher assured him that, no, his music was very much from inside. “Then,” Rafael recalled, “he told me I should read about these musicians, that I would learn a lot, I would be amazed. So I thought of that as a challenge. And I thought—these guys are all from the church, so I should look into their lives. And I did. I went to the Internet, watched videos, went to the library... I learned that these guys were singing not just for singing, but to change people, to change the law.” Eventually Rafael began to lecture in Sunday school about the importance of Blacks organizing themselves in their churches and thinking about the racial injustices that faced them in Brazil. He began to call upon his church to pay more attention to Blacks in the Bible.

Michael Santiago came from a very poor family, a broken home, and was close to suicide as a young teenager. One day at school, he saw a video of a Black choir in the US. That catalyzed a cognitive process that launched him into singing gospel, eventually becoming a major force in the founding of new black gospel choirs throughout São Paulo. “I had to understand,” he told me, “how there was a people like this, on this planet, who could open their mouths and sound like that, to sing like that... American blacks are the best singers in the world. There is no disputing that. So I needed to understand why... That, my friend, comes from history—from everything those people fought for. They fought back, they stood up and fought. Martin Luther King and marches, and Black Panthers. I love this, I learned all about it.” This mix of ideas led Michael to write a five-page summary of Black hemispheric history, which he insisted that anyone who wanted to sing in one of his choirs commit to memory.

THE DIVINE NARRATIVE

I have to this point emphasized the human side of this narrative—plantations and secret codes and bush arbors and civil rights—but there is a divine side to this narrative, too. When Black gospel artists speak in rehearsals and trainings and in corridor conversations about the origins of their music, they say that God bestowed upon the people of Kush and their descendants a special mission to bring the unsaved to Jesus. In this view, God endowed the people of Ethiopia with vocal apparatuses and a history that would enable them to sing powerfully and movingly, because He knew that it would be through hearing their voices that the unsaved would be saved.

I heard this remarkable theological history for the first time from Sergio Saas on stage at the Living Rock church, in front of hundreds of young Christians. Ending one song, Sergio reached beneath a chair, seized a huge Bible, and opened it to a dog-eared page. “My friends,” he said, “the eighteenth chapter of Isaiah speaks of a people from a land beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, a people tall and sturdy and fearsome and of glossy skin. [Hallelujah!] Listen to the seventh verse of the eighteenth chapter: ‘In that time shall a gift be brought unto the Lord of hosts by a people tall and of glossy and brown skin.’ It is a prophecy. God is talking about us, the Black race. He is saying that there will come a time when we will offer a gift to the world. And what is that gift?”

He paused. The church was still.

“MUSIC!!” he exploded. The place filled with shouts and hallelujahs.

“Do you see? God had given us the task, He has chosen us, to go forth and sing to the world, to bring our music, our song, because He knows that with our voices—and don’t we have the best voices in the world?—and with our suffering, that we can move the world toward Him. And now we are fulfilling the prophecy!”

I will return later to this view, which was shared by numerous Black gospel musicians. For now I want to underscore its *transnationalism*, the fact that it re-interprets North American Black musical dominance as a temporary phase of something more enduring: God’s choice of black people all over the world as bringers through song of His evangelizing mission. It is this transnational vision that allows the same artists who celebrate North American black musical vocal mastery to claim that, as Brazilian blacks increase their singing skill, they are fulfilling God’s plan. Some artists even claim that Brazilian blacks are *replacing* North American blacks in the working out of divine will, as the former’s spiritual fervor heats up and the latter’s cools. “North American blacks filled their churches with praise before we did,” explained Sergio. “They were the first to accept Jesus. But what do we see happening in the United States today? Spiritual cooling, now everyone there is getting richer, losing their humility before the Lord...So He is lifting us up, raining down the Holy Spirit upon us, and we are fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. Now is our moment, now it is our turn.”

One cool afternoon in her living room, Priscilla explained to me, in a gentle matter-of-fact tone, her thinking about the connections between the history of Black singing, Black oppression, and God’s will. In her view, God had endowed the descendants of Ethiopia with a history of suffering and enslavement, to ensure that their voices would touch listeners at the deepest level. “I have concluded that God made us so that people can always hear a tear in our voices,” she explained. “I think that Blacks are the only ones who have this tear. God needs our praise to be full of pain, he needs us, because He needs praise that expresses the broken heart. God needs this drop of tears... The Black with this awful history, that we read about, whipped and lashed. In Brazil, we try to bury that, we try to forget that, but when we read about this in your country, we learn the way things were... Even today, we still suffer from these prejudices. In Brazil, we try to bury that. But knowing this history, it is like digging it up. So when we enter truly in the Lord, we offer our voices to the Lord, and it is a voice full of pain... . I believe that God needs this kind of brokenness in song. God needs this because this feeling of brokenness touches the hearts of listeners. Black people are part of the dream of God for humankind about music because our voices reach other people, it is through us that God will save the world.”

