

JAMAICA BRASILEIRA:
THE POLITICS OF REGGAE IN SÃO LUÍS, BRAZIL, 1968-2010

by

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Residents of São Luís like to say that reggae music reached their island city in Maranhão state in northeast Brazil “through the back door,” into makeshift venues deep in urban slums. In time, audiences in São Luís cultivated a cosmopolitan music scene and an innovative cultural industry that earned their city the title of *Jamaica Brasileira*, or the Brazilian Jamaica. Based on interviews, archival research, participant-observation, and material sources including musical records, this dissertation explores how and why reggae developed local roots in São Luís and its subsequent role in local socio-economic and political developments.

This study finds that Jamaican rhythms of the late 1960s and 1970s arrived primarily through the global music industry via the economic metropolises of the north Atlantic and southeast Brazil alongside other popular international styles. However, as audiences experimented by dancing in couples, they drew upon a range of Caribbean styles including merengue, cumbia, and boleros that had arrived through maritime trade in the mid-20th century. Meanwhile, electrical engineers and entrepreneurs in São Luís independently developed audio arrays known as sound systems resembling similar institutions in Jamaica; these sound systems in turn spurred the growth of the Jamaican-based music scene in conjunction with audiences. Beginning in 1990, people from São Luís made direct contact with Jamaica, initiating a new movement of people, material goods, and culture.

The working-class music scene of São Luís also played a crucial role in negotiations between popular sectors, elites, and police during the military dictatorship, and reggae was even briefly criminalized in the public eye by association with violence, poverty, and marijuana. However, activists in the local black movement defended reggae and began to see the music as a primary weapon in their struggle for black liberation, leading to vigorous debates about nation, region, and culture. As the reggae scene moved from the informal to the formal sector, its sheer economic clout transformed the socio-cultural landscape of São Luís. Sound system owners also mobilized their audience bases into voting blocs, resulting in the election of one “reggae politician” to federal congress through a new complex of political-cultural patronage.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tragedy struck the island city of São Luís in the wee morning hours of Tuesday September 17th, 1996. Reggae deejay Antônio José Pinheiro was exhausted upon finishing four consecutive nights of work at the controls of the sound system Estrela do Som.¹ Yet there was still time for one more escapade, to the Morte do Boi (“Death of the Bull”) festivities in Iguaíba in the nearby municipality of Paço do Lumiar. So the deejay sped away with his driver Zezinho, Zezinho’s wife Vitória, and a lady friend named Sandra. At 3:25 am, as Antônio José slept in the passenger seat, the unthinkable happened. The Chevette D-20 spun out of control and rolled over, throwing the deejay five meters away onto Jerônimo Albuquerque Avenue. Rescue personnel administered first aid, but upon arrival at Socorrão hospital he was pronounced dead.

Antônio José’s wake was held at Espaço Aberto, the reggae club where he had forged his superstardom, the home of his beloved sound system Estrela do Som. From Tuesday afternoon through Wednesday morning, tens of thousands of his fans filed into Espaço Aberto to pay their respects to the man nicknamed “the Wolf.” Thousands more lined the streets outside of the club for several blocks to watch his body being carried away by a fire truck—an honor usually reserved for high-level dignitaries. Those present commented that even José Sarney, ex-president of Brazil and political strongman of the state of Maranhão, would not receive such a grand

¹ A sound system at its simplest is a combination of electrical equipment featuring three main elements: audio input(s), amplification, and audio output(s). At its most complicated, as it developed in the cases of Jamaica and Maranhão, a sound system can be a corporation and a socio-cultural institution based around a certain brand of sound equipment, selector(s), and hit songs. See Andrew C. Campbell, “Reggae Sound Systems,” in *Reggae, Rasta, Revolution: Jamaican Music from Ska to Dub*, ed. Chris Potash (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 198-206.

sending-off. The city of São Luís had never seen anything like it before. Ferreirinha, owner of the Estrela do Som sound system and father-in-law of Antônio José lamented the loss of “a son” with tears in his eyes. On that Wednesday morning, even rival sound system owners and fans appeared to pay their respects in a rare public show of unity within the reggae scene. Radio announcers sang his praises and declared a period of mourning.²

The public’s outpouring of emotion for a son of the soil remained deeply etched in the collective memory of the reggae scene a decade and a half later. Against the odds, a poor black migrant from the town of Ariquipá in the lowland basin municipality of Bequimão had conquered the city of São Luís with his cheerful personality and his exceptional talent as a deejay. Antônio José’s humble personality reminded common Maranhenses (the people of Maranhão) of their own humble backgrounds. His success also reminded them of how a marginalized and criminalized working-class cultural scene had also succeeded, against the odds. By the mid-1990s, reggae was the region’s largest and most financially successful cultural scene. Moreover, it had come to define the city itself. Antônio José’s story is but one of many reggae-related stories that the people of São Luís cherish as they remember their own past and their city’s past. The stories they shared with me, along with those I gleaned from archived printed sources, together comprise the basis for this dissertation.

Most studies of reggae scenes outside of Jamaica and the Jamaican diaspora would figure to be studies of sub-cultures marginal to dominant local cultural and political discourses. They might focus mainly on how the meanings of a global brand of Jamaican reggae were re-constructed locally. The São Luís reggae scene, however, is different. In São Luís, one soon

² Egídio Pacheco, “Morte de ‘Lobo’ deixa Reggae de Luto,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Dj era Estimado pelos Regueiros,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Desastre Mata Fera da Estrela do Som,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 18, 1996; “Muita Emoção no Enterro de Antônio José,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996; “A Viagem do Lobo,” Só Reggae column, *Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996.

realizes that reggae plays a profound role in the local economy, has affected political practices and outcomes, defines relationships between different neighborhoods and socio-economic strata, and continues to spur passionate debates on the identity and destiny of the city and its people. In order to understand the São Luís scene, we must first discard our assumptions about Jamaican reggae and its possible meanings.

São Luís emerges from this study as a cultural crossroads, a city that straddles both the Amazonian and northeast regions of Brazil and operates as a bridge between the Caribbean and Brazil—although, as we shall see, the path toward building that bridge followed an unexpectedly circuitous route. São Luís is peripheral within Brazil yet closely linked to international cultural and technological flows; economically disadvantaged, yet it found ways to access a seemingly distant set of musical commodities and use them to build a strong local commercial music sector. Although marginal to the national imagination, the city is understood by many of its residents as having created an extraordinary and valuable popular culture. Some elements of the story of reggae in São Luís appear unique, but many of the processes and pathways are common to patterns of cultural generation in other places in Latin America, the Caribbean, and elsewhere.

Why did the people of São Luís and the surrounding *baixada maranhense* region adopt reggae so wholeheartedly? One prominent figure in the reggae industry and scene told me that after three decades of trying to answer the question of why reggae is popular in São Luís, he believes “there is no logical explanation.”³ Some locals point to demographic or geographic similarities between the cities of Kingston (the capital of Jamaica) and São Luís. Others believe in ancestral connections between the peoples of Jamaica and Maranhão via enslaved “Mina” Africans, or going back even further via common Amazonian indigenous ancestors. Culture, however, is a process, not a static entity, and temporal coincidences can be distinguished from

³ Ademar Danilo Santos Junior (Ademar Danilo), interview by author, Ponta D’Areia—São Luís, October 14, 2010.

causal links by reconstructing both the movements of goods, people, and ideas and their patterns of local development. The secrets lie in how the routes interact with the roots. Indeed, tracing reggae's path from Jamaica to São Luís takes us on a fascinating historical journey across land and sea that belies intuition and embraces the improbable. This, then, is the central question of this study: How did reggae take root in São Luís and develop a vibrant scene and industry?

This is my history of São Luís do Maranhão, the place known as the Jamaica of Brazil: *Jamaica Brasileira*.

1.1 THE SETTING: SÃO LUÍS DO MARANHÃO

São Luís is a Brazilian island city two degrees south of the equator on the Atlantic Ocean coast. It is the capital of the state of Maranhão. The island is circled by the Bay of São Marcos, Bay of São José and Bay of Arraial. Steady migration towards the city over the last few decades has resulted in an extended urban area, including several neighborhoods created by rural migrant settlers. The second largest city in the state, Imperatriz, is located some 600 kilometers inland; other significant cities within 1000 km include Belém (Pará), Teresina (Piauí) and Fortaleza (Ceará). The state of Maranhão features a variety of ecosystems including a long coastline, well-watered agricultural lands, the Amazon basin rainforest and arid backlands.

The 2010 census estimated the population of the city of São Luís at just over a million people, making it the 15th largest municipality in Brazil and the fifth largest in the Northeast region. The city accounted for 15.4% of the 6.6 million people in the entire state of Maranhão.⁴

⁴ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), “Censo Demográfico 2010: Resultados Preliminares do Universo,” <http://www.sidra.ibge.gov.br/cd/cd2010rpu.asp?o=6&i=P> (accessed October 1, 2012). To be precise, the population of the municipality of São Luís was 1,014,837 and that of the state of Maranhão was 6,574,789.

Widening our gaze, the metropolitan area of greater São Luís—also consisting of the three other municipalities of the island (São José do Ribamar, Paço do Lumiar and Raposa), Alcântara across the bay to the west, and Bacabeira—housed 1.35 million people, giving the region 20.5% of the state’s entire population.⁵ (See Figure 1) The 2010 census also found that 56.4% of the people in the city of São Luís identified themselves as *pardo/a* (brown), 29.1% identified as *branco/a* (white) and 13.2% identified as *preto/a* (black).⁶ The proportion of the city of São Luís self-identifying as brown and black is substantially higher than the national average, as it is for the state of Maranhão; indeed, Maranhão is one of the blackest states of Brazil in terms of its people. The state also retains a strong Amerindian heritage.

