

The Impact of Folkloric Tourism on the Traditional Musical Style *Coco* in Pernambuco, Brazil

by Dan Sharp

Introduction

This research project investigates how the use of folklore in the state's marketing of tourism affects the performers of the traditional musical style *coco* and their music in Pernambuco, Brazil. Within Brazil, the Northeast region has been seen as a wellspring of cultural authenticity, premodern roots, and a living past. The state's efforts to attract tourists place musical traditions like *coco* on a symbolic pedestal as the essence of Pernambucan tradition, inviting Brazilians from the more industrialized south to return to where traditions are still intact. Yet, despite being touted as symbols of Pernambuco, providing the 'raw materials' for global pop performers, and remaining essential to the tourism economy, most *coco* performers lack the wealth to satisfy their basic material needs. This study, bridging tourism studies and traditional music, explores the contradiction of being symbolically valorized while remaining economically marginalized.

Currently, shifts in musicians' perspectives and redoubled efforts to attract tourism during an economic downturn signal a pivotal time of rapid change for the *coco*. The boundary between commercial popular music and the traditional *coco* is changing as musicians are coming to look upon their music as a commodity. *Coquistas* (*coco* performers) are increasingly engaged in battles over authorial copyright for lyrics previously considered part of the public domain. My research analyzes these shifts and focuses on how the state's cultural policy and

promotion of tourism shape the musical practices and everyday lives of *coco* performers. I will pay particular attention to how musicians alter their performances depending on the venue, the sponsor and the audience.

Historical Background

Music and place have long been linked in Brazilian nationalist discourse. Music has been held up as a major component of Brazilian singularity, and the mixture of European, African and indigenous sounds has come to sonically represent the strength and beauty of the nation's racial and cultural mixture. In contrast to earlier racist theories, sociologist and writer Gilberto Freyre claimed in the 1920s that mixture, whether racial or cultural, was a sign of strength and resilience, not degeneracy (Freyre 1933). In retrospect, this celebration has been criticized as contradictory, due to its link to the ideal of *branqueamento* (whitening): the belief that "miscegenation would gradually and inexorably 'whiten' and therefore 'upgrade' the Brazilian Population" (Skidmore 1990). Nevertheless, Freyre's ideas have remained deeply influential in debates regarding the question of *Brasilidade* or Brazilian-ness. Specific to this project, Freyre's ideas are credited as influencing the popularity of music made by marginalized Brazilians.¹ For example, *samba*, originating from largely black urban slums, became widely recognized as symbolic of the nation.

Although the *coco* style of call-and-response vocals and percussion did not become as ubiquitous as the *samba*, it too has circulated in the national popular imagination since the

¹ See Vianna 1995

1920s, symbolizing the *caboclo*, or rural mixed-race person of the Northeast region. Poet, novelist and musicologist Mario de Andrade increased the national visibility of the *coco* through his musical fieldwork. In 1928-9, Mario de Andrade traveled through rural Pernambuco documenting *coco* and other traditional musical practices (Andrade 1984). The melodies, to Andrade, were authentic ingredients of Brazilian-ness to which he juxtaposed with modern Brazil in order to render an all-encompassing portrait. In subsequent years, the Northeast, and specifically the state of Pernambuco, became seen increasingly as a place where traditions lost elsewhere still thrive. It was depicted as the opposite extreme of bustling, industrialized São Paulo and other cities in the South. It was used as an example by those who mourned the loss of tradition and "true" Brazilian culture due to industrialization (Muniz de Albuquerque 1999).

Over half a century later, the aura surrounding the Northeast and *coco* has not subsided in the popular imagination. Tourism is one of the region's main industries, and a large portion of tourists come from southern Brazil. Promotional campaigns from Pernambuco's Ministry of Tourism focus on not only the area's sunny beaches, but also the region's folklore, framing a vacation as a journey to glimpse one's roots. This conception of Pernambuco as a repository of folklore has been utilized by the state's Ministry of Tourism to attract visitors. State and municipal government-sponsored performances during Carnival, as *festas juninas* (Saint's day festivals in June) and throughout the year provide opportunities for musicians to play. *A lei do incentivo cultural* (the cultural incentive law) gives a tax break to private businesses who underwrite the production costs of recording in exchange for their name on the back cover of the record.