FROM CONSCIOUSNESS TO ACTION

The embrace of the narratives I have outlined here were frequently associated, I found, with other, more politicized views about what ought to be done collectively by evangelical Christians to improve the lives of Afro-Brazilians. Among the Black gospel artists I got to know, fully three quarters expressed strong agreement with one or more of the following: the need to develop a Black Christian theology; the desirability of creating a church with Black leadership; the importance of getting the church to teach Black history and nurture Black self-esteem; the need for churches to

advocate race-based affirmative action; and the desirability of black Christians to make purchases from black-owned businesses. Furthermore, as the Black evangelical movement in Brazil continues to grow, Black gospel artists seem to be playing an increasingly important role in shaping and directing it. Between 2002 and 2005, I tracked three groups of black gospel singers who organized evening study groups in which they discussed the interconnections between the Bible, social history, and slave resistance. Every year one church that is home to a major black gospel choir hosts a major teach-in about the connection between black music and the civil rights movement in the US. Several networks of black gospel singers created web-pages devoted to “Blacks in the Bible” and “Black heroes”. The Pão da Vida church, home of several black gospel singing groups, regularly organizes educational forums on racism, Blacks in the church, and buying from Black-owned businesses. In 2007 and 2008, leading black gospel singers could be found in the forefront in organizing the annual march for Black consciousness in São Paulo.³ Sergio Mello, a singer of gospel blues who built a church around a Black choir, used his pulpit to proclaim the virtues of affirmative action, the valorization of Black beauty, support for Black entrepreneurs, and nurturance of Black leadership. In the fall of 2005, he led a march of evangelicals to a downtown mall in São Paulo to protest the racially-motivated discrimination against a black musician. The minister of music of Pão de Vida, Daniela Zeidan, increasingly appears in inter-organizational forums to speak out about the need of evangelical Christians to take a stand against racism.⁴

THE CONTRAST WITH THE GOSPEL RAPPERS

The special cognitive affinity of black gospel artists for heightened racial identity and racial politics comes more clearly into focus when one compares them to another group of artists on the gospel music scene—gospel rappers. The key point in the comparison is that while black gospel artists are deeply concerned with developing a complex historical narrative and consciousness about the origins of their music in North American black history, gospel rappers are not. I found that gospel rappers believe that their art is about the here and now, that their energy is best focused on the present, and that they have little reason to linger on the development of complex historical narratives and frameworks. Chris, MC of the rap group *Guerreiros do Senhor* (Warriors of the Lord), pointed out that “rappers talk about what’s happening now, right around them. They want to share that reality, the immediate, what they can see and feel today.” According to Kleber, MC of the group *Ao Cubo*, “you need to survive in the present, not the past. You have to face the present.” At least one other reason gospel rappers have little interest in Black music history is their mistrust of the United States. As gospel rapper Naldo explained, “I am a rapper not to express an American reality, but to express my reality, a Brazilian reality. So I am more interested in Brazilian rappers.”

It thus should come as little surprise that gospel rappers did not develop anything like the deep interest in the complex cognitive world of black history manifested by black gospel artists. While in Black gospel rehearsals I frequently heard references to Black musical history, in gospel rap practice sessions I heard none. While in Black gospel concerts I heard lectures on spirituals and slavery, in gospel rap shows such lectures were conspicuously absent. While study groups and workshops that focused

³ http://www.facasper.com.br/radiouniversitaria/notas.php?id_nota=773;
http://152.92.152.60/web/olped/acoesafirmativas/exibir_noticias.asp?codnoticias=26253

⁴ http://www.facasper.com.br/radiouniversitaria/notas.php?id_nota=761;
http://www.lpp-uerj.net/olped/acoesafirmativas/exibir_noticias.asp?codnoticias=23411.
<http://www.senado.gov.br/sf/publicacoes/diarios/pdf/sf/2007/09/27092007/33320.pdf>

on Black music history were common on the Black gospel scene, I never came across a single gospel rapper who had organized any such study group or workshop. While I met many Black gospel artists who had developed complex ideas about musical history that went back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, gospel rappers had little to say about any music before the 1980s. And while, as I have described in this article, I found Black gospel artists to have developed a dense historic-musical theology, I found nothing faintly resembling such historico-theological thinking among gospel rappers.

This lack of a strong black historical sensibility may have been one of the influences contributing among gospel rappers to a weaker interest in racial identity than the one present among black gospel artists. For gospel rappers' identity was decidedly not focused on race; it was, rather, built around the experiences of class inequality and the misery of the urban periphery. Brazil's gospel rappers denounce drugs and violence and vengeance and police brutality; they decry the misery and fear of the streets, and the lack of options facing Brazil's youth; they declare that the solution is, first of all, salvation in Christ, and second, education and fraternity and love and self-discipline and the renunciation of violence. "We in the periphery," said Ao Cubo, an important gospel rapper, "do not know color, we are of all colors, but of one class. We are all poor. We live near the rotting waters of the gutter, under the grey skies of the periphery, beneath the threat of bullets flying through the air. Black, white, brown—we are all here together."