Founded in 1612, São Luís was an early strategic battleground for Portuguese, French and Dutch colonizing expeditions, given its proximity to Europe, Africa and the Caribbean and its location along transatlantic trading routes. Maranhão was administratively joined to the Amazonian state of Grão Pará during the colonial period and inhabited by a mixture of indigenous people, European settlers, African slaves, maroons, *bandeirantes* (slave hunters), and military personnel. Maranhão produced sugarcane, tobacco, and cacao for export and local consumption, but major economic expansion did not come until the 18th century, when wars in North America prompted the British to encourage cotton production. The late colonial cotton boom in Maranhão made São Luís the fourth largest city in Brazil by the year 1810, with a population of 17,500.⁷ Economic growth went hand in hand with gross exploitation of workers, many of them slaves, and when disputes between elites broke out into armed conflict in the interior of Maranhão in 1838 common people soon joined in the region’s largest popular

⁵ Ibid. The exact number was 1,346,106 people residing in the metropolitan area of greater São Luís. In comparison, the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and nearby Belém housed 11.7 million people, 3.6 million people, and 2.1 million people respectively.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Laurence Hallewell, *O Livro no Brasil: sua História* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1985), 91.

insurrection known as the *Balaçada*. Elites banded together successfully to defeat the masses, but within a decade the cotton trade to Britain began to decline. Importation of slaves into the state remained high from the late 18th century until as late as the 1880s; even when faced with abolition, Maranhense plantation owners kept buying slaves from nearby states in an attempt to revive their deteriorating plantation economy. From the landed elite of São Luís and nearby Alcântara emerged nationally prominent literary figures in the 19th century, earning São Luís the nickname of *Atenas Brasileira* or the Brazilian Athens.

The decline of the slavery-driven cotton industry by the end of the 19th century, combined with the reluctance of the elite to invest in modernizing or diversifying the local economy, reduced the importance of São Luís and Maranhão within the new Brazilian republic. São Luís's 119,783 people in 1950 made it only the fourteenth largest city of Brazil, far from its days as the fourth largest.⁸ The city's elite clung to the memory of its heyday of cultural significance while the vast majority of the people in and around the island remained primarily engaged in fishing, subsistence agriculture and cattle raising. A new wave of textile factories sustained a small urban sector from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century, when stagnation set in causing the factories to close by the 1950s. Elsewhere in the state, *babaçu* palms (grown for their oil) replaced cotton as the main export-oriented crop. Compared to other states of the republic, Maranhão's economy was suffering, and its social and health indicators were the lowest in Brazil. Maranhenses depended on fishing and agriculture for their livelihood and participated mostly in localized, informal economic networks. However, most were economically self-

⁸ Ibid., 522.

sufficient, especially those who grew their own rice and lived in an environment abundant with natural resources.⁹

The federal government began investing in highway projects in the interior of Maranhão during the era of modernization of the 1950s. Then in the mid-1960s, the federal and state governments pursued an aggressive model of capitalist development in rural interior Maranhão, specifically mining for aluminum and iron ore and constructing roads and railways linking mines in the interior Amazonian region to coastal São Luís. This in turn created a new industrial zone in São Luís by the 1980s dominated by mineral processing, port- and bridge-building, and maritime trade. These infrastructure projects displaced vast numbers of poor rural families, thereby exacerbating a situation already wrought with poverty, lack of access to education and health care, and periodic droughts and famines. In the mid-20th century, Maranhão already experienced a high level of emigration, especially by poor people towards the southeast or towards the Amazon region in search of economic opportunity. Tens of thousands of rural families also migrated to the city of São Luís each decade. Surprisingly, unlike the other states of the northeast, more people entered than left Maranhão in the 1970s and 1980s, the bulk of immigrants arriving from the drought-ridden *sertão* regions of Ceará and Piauí.¹⁰ What resulted was a city with a small elite, almost no middle class, and hundreds of thousands of working class families living in slums and squatter settlements. The movement of these migrants into São Luís affected how neighborhoods—and correspondingly, cultural spaces—formed throughout the city.

⁹ See Mario M. Meireles, *História do Maranhão*, 2nd ed. (São Luís: Fundação Cultural do Maranhão, 1980); Carlos de Lima, *História do Maranhão* (Brasília: Senado Federal, 1981); Francivaldo Melo, *História do Maranhão* (São Luís: Editora Alpha, 2006).

¹⁰ Aidil Sampaio and Risalva Vasconcelos Rocha, *Tendências das Migrações no Nordeste, 1940-1980* (Recife: Ministério do Interior, SUDENE, 1989).



Figure 1. Map of Maranhão featuring Regions with Caribbean influence

São Luís is one of two Brazilian cities with a significant history of a mass-based reggae musical and cultural scene. The other city is Salvador in the state of Bahia. Salvador is well known for its hybrid Afrocentric culture, of which reggae is an important component. Yet São Luís's economic and cultural interactions with Jamaica far surpass those of Salvador. Also, reggae's influence on São Luís's cultural scene and electoral politics is unrivaled by Salvador or by any other city in Brazil. Still, since Maranhão is less studied and less well understood than other important sites of Afro-Brazilian cultural creativity (Pernambuco, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro), the significance of reggae there has gone mostly unnoticed by academics outside of Maranhão. The position of São Luís and Maranhão as economic peripheries and their relative lack of importance within the Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian cultural imaginations make their adoption of reggae all the more fascinating.

The remainder of the introduction is divided into four sections. Section 1.2 reviews literature on musical formations in Brazil (specifically, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro) and Jamaica, and provides theoretical frameworks to situate findings from the experience of Maranhão. This section corresponds to material covered in Chapters Two and Four. Section 1.3 examines literature on global cultural, technological, and commercial flows, with special attention to the literature on global reggae and Rastafari. This section mainly dialogues with Chapter Two, although it is relevant to issues raised in parts of other chapters as well. Section 1.4 looks at socio-political questions in Brazil, beginning with literature on class, race, and violence under the military dictatorship, up to the literature on social and political mobilization in the 1990s and 2000s during the democratic period. These questions are addressed in Chapters Three and Five. The final section of the introduction discusses sources and methods.

1.2 RACE, PLACE, AND CULTURE: POPULAR MUSIC FORMATIONS IN BRAZIL AND JAMAICA

The process by which Maranhenses adopted Caribbean music, while unique in its particular nuances, was emblematic of how a peripheral region of Latin America was economically and culturally linked to the Atlantic and to the globe. Scholars widely agree that when a foreign music reaches a particular locale, it is understood and re-signified based on local priorities and ideologies. Scholars of musical cultures in 20th century Brazil have been especially attentive to how these cultures relate to race and place, given the importance of those relationships for both culture producers and cultural critics. The case of Maranhão challenges paradigms that rely on categorizing culture as international, national, or regional—I find that in practice, music can move both internationally and between regions where it is not supposed to or expected to, thereby blurring regional and national boundaries. Also, I argue that ideologies of race in Brazilian culture are challenged by the case of Maranhão, where both political and cultural forms of racial consciousness took a backseat to cosmopolitan identifications driven largely by sound and sound technology.

Debates on race and blackness in 20th century Brazilian cultural formations have largely focused on comparisons and connections between Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, beginning with the genre of *samba*. Samba music was developed in the urban neighborhoods of burgeoning Rio de Janeiro in the late 1910s and especially the 1920s where migrants from the northeast came together with a cross-class selection of local artists and intellectuals to mix Afro-Bahian rhythms (primarily *samba de roda*) with other popular styles. Samba represented Brazilian modernity; as such it fit quite well with anthropologist Gilberto Freyre's vision of a racially mixed national culture that gained currency in the 1930s and 1940s. Samba seemed musical confirmation of the

harmonious racial democracy Freyre acclaimed. Hermano Vianna argued in the 1990s that samba—and by extension, the city of Rio de Janeiro—occupied front and center in the Brazilian national imagination precisely because it represented the union of the black and the white, the traditional and the modern, the rich and the poor, and the central and the peripheral.¹¹

In response to the twinned heyday of Rio and modernism, strong regionalist movements that cultivated local trends in art and music also developed among intellectuals elsewhere by the 1930s. These movements were inspired by folklorists like Mario de Andrade who had traveled around the country to collect samples of folk and indigenous music, and writers like Jorge Amado who glorified Bahia's mystic African roots. While the newly defined national culture drew inspiration from regional cultures, and indeed based its claims to authenticity on those roots, paradoxically the “national” culture also served to redefine those “regional” cultures as part of a folk or an ethnic past. Afro-Brazilian rhythms, especially, were seen as “impulses” carrying “secrets” of percussion in Afro-Brazilian bodies, an idea that remained strong among musicologists throughout the 20th century.¹² This construct was hardly limited to Brazil, as Ronald Radano notes: “as a racialized ‘black essence,’ hot rhythm arose inexorably from modernity’s primordial wellspring ... to project an illusory folk authenticity.”¹³

Blackness, then, represented by Afro-Brazilians but even more specifically by Afro-Bahians, provided the creative basis for Brazilian cultural production—but only when Afro-Brazilians interacted with other social sectors, especially white elites, did they produce a music

¹¹ Hermano Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba: Popular Music and National Identity in Brazil*, ed. and trans. John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 64-65. See also Gilberto Freyre, *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil*, trans. and ed. Harriet de Onís (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986 [1963]).