In recent years, Recife, Pernambuco has become internationally known for its distinctive *mangue* style of popular music. My master's thesis on *mangue* was based on three months of research in Recife in 1999 and 2000, and focused on how *mangue* musicians conceived of musical hybridity. I was specifically concerned with the fusion of international popular styles and longstanding local musical traditions such as *coco* and how this musical hybridity represented to them a symbolic expression of updated *mestiço* Pernambucan-ness in the 1990s. As I conducted the project, nagging questions remained that couldn't be addressed in one summer: How has the commercial appropriation of traditional styles affected the poorer and often darker-skinned performers whose musical style is used as 'raw material' by pop performers? Now that *mangue*'s popularity is waning and Recife's musical groups are increasingly reluctant to incorporate traditional influences, how will this shift in taste affect *coquistas*?

Project Outline and Research Questions

I propose to explore the material and aesthetic effects of the state's symbolic valorization of traditional music for the musicians who play it. I am specifically interested in how the state and municipal government's cultural policies and efforts to attract tourism have affected *coco* musicians, their music, and what it means to them. I seek to understand how cultural intermediaries who book festivals and underwrite recordings attempt to shape an official view of Pernambucan cultural identity.² I will pay special attention to the processes of

² Cultural management of this type is rooted in the populism of the 1934-1939 period of the *Estado Novo* (New State) of Getulio Vargas. Vargas aimed to 'improve' Brazilian culture through

detachment and transformation that occur by placing performers of participative music and dance traditions on stage in state-sponsored contexts with a strict performer/audience boundary³. Yet, this process is not total—playing a performance for tourists or the local elite does not mark a formerly participatory tradition as exclusively presentational from that point forth. Instead, a musical tradition like *coco* continues to coexist in state-sanctioned, commercial and neighborhood contexts. I will follow musicians' navigation of these different arenas with special attention to the details of performance practice.

Accounts of *coquistas'* own representations of their practices will counterbalance this official state perspective. I will describe performances in neighborhood Saint's day celebrations and other non-state-sponsored contexts, paying special attention to the shifting meanings of similar performances produced for religious and popular social events on one hand, and commercial gain on the other. I seek to assess the various forces that impinge upon this living, struggling musical genre. Based on my previous experience in Recife, it appears that being placed on a symbolic pedestal as a region's distilled essence does not translate into material wealth or even into sufficient wealth to provide adequate living conditions for the musicians themselves. The discrepancy between the state's symbolic valorization of the *coquistas* and the widespread poverty of their material living conditions has implications that this dissertation project will explore.

“active consciousness of their unique characteristics” (Williams 2001:69). It was at this point that hegemonic folklorization proliferated, consisting of the bureaucratization and regulation of formerly informal folkloric groups.

³ This participative to presentational shift has been explored by Sherzer and Urban 1991, Flores 1995, Turino unpublished, and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998 among others.

This proposed study bridges the topics of tourism, the cultural industries and traditional music. It is grounded in the relationships between these areas, addressing not only the state's cultural marketing, but how this marketing affects the music itself. Different performance contexts can lead to different instrumentation, streamlining the ensemble to facilitate travel, or adaptation to changes in the sound due to microphones and amplification. Performers are confronting the contrast between events where the audience and performer are separated as opposed to events with no clear participant/audience boundary. I will examine both the institutional processes and the musical events, with the goal of understanding traditional music as a contemporary social phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