This kind of class- and place-based consciousness left little room for an identity or politics of race. I never heard any of them rhyme about Blackness, Black rights, or the fight against racism. When pastor Sergio invited a group of gospel rappers to write rhymes about these topics, they turned him down (cf, Pardue 2005, 2007, 2008). While sometimes affirming pride in being *negros* as *individuals*, gospel rappers expressed puzzlement and skepticism when I asked them to comment on Black theology, the black church, or the need of the church to deal with race. None of the gospel rappers I got to know could recall ever attending a study group on Blacks in the Bible, let alone planning one. While they sometimes attended educational forums on Black issues, I never met a gospel rapper who had organized or led one. None had ever taken part in imagining or planning a black-led church. None had set up websites extolling Black theology or Black heroes. And none had participated, let alone spoken in public at, marches in favor of black consciousness. Their social action was limited to neighborhood action, denouncing drugs, guns, gang violence, misery, the failures of government, the brutality of police toward neighborhood dwellers, and lives without love or Jesus. Race and racism, however, were low or absent from their list of priorities.

Multiple factors, of course, contribute the ideological contrast between black gospel artist and gospel rappers. In other work I argue that the contrast reflects the two genres' differing class locations; their differing stances toward the idea of black body; and their contrasting thematizations of place (Burdick 2008, 2009) Yet here I want also to suggest that the contrast is due, at least in part, to the two genres' different cognitive stances toward Black history, and the power of those cognitive stances to either reinforce or dilute collective identity. Black gospel artists stance history opens up cognitive pathways that help reinforce self-conscious racial politics; gospel rap, on contrast, with no similar cognitive historical stance, is deprived of those pathways. It is thus free to generate a far clearer class- and place-oriented collective identity.

Whether Black gospel's more self-conscious racial politics or gospel rap's more self-conscious class politics are preferable, I leave to others to judge.

CONCLUSION

Earlier in this paper I referred to the dominant racial ideology of Brazil, the “myth of racial democracy”, and I pointed out that the prevailing view in academic and activist circles is that evangelical Protestants have little to contribute to a critique of that ideology. What I hope to have revealed here is that, within that unlikely environment, beneath a veneer of indifference to racial identity (as suggested by the absence of the right kind of lyrics) there exists a densely textured collective identity of blackness infused with ideas in clear opposition to the dominant racial ideology. This collective identity, sheltered and nurtured within the subculture of black gospel music, appears to have grown up largely under the radar of the Brazil's black consciousness movement, which has assumed that nothing oppositional to prevailing racial ideology can possibly come out of evangelicalism (Selka 2005, 2007; Dawson 2008).

Yet oppositional this collective identity most decidedly is, as it embraces a range of deeply oppositional ideas (cf. Mainsbridge and Morris 2001): from its adherence to a Biblically-based Africanity; to its celebration of conflictual racial history; to its endorsement of the US civil rights movement; to its advocacy of an image of a divinely favored Blackness with a world-salvific mission; to its annunciation of the world-transformational power of the Black voice. This is cognitive frame at loggerheads with the ideology of racial cordiality, non-conflictual slavery, Afro-Brazilian contentment, the containment of Black aesthetics to a superficial exoticism, and the irrelevance of anti-racism activism. The cognitive frame aborning in black gospel music is dense with narrative of historical conflict, the brutality of diaspora, transcultural solidarity, the political power of Black voice, and a sense of the right and power of Black churches to act in the name of Blackness. These ideas are all the more striking when they are set apart from the weaker racial (but stronger class) ideas present among gospel rappers. The evidence thus suggests that far from remaining a place of passivity and political sterility, there are corners of the evangelical landscape in Brazil that have begun to produce emerging understandings of the racial world that already have sizable constituencies, and that imply that the black consciousness movement might do well to pay more attention—dare I say seek out dialogue and conversation with—new voices speaking from evangelical Protestant worlds.

More broadly, the method applied in this paper suggests the value of looking for the cognitive content of collective identity not only in lyrics—which often can be a weak guide to intellectual collective identity work—but also in the everyday discursive contexts that permeate music scenes. I suggest that by turning their attention to these informal, multiple contexts, analysts of the potential social and cultural force of music may discover submerged, veiled, and otherwise hard-to-hear ideas about collective identity. By listening to these ideas as they circulate in the interstices of music scenes' everyday lives, I suggest that we can begin to understand in a more specific, realistic way how the expressive cultural worlds of music contribute to the formation of collective identities and thus to identity politics.

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