¹² José Ramos Tinhorão, *História Social da Música Popular Brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), 310.

¹³ Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, “Introduction: Music and Race, their Past and Present,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Radano and Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 462.

that was considered “national.”¹⁴ The relationship between Bahia in the still agricultural northeast and Rio de Janeiro in the industrial southeast was further complicated by their economic relationship of a periphery to a center. Therefore Rio de Janeiro represented technology and Bahia represented African tradition. Writes Livio Sansone:

In Rio black culture has been commodified largely around the Rio Carnival, whereas in Bahia, roughly in the same period, from the 1920s to the 1950s, black culture was constructed as a religious culture and commodified chiefly around the symbolic universe of the Afro-Brazilian religious system and its African objects.¹⁵

Other regional musical traditions also participated in the regional-national dichotomy. In the 1940s and 1950s, musician Luiz Gonzaga brought folk songs from the arid backlands of the northeast known as the *sertão* to the southeast, in the process “assembling a set of pre-existing stereotypes [of the northeast] into a meaningful (and marketable) product,” in the form of the genres *forró* and *baião* played by people of mixed racial heritage.¹⁶ The way that Gonzaga and musicians from other areas represented their regions suggests that culture producers, in conjunction with their audiences, played an integral part in glorifying and maintaining regionalist ideas.¹⁷

Recent scholarship has challenged the constructions of Brazilian cultures as “national” or “regional” and also complicated the divisions of “folk” and “popular.”¹⁸ Sean Stroud has shown how MPB was constructed as a national genre and promoted under the dictatorship as part of a

¹⁴ Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*, 58-59.

¹⁵ Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 70.

¹⁶ Michael Benjamin Silvers, “Sounding Ceará: Music and the Environment in Northeastern Brazil,” Ph.D. diss., University of California—Los Angeles, 2012, 54.

¹⁷ See Larry Crook, *Brazilian Music: Northeastern Traditions and the Heartbeat of a Modern Nation* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005); Alexander Sebastian Dent, *River of Tears: Country Music, Memory, and Modernity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ For a further deconstruction of these terms for the Caribbean, see Jorge Duany, “Rethinking the Popular: Recent Essays on Caribbean Music and Identity,” *Latin American Music Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 176-94. Duany suggests the hybridity between popular, folk, urban, rural, etc.

nationalist cultural policy despite falling behind other Brazilian genres in commercial sales. Carlos Sandroni and Gerard Béhague have deconstructed the term “popular,” suggesting that the boundaries of what is popular in Brazil and what is not are increasingly irrelevant, given the wide range of categories of practice that use the term.¹⁹ Larry Crook, meanwhile, has reformulated the relationship of the northeast to the nation, previously understood as folk to popular or tradition to modernity. He traces northeastern inventions from slave-era samba de roda to Luiz Gonzaga to 1990s mangue-beat (exemplified by Chico Science and Nação Zumbi) to argue that by mixing indigenous, African and European music, the northeast has been at the vanguard of cultural innovation and therefore at the vanguard of defining the Brazilian nation and Brazilian modernity.²⁰ The transnational turn in the study of history and culture further broke barriers. Micol Seigel even took on the bastion of Brazilian national culture—samba from Rio de Janeiro—and argued that as the pioneering group Oito Batutas toured Europe, their interactions there contributed to the genesis of samba: making samba itself the product of a transnational process.²¹

A comparison of Brazil’s conceptions of race, place, and nation to similar conceptions for Jamaican culture is illuminating. Deborah Thomas argues that once 1970s roots reggae came to define, represent, and publicize Jamaica for the rest of world, it came to be defined as the

¹⁹ Gerard Béhague, “Música ‘Erudita’, ‘Folclórica’ e ‘Popular’ no Brasil: Interações e Inferências para a Musicologia e Etnomusicologia Modernas,” *Latin American Music Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 59-61; Carlos Sandroni, “Farewell to MPB,” in *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship*, ed. Idelber Avelar and Christopher Dunn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 64-73. The three-pronged division of musics into erudite, folk, and popular remains an oft-used formulation for Brazilian musicology: see for example Marcos A. Marcondes, *Enciclopédia da Música Brasileira: Popular, Erudite e Folclórica*. 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Art Editora, 1998). For a

²⁰ Larry Crook, *Brazilian Music: Northeastern Traditions and the Heartbeat of a Modern Nation* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

²¹ Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

national culture (much like samba in Brazil) and a symbol of modernity.²² Jamaican popular music in the late 20th century was in fact extremely diverse, producing the styles ska, rocksteady, roots, dancehall, dub, and ragga; yet these maintained a collective identity as “reggae.” While Brazil developed regionalist cultural movements based on folk identities, Jamaica, in contrast, was able to create a unified national ideology of various strains of folk cultures coalescing into a central unifying cultural force—roots reggae.²³ Carolyn Cooper has argued that this understanding of reggae, however, misreads the reality of Jamaican culture. For her, roots reggae was one formation within Jamaican popular culture that looked backwards to folk traditions and spiritualities, while dancehall—with its innovative sound engineering and dance moves—offers better (and newer) representations of modernity within Jamaican society.²⁴ Ultimately, in the Jamaican context, ideas of nation and modernity were malleable, shifting according to changing social and technological needs.

This literature review has tried to problematize conceptualizations of the region and the nation in Brazilian culture in order to break down the imagined oppositions that, I argue, can mislead our understanding of both cultural and racial formations.²⁵ These ideas are not simply abstract concepts. The question is, when do regional characteristics mask other processes (i.e., when do “roots” distract from “routes”), and when do they matter in determining cultural production/consumption? Regional pride and national pride, for example, remain strong emotional forces for producers of culture and audiences alike, and no doubt play a role in the process of creating culture itself. I argue that to understand the case of Maranhão and how its

²² Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

²³ See Lloyd Bradley, *Bass Culture: When Reggae was King* (London: Viking, 2000) for the classic narrative.

²⁴ Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the “Vulgar” Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

people accepted foreign music with open arms, it is useful to shelve restrictive ideas of national and regional identities.

I will show in Chapter Two that Maranhenses cultivated three different groups of musical genres (and rhythms) in the 1960s and 1970s and integrated them on the dance floor to create a twin foundation of musical and dance sensibilities that turned out to be very compatible with reggae. The first group consisted of the Caribbean popular genres of cumbia, merengue, bolero, compas, guaracha, calypso and others that were lumped together in São Luís under the rubric of “merengue” (faster rhythms) and “bolero” (slower ones). The second group consisted of international pop, rock, and disco music from England, the United States, and wherever else. The third group consisted of northeast Brazilian folk styles: not Afro-Maranhense styles, but the hybrid African/European/Indigenous styles from the backlands that Larry Crook described as vital to the creative thrust of northeast Brazil. I suggest that along with Caribbean popular styles and international pop, certain elements in the music of the northeast folk styles (grouped as forró) provided a musical basis for accepting reggae. This played out largely through dance; club-goers synthesized dance moves from boleros, merengue, international pop, and forró to create a couple dance that responded well to the acoustic and electric innovations of reggae music. In other words, by dancing to new rhythms they liked, Maranhenses bridged familiar styles of the past and innovations of the present. They also disregarded boundaries of race and nation as they made their cultural choices. They might have said, to paraphrase Anthony Seeger, “whoever we are today, we can dance you a dance about it.”²⁶

Another important debate in the literature surrounds the advent of a new wave of racially conscious musical scenes in the 1970s. By the late 1960s Florestan Fernandes and others were

²⁶ Anthony Seeger, “Whoever We Are Today, We Can Sing You a Song about It,” in *Music and Black Ethnicity: The Caribbean and South America*, ed. Gerard H. Béhague (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 1-15.

challenging the validity of the “racial democracy” paradigm to understand Brazil social formations, instead arguing that racial inequality had persisted.²⁷ In the 1970s a wave of new black cultural forms in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia reframed the debates on race, place, and music in Brazil. A number of scholars, including Antonio Riserio, Larry Crook, and Goli Guerrero, argued that Bahians developed a new Afrocentric consciousness through their carnival blocs, educational groups such as Ilê Aiyê, and musical ensembles such as Olodum.²⁸ Reggae was especially important in this artistic mix; scholars like Araújo Pinho and Santos Godi affirmed that Bahians had establishing an international linkage with Africa and Jamaica. What’s more, the creation of a local hybrid form called *samba-reggae* was, to them, evidence of a union between a regional (folk/roots) blackness and a transnational blackness.²⁹ In doing so, they suggested, Bahians bypassed the racial democracy ideal that represented the Brazilian nation.

The “black soul” and funk scenes (led by artists like Jorge Ben, Tim Maia and Gilberto Gil), especially strong among working-class youth in Rio de Janeiro, also challenged the regional-national dichotomy that informed the Brazilian cultural imagination. According to Livio Sansone, as youth in Rio—many of them Afro-Bahian migrants themselves—danced to North American soul and funk scenes, known as “black music,” they made an ideological connection

²⁷ See Florestan Fernandes, *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Robin Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race and Racism in Urban Brazil* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Larry Crook, “Black Consciousness, Samba Reggae, and the Re-Africanization of Bahian Carnival Music in Brazil,” *The World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993): 90-108; Goli Guerreiro, “Um Mapa em Preto e Branco da Música na Bahia: Territorialização e Mestiçagem no Meio Musical de Salvador, 1987-1997,” in *Ritmos em Trânsito: Socio-Antropologia da Música Baiana*, ed. Livio Sansone and Jocélio Teles dos Santos (São Paulo: Dynamis, 1998), 97-122; Antonio Risério, *Carnaval Ijexá: Notas sobre Afoxês e Blocos Afro do Novo Carnaval Afrobaiano* (Salvador, BA: Corrupio, 1981).