This research fits with recent work that views folklore as a particularly modern creation. Past studies have portrayed folklore as preexisting, largely static traditions produced by isolated, internally cohesive groups persisting largely outside of capitalist modernity. This concept of folklore has been questioned from a variety of angles. Much of the basis of these critiques can be found in debates within anthropology decentering the terms 'folklore', 'culture' and 'nation' (Stokes 2001, Abu-Lughod 1991, Turino unpublished, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Wade 2000 among others). Many recent studies no longer view these basic concepts as givens, but consider them problematics that complicate analysis. The 'bubble' approach to ethnography, representing a tradition as bounded and universally regarded within a given group, has been criticized as contributing to undue connotations of coherence, difference and timelessness within the culture concept (Abu-Lughod 1991, 147).

At the heart of this reassessment is an interrogation of the history of folklore and its development in connection to populist nationalist agendas and Romanticism's response to the Enlightenment in the 19th century. The impulse to celebrate the folk has been located in elite ambivalence towards the drive to include previously excluded sectors of the population within the purview of the nation. The legitimacy of a secular, democratic government relies on the inclusion of the popular classes, yet, to elites, these groups often represented ignorance and superstition that Enlightenment reason strives to move beyond (Garcia-Canclini 1995:147) . Modernizing efforts to widen the consumer base by bringing more people into the fold of commercial exchange coincide with the need to stitch together a unified national identity out of disparate ethnic groups, regions and classes (Turino, unpublished). This ambivalence resulted in combinations of "abstract inclusion and concrete exclusion" within the nation (Garcia-Canclini 1995:147), a tension at the core of this study. Seen from this critical perspective, the bulk of positivist folkloric studies are recast not merely as neutral description, but playing an active part in the ideology of nation-building. In this view, folklorists help shape the contours of abstract inclusion while separating popular culture from the social processes that exclude larger sectors of the population.

In contrast to a positivist approach, this project assumes a more holistic position by focusing on the impact of cultural policy surrounding tourism on *coco*, as well as on the relationship between musicians and the music industry. By acknowledging how commerce and the state affect the traditional *coco*, the genre will not be considered to be a pristine tradition subject to sullyng influences. Instead, a more nuanced situation should emerge in which

musicians' choices occur within a more complicated arena than a more dichotomous conception of tradition vs. modernity would allow. By detailing state-sponsored festivals, copyright battles and musicians' dealings with record labels, current shifts in musicians' intertwined economic and aesthetic decisions will be outlined. Rather than decrying these changes as necessarily signs of the degeneration of a once venerable tradition, a more subtle rendering of how musicians negotiate the state's deployment of folklore can emerge. As opposed to a portrait of a preexisting, currently besieged popular tradition, this approach facilitates an account of how political and commercial forces construct and transform *coco* as they promote it. It also allows for a more practice-based approach that leaves room for the ways in which musicians navigate these institutional structures to carve out a meaningful living for themselves. This project seeks to examine the contemporary reasons that this particular tradition continues to be supported and valorized by different groups.

Crucial to this analysis of the state's impulse to support folklorization is an understanding of the internal regional dynamics between the richer, more industrialized South of the country and the poorer Northeast. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Northeast has been marked as a "culturally distinctive" region in a process similar to that described as 'discursive distancing' by Isar Godreau in her study of Puerto Rico. Discursive distancing refers to the processes of marginalizing certain places within the nation by marking off "its phenotype and cultural signs [as] 'somewhere else' and in pre-modern times" (Godreau 2002:283). This temporal and geographic displacement leads to the celebration of these places as part of a nation's heritage, while simultaneously downplaying their contemporary relevance.