²⁹ Osmundo de Araújo Pinho, “‘Fogo na Babilônia’: Reggae, Black Counterculture, and Globalization in Brazil,” in *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, ed. Charles A. Perrone and Christopher Dunn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 192-206; Antonio J. V. dos Santos Godi, “Reggae and Samba-Reggae in Bahia: a case of Long-Distance Belonging,” in *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, ed. Perrone and Dunn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 207-19; Goli Guerreiro, “As Trilhas do Samba-Reggae: a Invenção de um Ritmo.” *Latin American Music Review* 20, no. 1 (1999): 105-40.

not to a transnational blackness but to their own Afro-Bahian roots.³⁰ Such data seems to suggest that the nature of blackness, especially for Afro-Brazilian youth culture, was more dependent on where the youth lived at that moment (especially if they missed their homeland of Bahia, or Ceará, or Pernambuco), rather than some deep cultural attachment to notions of region, nation, and globe. Indeed, Tropicalist musicians argued against such restrictions, none more so than Gilberto Gil who easily moved between different regions of Brazil, played “black” and “non-black” forms, and was equally adept at British rock and Jamaican reggae as he was with “national” styles under the rubric of *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB).³¹

Paulina Alberto provides a framework for a possible way of understanding reggae in Maranhão. She looks at how black intellectuals in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo used different cultural arguments in their efforts at political mobilization vis-à-vis the state. (Bahians emphasized culture most, while activists in Rio de Janeiro used a mixture of political and cultural claims.)³² In Section 4.6 I examine how in São Luís black intellectuals mobilized and negotiated vigorously, some on behalf of reggae, and others against reggae and behalf of local Afro-Maranhense folk and popular forms. Also, I show that in the 1980s and 1990s, reggae played also played an important role in discussions regarding state and city government policy, both social and cultural.

Another framework to understand how reggae may have interacted with social formations of race and nation in Brazil comes from Peter Fry and Michael Hanchard. Fry points out that the

³⁰ Livio Sansone, “Funk Baiano: Uma Versão Local de um Fenômeno Global?” in *Ritmos em Trânsito*, ed. Sansone and dos Santos, 219-240. Also see Hermano Vianna, *O Mundo Funk Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1988).

³¹ See Caetano Veloso, *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Isabel de Sena, ed. Barbara Einzig (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002); Sergio Cohn, ed., *Gilberto Gil – Encontros* (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2007).

³² Paulina Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); also see Larry Crook and Randal Johnson, ed., *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity and Social Mobilization* (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1999).

same type of African-derived food that was constructed a symbol of a certain ethnic group (blacks) in the United States, was instead constructed as a national dish in Brazil, a symbol of racial mixing and unity.³³ Hanchard elaborates on this argument, arguing that once samba, feijoada and other Afro-Brazilian culture had been appropriated by the white middle classes and made into a symbol of a national heritage, Afro-Brazilians could not use it in defense of their African heritage. Instead, they had to appropriate black cultural forms from elsewhere, for example North American funk, to reaffirm their racial consciousness. This suggests the hypothesis that perhaps Maranhenses, unsatisfied by the inability of samba or Boi or forró to represent the African side of their heritage, turned to reggae to fulfill that symbolic role.³⁴

This brings us to the final debate in the literature of this section. The debate surrounds the more specific question: did the predominantly black population of Maranhão connect with reggae in racial terms, and if so, did their local constructions of reggae redefine their ideas of blackness? This was the question that guided the first major research project on reggae in São Luís, undertaken by Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva. Silva argued that Afro-maranhenses connected to reggae not politically through lyrics or other messages in the music, but through the leisure activity of dancing, which led many of them to develop a level of racial consciousness, not at the political level but at the level of culture and identity.³⁵ This argument parallels Bryan McCann's assertions for Afro-Brazilian youth in black soul dances in Rio de Janeiro, and for Alberto's framework for Bahian movements.³⁶ Silva goes on to suggest that in the 1990s Afro-Maranhenses syncretized reggae with local folk festivals such as Bumba-meu-Boi. In essence,

³³ Peter Fry, "Feijoada e 'Soul Food': Notas sobre a Manipulação de Símbolos Étnicos e Nacionais," in *Para Inglês Ver: Identidade e Política na Cultura Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982), 47-53.

³⁴ Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 114-116.

³⁵ Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras à Ilha do Amor: Reggae, Lazer e Identidade Cultural* (São Luís, MA: EDUFMA, 1995).

³⁶ Bryan McCann, "Black Pau: Uncovering the History of Brazilian Soul," *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 14 (March 2002): 33-62.

Silva traces the process by which reggae came to be understood as local culture—the ultimate re-definition of place.³⁷

The findings of this dissertation support all of Silva’s major findings. There are several areas where this research can elaborate on Silva’s arguments and provide a more nuanced view of the historical process of how reggae came to São Luís. What Silva represents as almost an inevitable process of local discovery of reggae’s black credentials, I represent as a process that had to be initiated and constantly fueled by members of the Center for Black Culture (CCN) in the press, in city council meetings, in teach-ins, etc.³⁸ Heidi Feldman provides an interesting parallel; she shows how Peruvians “re-create[d] the forgotten music, dance, and poetry of Black Peru,” but since these cultural expressions had been lost, they had to resort to “conjuring newly imagined links to the past.”³⁹ In the case of Maranhão, once black activists discovered the Jamaican music scene right under their noses, they didn’t have to invent anything since reggae already was a black cultural formation. They only had to invent an ideological connection and educate audiences, which had some positive results but not the large-scale awakening of black consciousness as happened in Bahia that the activists were hoping for.

This research also aims to further Silva’s arguments by exploring some of the mechanisms by which Maranhenses connected to reggae. Scholars have traced how people in Brazil and Jamaica have stored cultural knowledge in their bodies and expressed it through

³⁷ Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, *Ritmos da Identidade: Mestiçagens e Sincretismos na Cultura do Maranhão* (São Luís: SEIR/FAPEMA/EDUFMA, 2007).

³⁸ I doubt anyone knows more about this than Silva himself; after all, Silva was present at some of those city council meetings and teach-ins and was himself involved with the CCN’s efforts at educating reggae’s audiences and the general population about reggae, as a member of the CCN.

³⁹ Heidi Carolyn Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 3-4.

dance.⁴⁰ New research on Jamaica has focused on audio systems, sound frequencies, and the sounding of bodies.⁴¹ In the following Section 1.3 I suggest that as Maranhenses bodies connected to reggae music through dance and through sonar vibrations, they connected to Caribbean musical sensibilities. Also, in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, I trace the material connections and voyages between Jamaica and São Luís. Through these two processes, Maranhenses made connections to Jamaica, and beyond.⁴²

In summary, I suggest that given the many cultural and commercial global linkages that the people of São Luís found themselves part of from the second half of the 20th century onwards, it is difficult to pinpoint regional or national causes for the development of a major reggae scene. Yes, people in São Luís responded to folk music, but not just their own: the calypsos and merengues they loved were themselves part of the mid-20th century milieu in Jamaica that eventually produced reggae. Yes, they liked international music, but not the explicitly black musical forms popular in Bahia or Rio de Janeiro. From listening to the most commercialized pop music and pop covers of Jamaican songs, they eventually stumbled upon roots reggae with all its trappings of authentic black culture. Although the reggae scene in Maranhão drew criticism locally for supporting a black music form not born out the Brazilian racial democracy model, ironically, the Caribbean dances of merengue, cumbia and bolero that

⁴⁰ For Jamaica see Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (London: Macmillan, 2004) and Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*; for Brazil, see Cristina F. Rosa, “Choreographing Identification: the Presence of Ginga in Samba, Capoeira, and Grupo Corpo,” Ph.D. diss., University of California—Los Angeles, 2010.

⁴¹ Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Soundsystems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

⁴² See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

informed the reggae dance performances of Maranhenses were themselves products of similar African and European mixtures, only in the Caribbean instead of Brazil.⁴³

1.3 INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL FLOWS

Maranhão and Caribbean were linked from the late 1960s onwards, despite the lack of direct movement of people, ideas, or goods between the regions. Similar social structures and technological developments in Jamaica and Maranhão, organized around the institution of the sound system-led musical event, ultimately created two compatible cultural scenes where music produced in one place fit seamlessly into the other. Such a linkage can hardly be called transnational; it was, however, mediated through global economic structures and a global cultural marketplace. Jamaican songs, melodies, and rhythms arrived in São Luís mostly thanks to international pop, largely via the Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff, but also via a Texan soul singer, a Swedish pop band, the Rolling Stones, an obscure record label from Guadeloupe, a Tennessean adult film actress, and Jamaican covers of disco hits.

In this section I look at several debates in the academic literature regarding industries and commercial structures (small-scale and large-scale) and their interactions with processes of cultural production and consumption, including global cultural flows. Musicologists of Brazil have been very attentive to questions of how Brazilian cultures have been affected by cultural imperialism and global core-periphery economic relationships. However, in general, they have been less attentive to small-scale and medium-scale music industries and to economic and commercial factors within music scenes in Brazil. Scholars of global reggae have been even less

⁴³ John Charles Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004).

successful at examining the commercial side of musical production and consumption, focusing instead on the appeal of reggae strictly through its highly visible political and cultural messages.⁴⁴ The case of reggae in Maranhão, I argue, refocuses our attention towards economic interactions, especially that of multinational recording companies and informal nightclubs and their relationships to audiences and sound systems. I also find that the unique cultural flows to São Luís were driven, unexpectedly, by economic policy including trade, tariffs, and import-substitution industrialization. Finally, the importance of technology, especially electrical and sound technology, cannot be overstated as a factor in the reggae scene of São Luís.