Discursive distancing contains a racial, as well as class component, as these folklorized spaces are often spaces of blackness and poverty -- in the case of *coco*, darker shades of poor *caboclo* playing music with pronounced African influences. By framing these spaces as racialized 'survivals,' they implicitly invoke the ideology of *branqueamento*, or whitening, historically intertwined with the Brazilian celebration of racial and cultural miscegenation (Godreau 2002:284) (Skidmore 1990). Admittedly, notions of race and the nation vary between Brazil and Puerto Rico. At the same time, I feel that Godreau's analysis of folklorization and space resonates with the *coco* example in Pernambuco. Conducting this research will help me sort out exactly to what extent the Northeastern Brazilian case parallels, and differs from, her Puerto Rican case. I suspect that the overriding frame for understanding musical examples like this in the Brazilian case is the ideology of racial democracy.

The Northeast of the country has been represented as both a *espaço de saudade* (a nostalgic space) and a *espaço de rebelião* (a rebellious space) (Muniz de Albuquerque 1999) in the national imaginary. Renato Ortiz suggests that the designation of this region as a repository of folklore is related to the cultivation of regionalist tendencies opposing the centralization of the state. He explains the construction of the Northeast as an attempt by elites of the region such as Gilberto Freyre to "reequilibrate its symbolic capital through a regional ideology" following the region's loss of economic power in the early twentieth century (Ortiz 1985:53). I would like to explore how this music attempts to recuperate a domesticated version of this rebelliousness into the hegemonic nationalist project.

While the internal dynamic between the Northeast region and the country as a whole will be the principal context for this study, its focus on the effects of tourism and the music industry introduces cross-cutting international forces into the analysis as well. Although the majority of tourists to Pernambuco come from South Brazil, many also visit from other countries. In addition, the global reach of the burgeoning World Music market, including the recent popularity in Europe and the U.S. of *coco*-influenced popular music⁴ and *Selma do Coco*'s successful recent performance at Lincoln Center in New York City indicate that an analysis of the contemporary significance of *coco* must acknowledge transnational, as well as national, regional and local levels of presence.

This study, like many recent ethnomusicological studies, moves away from a focus on the product, musical sounds, towards the experience of music-making. Attention to process fixes the central focus of the study on human actors and the institutions that constrain and shape their behaviors. An examination of these processes is prioritized above the collection and categorization of songs. Variations in performance practice, including song choice, audience placement and participation, dancing, and any speaking between songs, become a significant focus of this study as musicians navigate a variety of venues. I agree with Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's foregrounding of the "display interface," the venue or performance context itself. By focusing on the display interface, the meaning of the performance derives not only from whatever is performed on the stage, but how a given performance is mediated, detached and recontextualized as a heritage production for tourists (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett

⁴ by groups such as *Chico Science e a Nação Zumbi* and *Cascabulho*

1998:8). This project departs, however, from Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's work on tourism, in that it focuses principally on domestic tourists, Brazilians travelling within their own country.

Research Experience

I have a total of 16 months experience in Northeast Brazil (Fortaleza, Recife and Natal), beginning in 1994. As the Project Director of the Amigos de las Americas volunteer service exchange program in 1996 and 1998, I coordinated rural community health projects in which U.S. students collaborated with community members and local high school students. This experience acquainted me with rural life in Northeast Brazil and galvanized my commitment to understanding the nuances of its complexity. I am fluent in Brazilian Portuguese, including Northeastern regional vocabulary. The research period from October 2003 to August 2004 will allow me to be present during preparations for carnaval, carnaval itself, and the *festas juninas* in June. In addition, I will attend other state-sponsored performances and festivals throughout the year, including the *Festival do Coco* in Igarassu, Pernambuco held each November.

The contacts I made during my Masters research will aid my work and help me negotiate bureaucratic hurdles. Dr. Carlos Sandroni, ethnomusicology and anthropology professor at the *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco*, has agreed to support this project, as he did my Master's research. He will serve as an important contact and resource, especially considering his recent *coco* recording project and research retracing Mario de Andrade's rural sojourn. My initial contacts with the community of *Coco* musicians will also be made through

Dona Olga, a *coquista* from the city of Igarassu, who I met while studying a *coco-de-roda* festival in honor of *São João* in June, 1999.