In the 1980s, in response to the centralization of cultural production in a handful of multinational conglomerates, ethnomusicologists refocused their gaze towards music industries, arguing that recording companies were commercializing popular culture, thereby robbing it of much of its anti-hegemonic character.⁴⁵ While one line of the scholarship continues to be intrigued by music industries that operate at a global scale, on the other end of the spectrum Peter Manuel's classic study on cassette culture looked at small-scale and cottage industries that proliferated when recording companies failed to enforce copyright rules.⁴⁶ Keith Negus has posited that whether large or small, "as cultural intermediaries, recording industry personnel are constantly contributing to the production of and then reorganizing, circulating, and mediating the words, sounds, and images of popular music."⁴⁷ The sound system, I argue, has operated as such a mediator between audiences and selectors, allowing for the proliferation of informal popular music parties in working-class neighborhoods in Maranhão as in Jamaica. I find that in São Luís,

⁴⁴ This point is valid for reggae cultures and sub-cultures outside of Jamaica and England, where the literature on the commercial side of reggae is adequate. See for example Michael De Koningh and Marc Griffiths, *Tighten Up!: The History of Reggae in the UK* (London: Sanctuary, 2003).

⁴⁵ See Simon Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," in *Popular Music and Communication*, ed. James Lull (London: Sage, 1987), 53-79;

⁴⁶ Peter Manuel, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 190-193.

⁴⁷ Keith Negus, *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 62.

sound system owners were entrepreneurial members of the working class who kept their industry in the informal sector; they created the informal (and easily breakable) rule of exclusivity, which had a positive effect on attracting audiences.

Brazilian musicologists in the 20th century have generally been wary of both foreign musical genres and music corporations. In the post war-period, they reacted defensively toward the popularity of foreign genres like jazz, boleros, and rock, and also toward the Brazilian hybrid creations they inspired like *bossa nova* and Tropicalism. Academics in the flagship institutions Center for Popular Culture (CPC) and the Institute of Higher Studies (ISEB) defended the national genres of samba and *choro* against the perceived threat of foreign genres.⁴⁸ Right-wing nationalist critiques coincided with critiques from a Marxist perspective like that of Jose Ramos Tinhorão, who believed that Brazilian music was being “diluted” by U.S.-led cultural imperialism. Tinhorão and his Brazilian colleagues shared the central concerns of Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt Marxist school about how global economic structures and class formations affected culture negatively.⁴⁹ Tinhorão painted the middle classes of southeast Brazil as consumers and superficial imitators of imported cultural goods, juxtaposing them with the black-majority popular classes, who, he argued, were living “a dynamic process of great creative richness” as they created their sambas.⁵⁰ In response, critics from a new left tradition Roberto Schwarz and Celso Favaretto defended Tropicalism, arguing that it succeeded in representing Brazil allegorically with all its contradictions—archaic and modern, underdeveloped and developed, insular and transnational.⁵¹ According to Caetano Veloso, an important musician of

⁴⁸ Sean Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music: Politics, Culture, and the Creation of Música Popular Brasileira* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 18-22.

⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “On Popular Music,” in *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002[1941]), 437-469.

⁵⁰ Tinhorão, *História Social da Música Popular Brasileira*, 263. Also see Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition*, 25-27.

⁵¹ Roberto Schwarz, “Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964-1969,” in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, ed. John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992[1970]), 136-43; Celso Favaretto, *Tropicália: Alegoria, Alegria* (São Paulo:

the movement, the Tropicalists preferred to “open the lanes of musical creativity” rather than to obsess about national purity.⁵²

Broadly speaking, foreign musical genres in 20th century Brazil have been cast by scholars into two molds—as forms of cultural imperialism forced upon Brazilians and their economically disadvantaged music industry, or as fresh cultural perspectives that Brazilians could adopt as counter-cultural or oppositional tools to respond to inequalities and ideologies in Brazilian society. In other words, Brazilians adopted foreign genres either because they were enamored by foreign culture, or because they had a socio-political reason to do so, or some combination of the two. Maranhão’s Caribbean-based scene dispels this perspective. I suggest that just as sound frequencies can defy spatialized conventions as they between regions, people in certain regions can build radical musical cultures based on ever changing social needs, economic relationships, technological preferences, and rhythmic expectations.

Another relevant body of academic literature pertains to reggae and Rastafari. Scholarship on reggae and Rastafari has taken a global turn in the last decade, especially with the Global Reggae Conferences at the University of West Indies (Mona) in Kingston and the publication of recent anthologies on global Rastafari. Rastafari has had a significant impact in Brazil, especially in Bahia.⁵³ However, the absence of Rastafari spirituality in São Luís (except for a handful of adherents—see section 4.7) dictates that the scholarly debates on the political,

Editora Ateliê, 1996[1979]); Caetano Veloso, *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Isabel de Sena, ed. Barbara Einzig (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002), 20; Schwartz lamented over global cultural imperialism, and took a middle ground between Tinhorão and Favaretto; it was Favaretto who was most sympathetic to the political project of Tropicalist musicians and embraced their reconceptualization of the Brazilian nation.

⁵² Veloso, *Tropical Truth*, 55; also see Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition*, 29.

⁵³ See Janet L. DeCosmo, “Reggae and Rastafari in Salvador, Bahia: The Caribbean Connection in Brazil,” in *Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean*, ed. Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 37-64; Ericivaldo Veiga, “O Rastafarianismo em Salvador: Conjecturas sobre Religião e Identidade,” master’s thesis, Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1986.

cultural, social, and spiritual meanings of Rastafari will not be discussed here.⁵⁴ There is a good body of literature on reggae, much of it written for popular audiences, that discusses how reggae was projected worldwide since the 1970s. The bulk of the literature from the 1980s and 1990s focused on Bob Marley and the Wailers and associated roots reggae acts,⁵⁵ although recent works on reggae have on the whole been more comprehensive in their coverage.⁵⁶ Some works have tended to portray reggae as a clearly defined set of cultural ideas—reggae music, Rastafari, black liberation, human liberation, etc.—with some going as far to see reggae as a worldwide social movement.⁵⁷ Led by Carolyn Cooper, scholars studying Jamaica have challenged that argument, showing that Jamaican popular culture was itself more heterogeneous and more contested along lines of gender, morality, and other ideologies.⁵⁸

Scholars studying reggae outside of Jamaica have shared the presumption that reggae's meanings would be negotiated locally. Studies of scenes in places like Hawai'i, Indonesia, and Africa show how audiences adopted certain socio-political messages that accompanied the music and then refashioned them in various ways.⁵⁹ Reggae elsewhere in Brazil follows this model. The São Luís scene, however, developed quite differently. Audiences there did not pay attention

⁵⁴ See Michael A Barnett, ed., *Rastafari in the New Millennium* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012); Werner Zips, ed., *Rastafari: a Universal Philosophy in the Third Millennium* (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2006); Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William D. Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, eds., *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994); Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987).

⁵⁵ See for example Stephen Davis and Peter Simon, *Reggae International* (New York: Rogner & Bernhard, 1983); a good recent example is Mike Alleyne, *The Encyclopedia of Reggae: the Golden Age of Roots Reggae* (New York: Sterling, 2012).

⁵⁶ Gender theory, especially, has been excellent in theorizing both roots and dancehall reggae. See Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*; Donna P. Hope, *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall* (Miami: Ian Randle, 2010).

⁵⁷ See for example Thomas Joseph Weber, "Likkle but Talawah (Small but Mighty): Reggae Music, Globalization and the Birth of a Social Movement," Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2000.

⁵⁸ Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*.

⁵⁹ Andrew Weintraub, "Jawaiian and Local Cultural Identity in Hawaii," *Perfect Beat* 1, no. 2 (1993): 78-89; Emma Baulch, "Reggae Border Zones, Reggae Graveyards: Bob Marley Fandom in Bali," *Perfect Beat* 6 (2004): 3-27; Savishinsky, Neil. "Transnational Popular Culture and the Global Spread of the Jamaican Rastafarian Movement," *New West Indies Guide* 68 (1994): 259-81.

to lyrics (common in global scenes) but neither did they receive any kind of social or cultural message, not even the colors red, gold, and green or dreadlocked hair (this was extremely rare for a reggae scene, however small), for they did not identify the music as reggae or as coming from Jamaica—to them it fell under the umbrella of popular international music. Neil Savishinsky’s research on reggae and Rastafari in West Africa is the most resonant with this pattern. He identifies reggae’s danceability, not any social or political message, as the first and foremost reason that West Africans liked the music, despite the fact that both political and spiritual messages in Jamaican reggae would appear to be more relevant to black people in Africa than anywhere else.⁶⁰ I come to the same conclusion for Maranhão at the intersection of north and northeast Brazil.

Of the studies on the history of reggae in Jamaica, the most relevant to my project turned out to be oral histories by Lloyd Bradley and David Katz that examine the early years of Jamaican popular culture.⁶¹ Their discussions of how Jamaicans interacted with foreign music, with local economic structures, with electronic technology, with details of production and consumption, and finally how they responded to music on the dance floor, are fascinating for their similarity to processes in Maranhão. The parallel processes strengthen my argument that it was similar socio-economic conditions and similar technological and cultural needs, rather than direct transnational connections between the two places that drove the rise of the reggae scene of São Luís.

Three more recent lines of research on how people negotiate sound frequencies and soundscapes also inform this study. First, Michael Veal shows how studio producers and sound

⁶⁰ Neil Savishinsky, “Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of a Jamaican Socio-Religious Movement and its Music and Culture Among the Youth of Ghana and Senegambia,” Phd. diss., Columbia University, 1993, 45.

⁶¹ Bradley, *Bass Culture*; David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003).

engineers in Jamaica developed novel techniques to isolate and then manipulate certain sounds. Bass sounds were especially important to dub reggae.⁶² Second, Darien Lamén and Júnior Almeida investigate the history of sound systems in Belém do Pará, arguing that electrical engineers spurred both technological innovations and musical innovations.⁶³ Lamén's research is especially relevant because São Luís and Belém fall within the same Caribbean sphere of influence; São Luís's sound system scene basically developed out of Belém's sound system scene, and much of the Caribbean music that the people of São Luís heard was also heard and cultivated in Belém.⁶⁴ Third, Julian Henriques argues that the massive sonic power mediated through sound systems interacted with Jamaican bodies to create a new aesthetic of listening and dancing. It appears that the same process took place in Maranhão, as sound system speaker racks and potencies grew to massive proportions and audiences began calling their favorite songs *pedras* (rocks) or *tijolos* (bricks) because of the way the sound hit their bodies.⁶⁵

In sum, I argue that the people of São Luís, through a complex process that took place across a number of nightclubs, chose to cultivate Caribbean musical styles based on listening to sound, dancing, and feeling sound as it was mediated through sound systems. The routes that Caribbean music took into São Luís were complicated; in the 1960s and 1970s it arrived disguised as popular culture from Belém, or São Paulo, or the United States, or Europe—in short, anywhere but the Caribbean itself. My research suggests that the routes of musical transfer were important, but that reggae's roots in Jamaican sound systems' cultural and technological experimentation also had crucial importance when recordings reached São Luís, because the

⁶² Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); also see Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen, 1987).

⁶³ Júnior Almeida and Darien Vincent Lamén, *Projeto Sonora Paraense*, <http://www.sonoraparaense.com> (accessed December 26, 2012).

⁶⁴ Darien V. Lamén, "Mobilizing Regionalism at Land's End: Popular Electric Guitar Music and the Caribbeanization of the Brazilian Amazon," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2011.

⁶⁵ See Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*.

structural similarities between the two places created demand for similar characteristics. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot suggested, the Caribbean in the 20th century was a hotbed of constant creativity, including innovations in music and dance, and one response to that creativity came loud and clear from an unlikely place—São Luís do Maranhão.⁶⁶

1.4 NEGOTIATING CRIME AND POLITICS, FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY

This section begins by reviewing the literature that will dialogue with my findings in Chapter Three on criminality and popular music and then addresses the literature relevant to Chapter Five, which discusses reggae's participation in electoral politics. When I began my research I had not planned to write a chapter on the violence in São Luís connected to working-class neighborhoods and their nightclubs. I knew that the earliest reports on the international music scene in São Luís appeared on the newspapers' police pages instead of entertainment pages, but absent an organized police effort against a reggae scene, I had thought nothing of it. Later I realized that I was missing the forest for the trees. There was no organized police effort against a reggae scene, a black music scene, or a Jamaican music scene per se, because the members of that scene did not identify it as such. There was, however, police repression against the poor, the periphery, the black and brown, the young—the very people that were busy creating a music scene for themselves deep in the ghettos of São Luís. I argue that in response, working-class

⁶⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992): 19-42. Lara Putnam identifies the roots of Jamaican reggae in a similar process of musical and bodily contestations with political, social, and economic forces across the Caribbean: Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

members of the reggae scene and social activists banded together to negotiate with authorities and alleviate the violence. My findings, I believe, add to the literature on the everyday cultural and social impact of the military dictatorship on the urban working class, and how the urban working class in turn negotiated and maneuvered for their rights.

The story of outlaw cultures, or those urban musical and dancing cultures across the Americas that were criminalized as sinful and dangerous in the late 19th century, then persecuted, then accepted by the elite, and finally elevated to the status of national culture in the 20th century, is not an unfamiliar one. Afro-Brazilian capoeira and religious drumming were outlaw cultures; so were tango in Argentina, danzón in Cuba, and jazz in the United States.⁶⁷ Nineteenth-century Maranhão had its own rural outlaw culture, a dissident popular culture among the free peasantry with its mixture of black, indigenous and *mestizo* farmers. According to Matthias Röhrig Assunção, the popular revolt called the Balaiada (1838-1841) left elites deeply suspicious of popular gatherings. Beginning in the 1840s, São Luís and municipalities in the interior of the province enacted laws forbidding musical gatherings, festivals and more.⁶⁸ Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, Maranhense elites joined their counterparts in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere in Brazil to further outlaw a wide selection of cultural practices.

Populist policies of the 1930s to the 1960s in Brazil, based on inclusionary theories led by Gilberto Freyre's idea of racial democracy, decriminalized and even cultivated many of these cultural practices. Yet there would be no redemption for Maranhão's outlaw cultures in the mid-

⁶⁷ See John Charles Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Peter Fryer, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage in Brazil* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

⁶⁸ African healing practices, indigenous alcoholic drinks (*caium*), widely used intoxicants such as marijuana, and even indigenous clothing and public bathing were outlawed in many municipalities. *Batuques* or drum ensembles that were tolerated during the late Colonial period for strategic reasons were quickly outlawed after the *Balaiada*; authorities also banned popular festivals that encouraged large public congregations and destroyed musical instruments regularly. Matthias Röhrig Assunção, "Popular Culture and Regional Society in 19th Century Maranhão, Brazil," in *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14, no. 3 (1995): 265-286.

20th century.⁶⁹ Sergio Ferretti argues that local academics ignored popular culture⁷⁰ until the 1970s, when they began studying the considerably heterogeneous cultural practices that dominated both rural and urban Maranhão, especially those with a tangible connection to African or *caboclo* (indigenous-based) cultural memory.⁷¹ And while landowning (and ex-slave owning) families and elites of São Luís slowly accepted national ideologies of inclusion on a theoretical level, through the 1950s they continued to bar popular festival celebrations from the city fearing “gun battles and violent deaths.”⁷² Several scholars of Maranhense culture have argued that thanks to the long period of segregation of elite culture from that of the popular classes, much longer than in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, class inequality was the single most crucial factor driving local cultural change.⁷³

Despite developments in Brazil that led to the growth of middle classes between 1930 and the mid-1960s, especially in the southeast of the country, many other areas suffered. The city of São Luís and the state of Maranhão fared especially badly, constantly ranking towards or at the bottom of social indicators among Brazilian states. Moreover, income inequality in Brazil remained high. Two separate socio-economic worlds led to two separate cultural worlds—the elites and the working class played in different places and their play was organized in different

⁶⁹ These popular cultural forms will be explored in more detail in Section 2.2. See Sergio Ferretti, ed., *Tambor de Crioula: Ritual e Espetáculo* (São Luís: Comissão Maranhense de Folclore, 2002 [1979]); Ferretti, *Querebentã de Zomadonu; Etnografia da Casa das Minas do Maranhão* (São Luís: UFMA, 1996 [1985]); Vera Fróes, *Santo Daimé, Cultura Amazônica—História do Povo Juramidam* (Manaus: SUFRAMA, 1986); Kazadi wa Mukuna, “The Rise of Bumba-meu-Boi in Maranhão: Resilience of African-Brazilian Cultural Identity,” in *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity and Social Mobilization*, ed. Larry Crook and Randal Johnson (Los Angeles: UCLA, 1999), 297-310; Patricia Sandler, “Singing with the Spirits: Musical Life in São Luís, Northeast Brazil,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, 2002).

⁷⁰ There were rare exceptions; one was the Afro-Maranhense religious house *Casa das Minas Jeje*, which was studied by folklorists and anthropologists mid-century, and as result was able to shed some the negative social stigma it was burdened with. See Sérgio Ferretti, “Contribuição Cultural do Negro na Sociedade Maranhense,” Lecture, Universidade Federal do Maranhão, São Luís, October 9, 2008.

⁷¹ In choosing cultural formations that represented deep tradition, they chose not to study the Caribbean-based popular scene with its merengue and boleros, which was equally strong in parts of rural Maranhão.

⁷² Ferretti, “Contribuição Cultural do Negro.”

⁷³ A strong case for this is made by Matthias Röhrig Assunção, *A Guerra dos Bem-te-vis: A Balaiada na Memória Oral* (São Luís: SIOGE, 1988).

ways. The city of São Luís seems to fit Nestor Garcia Canclini's model of Latin American cities with parallel erudite and popular cultures in constant dialogue;⁷⁴ studies of Afro-Maranhense culture by Ferretti, Assunção and others suggest that cultural hybridity between the two social tiers did exist, although it was based on an unequal power relationship and was accompanied by an equal dose of segregation. My research suggests that elites in São Luís actively tried to segregate their urban cultural world by criminalizing festive places of the working class, even in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fear was the main mechanism bolstering class segregation, led by the fear of violent crime. Concern over criminality was, however, not simply an elite affair. Crime, especially violent crime, affected anyone that lived nearby regardless of social class. Daniel Linger, an ethnographer of mid-1980s São Luís and its working class, argues that *briga*—which he defines as a violent confrontation—was embedded in social, cultural, and psychological relationships within the city.⁷⁵ From the late 1960s to the late 1980s, I find that residents of working-class neighborhoods also complained constantly about popular nightclubs, accusing them of being thief hangouts, drug havens, places of sexual assault, and general public nuisances that kept people awake at night. Newspapers provided an outlet for such discontent, none more so than *Jornal Pequeno*, which was geared towards a working-class readership.