Methodology

This methodology is designed to account for: 1) an examination of the performance practice of various Pernambucan *coco* musicians; 2) research into the processes of institutional gatekeeping – how cultural intermediaries in government and the cultural industries decide who is allowed to play and record, where, and for whom; 3) how musicians view their music and their interactions with cultural intermediaries; 4) the nature of the relationship between the performance of traditional music, Brazilian cultural nationalism and regionalism in the Northeast.

In order to research these topics, I will principally utilize these four techniques: 1) Participant-observation; 2) Analysis of performance practice in a variety of venues; 3) Interviews with musicians, state bureaucrats and music industry professionals and audience members; and 4) Archival research.

Participant-Observation

I will employ participant observation as part of a discourse-centered approach for my project. This method advocates a focus on naturally occurring discourse in daily social interaction, as opposed to gathering information solely through directed interviews. Studying and performing with Pernambucan musicians will enable me to observe their speech, musical styles, and collective silences.

I will study percussion in order to enter into a teacher/student relationship that will enable informal conversation regarding the details of the music. However, during actual performances, I expect my participation to be limited to the role of audience member/participant, dancing when the entire group is dancing. I will probably play the minor percussion instruments such as shakers, as the performance events often last 12-15 hours with almost non-stop music, and shaker duty is rotated among many people, as it requires less skill.

Lastly, I have been invited to teach ethnomusicology classes at the UFPE during the second half of the year. This will give me the unique experience of teaching Brazilian students in the classroom who have done shorter term field projects of their own on *coco* and other forms of traditional music from the region. This will give me the opportunity to learn from them, and potentially work alongside them at performances.

Interviews

Another technique that I will employ will be partially structured interviews that begin with open-ended questions in order to allow musicians and industry officials to elaborate on the themes that they find most important. Interviews with musicians will cover topics such as their perceptions of the differences between different performance contexts, current concerns such as songwriting copyright battles and their motivations for performing *coco*. Many of the principal performers are over 60 years old and have been performing *coco* for decades. Therefore, interviews regarding how performance opportunities have changed through the years with shifts in cultural policy may yield insight into the current situation.

To learn about Pernambuco's state Ministry of Tourism and Recife's municipal counterpart, I will conduct interviews with the employees of both agencies, focusing specifically on the development of promotional campaigns and the organization of music festivals.

Analysis of Performance Practice

I intend to observe, document, and record how *coco* is being performed and how musicians articulate their identities musically, visually, and through their speech during performances. With performers' permission, I will record audio and video of these performances, and use the recordings as the basis of feedback interviews that give the performers a chance to explain and comment upon the factors that together make up musical style, such as improvisation, vocal timbre, tempo, and choice of repertoire.

In addition, a recent innovation within ethnomusicology that I would like to utilize is ethnography within the recording studio (Meintjes 1997). This methodology acknowledges that the recording studio is a privileged site in the production of music, and involves close observation of the decision-making processes of musicians, producers and engineers who together produce the final recorded sounds.

Audience Reception

Informal interviews with audience members during and/or after a performance, as well as observation of audience reactions to the performance will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the performance event. As much as possible, I will try to speak with people from a variety of backgrounds. In addition, throughout my time in Pernambuco, I will converse

with people who prefer not to listen to this type of music, in order to understand the perspectives of those who have musical tastes that oppose this type of traditional or folkloric music.

Archival Research

For historical research, I will continue to rely on the phonograph archive at the *Fundação Joaquim Nabuco* and its knowledgeable curator, Renato Phaelante. This archive contains a wealth of recordings and books regarding the music of the Northeast that simply can't be found anywhere else. The growing ethnomusicology archive at the UFPE will also provide contextual information regarding the region's traditional music. My Master's research allowed me to become acquainted with the city's resources. As a result, I have already begun gathering information regarding music-making in Pernambuco that will prove useful for this project as well.