How did criminality and the social constructions of crime as related to popular culture interact with class, especially under the law enforcement regime of the military dictatorship in Brasília? Scholarship on Brazil has argued that the military dictatorship's repressive period was, unlike previous periods, a time when the police targeted middle-class and elite youth equally if

⁷⁴ Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁷⁵ Daniel Touro Linger, *Dangerous Encounters: Meanings of Violence in a Brazilian City* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 8-9.

not more than working-class youth, although recently scholars have rethought this formulation.⁷⁶ The promulgation of Institutional Act no. 5 (AI-5) was itself precipitated in part by middle-class musicians who in turn suffered its consequences at the hands of the military intelligence, organized under the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS).⁷⁷ For São Luís, I find little overt repression directed toward upper or middle class youth, especially given the absence of urban guerrillas or violent political conflicts. The experience of the rural poor in Maranhão was a different story. Human rights groups documented how armies of military police that were dispatched to rural and indigenous areas were found increasingly to commit extralegal violence, often to expel agricultural workers from their land on behalf of large landowners or even the state.⁷⁸ The normalization of police violence against the rural poor in the 1970s accompanied police violence against political dissenters in urban areas across Brazil. This normalized police violence also soon descended upon the cities of Maranhão, especially Imperatriz and São Luís.

How did police violence intersect with race? Paulina Alberto's study of Rio de Janeiro shows how DOPS investigated popular "black soul" events in the mid-1970s soon after white elites expressed distress at Afro-Brazilian youth's affinity for North American black culture, although the investigation was dropped for lack of evidence of black separatist ideologies or formal segregation of audiences by race.⁷⁹ There is no evidence of a comparable investigation of musicians or musical events by the DOPS in São Luís.⁸⁰ Still, I found that law enforcement in the 1970s and 1980s frequently carried out raids in working-class nightclubs and events.

⁷⁶ See for example Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964-85* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 126-127.

⁷⁷ For more detail, see section 2.3. Also, Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ Rights groups included the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT or *Comissão Pastoral da Terra*) or the Landless Workers Movement (MST or *Movimento Sem Terra*); R. S. Rose, *The Unpast: Elite Violence and Social Control in Brazil, 1954-2000* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 209.

⁷⁹ Paulina Alberto, "When Rio Was *Black*: Soul Music, National Culture, and the Politics of Racial Comparison in 1970s Brazil," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89, no. 1 (2009): 3-39.

⁸⁰ It is still possible that such investigations existed. Much of the documentation on this subject remains classified.

Although justifications for the raids did not explicitly refer to race, the perceived race and class of audiences was integral to the perceived criminality of the scene. I argue that the best way to understand criminality in São Luís is to locate the intersection of race, class, and a third factor—the criminalization of illegal drugs.

The place of illegal drug use within the broader panorama of violent policing and cross-class tensions over popular culture is an issue scholars are familiar with, especially with respect to Rio de Janeiro. Based on research in three Rio *favelas* from 1968 to 1973, Janice Perlman argued that the urban poor lived in friendly places with strong community bonds but had acquired a set of negative stereotypes and were stigmatized with a “myth of marginality.” The concept of a *marginal* or “shiftless, dangerous ne’er-do-well, usually associated with the underworld of crime, violence, drugs and prostitution,” was used to legitimize the repression of the urban poor and also justified policies that served the interests of elites and middle classes.⁸¹ Perlman returned to Rio de Janeiro three decades later to find that “the rise of drug and arms traffic in the favelas” had transformed popular urban neighborhoods into truly violent and dangerous places, straining the earlier community bonds.⁸² Despite their varying methodologies, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists studying violence in urban shantytowns (along with the general public) agreed that drug dealers had exploited the lack of civic institutions to take control of poor neighborhoods. Some blamed drug dealers themselves for the violence, others blamed their criminalization by the authorities, and others a combination of the two.⁸³

⁸¹ Janice Perlman, “Rio’s Favelas and the Myth of Marginality,” *Politics & Society* 5, no. 2 (1975): 133.

⁸² Janice Perlman, *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

⁸³ See, for example, Mercedes S. Hinton, *The State on the Streets: Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 102; Enrique Desmond Arias, *Drugs and Democracy in Rio de Janeiro: Trafficking, Social Networks, and Public Security* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Relatively few voices in the 1970s and the 1980s distinguished between the two substances targeted most by the massive Brazilian drug war under the military: cocaine and marijuana.⁸⁴ Several scholars did point out that Africans brought marijuana to Maranhão under the Angolan name of *diamba* or *liamba* and that black, indigenous and mixed populations in Maranhão had used marijuana for centuries for medicinal and recreational reasons.⁸⁵ Anthony Henman's research suggests that Maranhão played an important role in the development of marijuana policy in Brazil, via the military police who developed anti-drug strategies and justifications in the field—specifically, in indigenous reservations in rural Maranhão from 1973 to 1978. The rural raids by security and police personnel on behalf of landowners now had a new excuse to criminalize indigenous and farmer communities: marijuana.⁸⁶ In the last few years, some academics and public figures have explored further the history of marijuana policy. They have also repeated the critique of the drug war, but this time for federal drug policy since democratization, which has not changed much since the 1960s.⁸⁷

My research both substantiates and complicates these critical readings of marijuana policy in Brazil. I find that police, elites, media, and sectors of the working class in São Luís all contributed to the criminalization of drug use in conjunction with blackness, poverty, and sin. Research on race and class across Latin America and in the United States has identified several mechanisms that continue to reinforce racism—prominent among them, the growth of the prison-

⁸⁴ Anthony Henman, "War on Drugs is War on People," *The Ecologist*, Vol 10 No. 8/9 (October/November 1980) 282-89; Anthony Henman and Osvaldo Pessoa Júnior, *Diamba Sarabamba: Coletânea de Textos Brasileiros sobre a Maconha* (São Paulo: Ground, 1986).

⁸⁵ Assunção, "Popular Culture and Regional Society"; Ferretti, *Querebentã de Zomadonu*.

⁸⁶ Henman, "War on Drugs is War on People."

⁸⁷ Elisaldo Araújo Carlini, "A História da Maconha no Brasil," *Jornal Brasileiro de Psiquiatria* 55, no. 4 (2006): 314-317; André Barros and Marta Peres, "Proibição da Maconha no Brasil e suas Raízes Históricas Escravocratas," *Revista Periferia* 3, no. 2 (2012); Maria Lúcia Karam, *Proibições, Riscos, Danos e Enganos: as Drogas Tornadas Ilícitas*, Vol. 3 (Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Juris, 2009); Luísa Gonçalves Saad, "Medicina Legal: o Discurso Médico, a Proibição da Maconha e a Criminalização do Negro," *Revista da Associação Brasileira dos Pesquisadores Negros* 1, no. 2 (July-October 2010).

industrial complex on the backs of black inmates, many of them imprisoned on drug charges.⁸⁸ The experience of Maranhão appears to have been no different.

My research also bolsters the scholarship on how extreme levels of police violence and repression survived the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Brazil. The violence of the military in Brazil was not just aimed at middle-class activists and guerillas, but also at the urban poor on a daily basis under a blanket of fear. In the 1980s, however, the same public that had demonstrated and organized against torture and police repression, proved willing to turn a blind eye to the same repression and violence when the victims were common criminals of the working class. Indeed, elites, middle classes, and working classes alike displayed widespread support for such acts by the police.⁸⁹ I find similar processes occurring in São Luís. For the long, slow democratization process, academics starting with Thomas Skidmore have identified the various negotiations between the military government at the federal level and civil society, organized labor, and other popular movements.⁹⁰ My research provides a companion narrative for the city of São Luís. I find that resolution for local conflicts that were taking place between police and clubgoers at popular nightclubs came not through a change in federal policy, but through negotiations on the ground between social activists, nightclub owners, and other sympathizers of the reggae scene on one hand and security authorities on the other hand.

Chapter Five zeroes in on the material role of culture in the actual practice of politics. Examining policy makers' impact on reggae music and vice versa, it addresses three main

⁸⁸ See, for example, Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: New Press, 1999); Lawrence D. Bobo and Victor Thompson, "Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System," *Social Research* 73, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 445-472; Nigel S. Rodley, "Torture and Conditions of Detention in Latin America," in *The (Un)Rule of Law and the Underprivileged in Latin America*, ed. Juan E. Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 25-41.

⁸⁹ See Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule*, 302-303; Paul Chevigny, "Defining the Role of the Police in Latin America," in *The (Un)Rule of Law and the Underprivileged in Latin America*, ed. Juan E. Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 49-70.

⁹⁰ Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule*.

academic debates. The first debate centers on the role of the Brazilian state and Brazilian politicians in the dissemination, control, and repression of music and culture. The second deals more generally with the political or activist potential of reggae-based cultures, both in Brazil and in reggae's point of origin Jamaica. The third debate evaluates the shift toward a new participatory politics that has characterized the last two decades in Brazil, and questions whether "reggae politicians" in São Luís could be a part of this arrangement or not.