Scholarly Contributions

This research brings together topics and theoretical threads that have been studied by others. Mario de Andrade's seminal study *Os Cocos* (1984) based on his fieldwork in the Northeast in 1928-9 was the first scholarly assessment of the genre. A wealth of other descriptive studies on the traditional music and folklore of the Northeast region have been undertaken, focusing on Pernambuco's carnival (Real 1967) and specifically the afro-pernambucan maracatu (Guerra-Peixe 1956), another genre that is emphasized in the state's tourism promotion. Tiago de Oliveira Pinto's more recent study of *maracatu* carnival groups

(1996) admits in the concluding paragraph that state sponsorship of the genre is prominent during carnival, yet the rest of the article doesn't discuss the implications of this fact. The region's rural troubadour tradition *cantoria* has been outlined in florid nostalgic detail by Luiz da Câmara Cascudo in *Vaqueiros e Cantadores* (1937). As a whole, however, descriptive studies of Northeastern folklore, including a variety of works of literary criticism focusing on *literatura de corde*, a type of poetry pamphlets associated with the rural drylands, fail to question, through the twentieth century, how the region became so strongly associated with nostalgia and tradition in the national imaginary.

Although Muniz de Albuquerque is a historian who only mentions music briefly in his study, his Foucaultian archeology of the social construction of the Northeastern region *A Invenção do Nordeste e outras artes* (1999) contains useful theoretical insights for my project. My project will contribute to this research by highlighting how hegemonic manipulation of musical genres plays an important role in crystallizing this space in the national imaginary. This work will point to contradictions within the dominant national project that will provide the basis for alternative possibilities for the construction of a new, less homogeneous and exclusive, imaginary.

Hermano Vianna's 1995 study *O Mistério do Samba* focuses not on the Northeast but Rio de Janeiro, yet his chronicle of the nationalization of the *samba* is relevant to this project due to its "invention of tradition" approach and attention to the interactions between musicians and various sectors of the artistic, intellectual and political elite. Recently, theoretically-informed works on the Northeast region have focused on self-consciously hybrid

experimental styles of popular music known as *mangue bit* (Galinsky 2002, Murphy 2001, Crook 2001, Sharp 2001). These works have all been concerned with the significance of mixtures of the local and the global in this 1990s pop music movement. However, this attention to avant-garde *mangue bit* has not been balanced with sufficient scrutiny of the impact of these developments on the musicians, such as the *coquistas*, that serve as their influences.⁵ Most studies of folk or traditional music have focused primarily on the sounds and local context (Waddey 1981 among others), and most studies that include crosscutting national and transnational influences have focused on more commercial 'World' popular music. By focusing on performance practice, the state's cultural policy and tourism promotion, this study will engage with ongoing debates regarding the *coco* present in Ayala and Ayala's 2000 book *cocos, alegria e devoção* regarding the genre in the nearby state of Paraíba, and current work being done by the *Núcleo de estudos de etnomusicologia* or Ethnomusicology research group at the *Universidade Federal de Pernambuco* (UFPE).

I have agreed to donate copies of my dissertation, as well as any audio or video recordings, to the growing ethnomusicology archive at the UFPE. In addition, I will present my results at the UFPE before leaving, and give copies of my dissertation to the phonograph archive at the *Fundação Joaquim Nabuco*. I plan to publish articles in both English and Portuguese based on this research, and to turn my dissertation into a book published in English.

⁵ Two notable exceptions to this trend include John Murphy's work on the folk fiddle known as the *rabeca*, and the Brazilian documentary film *Quixabeira: Da Roça à Indústria Cultural* (Quixabeira: From the Fields to the Culture Industry) produced in 1998 by *Instituto de Radiodifusão Educativa da Bahia / TV Educativa* (IRDEB/TVE) which examines the same issues of folklore, the state, and the culture industries that my project will address. Also, Margaret Sarkassian addresses

these issues in Asia in her study entitled *D'Albuquerque's Children: Performing Tradition in Malaysia's Portuguese Settlement*.

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