Musicologists have debated the relationship between the Brazilian state and its population. Both Hermano Vianna and Bryan McCann emphasize the attempts of the populist Brazilian state (1930s-1960s) to spread its influence and ideology through the use of popular culture, especially Brazilian music. McCann argues that although the Vargas government's patronage of Radio Nacional allowed for the dissemination of state propaganda including racial-democracy ideologies, such propaganda was constantly contested and ultimately less successful than other radio stations not linked to the state. McCann suggests that toward the end of the Estado Novo and in the late 1940s samba musicians started to critique the state as part of the wider trends of social critique present in their lyrics.⁹¹ Other authors, notably Lisa Shaw and Darien J. Davis, argue that even in the 1920s and 1930s, collaborations between musicians, consumers and the state were not so harmonious. Shaw suggests that musicians often walked a political tightrope, sometimes agreeing with official goals and sometimes challenging them.⁹²

Others have written of the Brazilian state's strong interest in shaping and censoring the musical landscape from the 1960s onwards.⁹³ They argue that the state became more aggressive

⁹¹ Bryan McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music and the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 93-95.

⁹² Darien Davis, *White Face, Black Mask: Africaneity and the Early Social History of Popular Music in Brazil* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009); Lisa Shaw, *The Social History of the Brazilian Samba* (Aldershot, Eng.: Ashgate, 1998).

⁹³ Dunn, *Brutality Garden*; also see Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition*.

in promoting certain Brazilian music, organizing large music festivals and forcing institutional support. On the flip side, officials were quick to censor—or even torture and exile—musicians whose political viewpoints contradicted their own, in the name of national interest and national security. Studying either phenomenon, scholars have arrived at a similar conclusion: the state’s efforts to shape the musical tastes of the Brazilian popular sectors and middle classes were ultimately futile. According to Osmundo de Araújo Pinho, popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s was dictated less by the increasingly ineffective state and more by the rising social movements that provided a space for popular sectors and the middle class to interact. He argues that new genres of popular music emerged thanks to musical entrepreneurs working in these participatory spaces; only afterwards did large record companies enter the fray. I find a similar history for reggae in São Luís.

Brazilianist musicologists have argued that popular socio-cultural movements including reggae embody a strong oppositional political potential. Gerard Béhague shows that since the 1960s youth cultures have been able to draw on a leftist musical tradition originating in the Tropicalist movement’s political opposition to the military dictatorship. Béhague goes on to suggest that the post-1960s youth political critique has also maintained an international bent thanks to connections between Brazilian subcultures and global counter-cultures.⁹⁴ In one example of this, Araújo Pinho suggests that the idea of *fogo na babilônia* (fire upon Babylon), a common theme in reggae music, was used by Bahians from the 1980s onwards to aid them in their struggle against a system of oppression, in their case racism.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Gerard Béhague, “Rap, Reggae, Rock, or Samba: the Local and the Global in Brazilian Popular Music (1985-95),” *Latin American Music Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 79-91.

⁹⁵ Pinho, “*Fogo na Babilônia*.” Most scholars studying the political movements such as the black cultural renaissance in Bahia and/or Rio Janeiro relied more heavily on anthropological and sociological methods, while downplaying the role of the state and local political bodies.

For Jamaica, scholars led by Horace Campbell argue that the association with Rasta spurred a strong political critique within reggae music against oppression beginning in the late 1960s when Jamaican reggae artists sang songs of social protest in response to the violence wrought on the urban poor.⁹⁶ In opposition to Campbell stands Richard Burton. From a Gramscian perspective, Burton argues that while Afro-Jamaican cultures including Rasta and reggae are *oppositional*, this does not necessarily make them *political*. For him, the critiques and satire proposed by reggae music (as in other Jamaican music) are symbolic, but they have not made the transition into a concrete critique of Jamaican politics. “Babylon” in his interpretation is too vague a statement to organize a political movement around.⁹⁷ Still, culture is always political. And more specifically, reggae did play a role in electoral politics in Jamaica in the 1970s, notably in the ascension of Michael Manley to the Jamaican prime-ministership and in a momentous truce between violent factions of the two major parties.⁹⁸

In the Brazilian context, academics have seen both patronage and participation structuring the Brazilian political process, in a changing mix over time. Richard Graham argues that Brazilian politics since the 19th century worked along lines of patronage, showing how the unequal power relationship between elites and workers was maintained as common people voted their local bosses into power and hoped for rewards and benefits from those bosses.⁹⁹ More recently, some scholars argue that since the 1980s a new style of participatory politics has taken

⁹⁶ Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press), 128-33; Stephen A. King, *Reggae, Rastafari and the Rhetoric of Social Control* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 29-31.

⁹⁷ Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁹⁸ Manley himself has been portrayed as everything from a dedicated socialist revolutionary, to the beneficiary of a popular political mobilization, to a political patron, to a usurper of power who exploited the powerful religious image of Joshua’s Rod of Correction solely to further a personality cult of leadership. See Stephen Davis and Paul Simon, *Reggae Bloodlines: In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Press, 1979), 172-76; Bradley, *Bass Culture*, 280-82; King, *Reggae, Rastafari and the Rhetoric of Social Control*, 91-95; Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*, 136-37.

⁹⁹ Richard Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

root in Brazil, thanks to the democratization process, the rise of social movements, and the success of the Workers Party (PT). Gianpaolo Baiocchi argues that the model of governance by the Workers Party in Porto Alegre represents a break with the Brazilian past.¹⁰⁰ Others argue that even with the new Brazilian constitution affirming universal citizenship in 1988, the rights associated with citizenship remained unequally distributed and subject to manipulation.¹⁰¹

What light can the case of reggae in Maranhão shed on these debates over the oppositional potential and electoral role of music? To respond, we must place the political role of reggae in Maranhão within the trajectory of the working-class political journey in Brazil from dictatorship to *abertura* to democracy. The gradual democratization of the 1980s, as in the rest of Brazil, created new opportunities to challenge old political orders. There was much to discuss in São Luís, much to fix in the sprawling, squatting city, and so political dissidence and popular protest were strong. Also, while the strength of the state's political boss José Sarney lay in the interior of the state, São Luís remained a complex political battleground for Sarney and his allies.¹⁰² Despite these political traditions, working classes found it hard to make social and political change. As a result, patronage of popular culture persisted as an important political mechanism of support in the late 1980s and 1990s, including in the reggae scene.

Soon after it entered the public social consciousness of São Luís, the reggae scene was thrust into the forefront of Maranhão political world in the gubernatorial race of 1990. It started

¹⁰⁰ Gianpaolo Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens: the Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰¹ James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁰² José Sarney was a senator in Brasília and then governor of Maranhão in the 1960s. He built a formidable political machine in conjunction with the military dictatorship, multinational corporations, and state and local political appointees. Sarney became president of Brazil in the 1980s when president-elect Tancredo Neves died before assuming office. He is currently the longest-serving member of the senate and his family members and allies continue to occupy top political posts in Maranhão and in Brasília. Political ideology, party affiliation, and electoral alliances in Maranhão depend largely on one's relationship to the Sarney camp. See Palmério Dória, *Honoráveis Bandidos: um Retrato do Brasil na era Sarney* (São Paulo: Geração Editorial, 2009).

controversially, with a moment of patronage—a performance by Jamaican legend Jimmy Cliff to celebrate the victory of governor-elect Edison Lobão. Soon, reggae radio personality Ademar Danilo was elected to city council with votes from reggae audiences and black movement activists in 1992; in office he fought for broad working class platforms, but was unable to stay connected with the reggae scene and lost his re-election bid. Reggae’s powerful electoral potential returned spectacularly in the 2000s with the ascent of the premier reggae businessman José Eleonildo Soares (also known as Pinto da Itamaraty) to the federal congress in 2006. Soares ran his campaign strategy to perfection, successfully making use of more traditional avenues of gaining power alongside a new sound system-based model.

That music industry entrepreneurs consolidated their popularity into votes and gained political office in Maranhão was, I argue, a significant trend for politics in Brazil. Singers and radio personalities from a variety of musical scenes, most of them leftists, have climbed the political ladder in Brazil—Gilberto Gil, for example, was even appointed as national minister of culture in 2003. Ademar Danilo’s mandate fits into this category. The case of Pinto da Itamaraty, however, is part of a specific new trend in Brazil, along with other sound system owners turned politicians in Rio de Janeiro and Belém in the *baile funk* and *tecnobrega* scenes respectively. This trend, I will suggest, is a new form of cultural-political patronage. As such it is quite different from a separate trend of popular musicians who launched political careers based on progressive platforms derived from oppositional youth sub-cultures. The editors of a recent collection, *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship*, write that “whereas scholarship was once

dominated by the study of how certain contents were represented in the music, the simultaneity and the intertwining of political and music processes have recently been emphasized.”¹⁰³

Did politicians in São Luís who relied on reggae events for their campaigns and on reggae audiences for votes deliver on their promises? Some might say yes. But in the 1990s those promises were vague and in the 2000s, with Soares, the promises became less political and more oriented to business marketing. If all that voters wanted was a mega-reggae concert with famous artists and selectors, then they likely got their wish. Did the political success of the “reggae politicians” empower common people? Or did the “reggae politicians” simply use reggae audiences as their path to power? It appears that a system of patronage arose in the 2000s with Soares and his sound system Itamaraty. Once in power Soares began to act like other Maranhense economic elites, but with an important difference (some might say, advantage): the instrument of patronage being popular culture, Pinto’s economic and political success was, in a sense, the reggae masses’ cultural success. The social welfare of the reggae politicians’ constituents seems to have taken a back seat to their cultural consumption, which sound systems have no trouble in providing—as a year-round campaign tactic and as fulfillment of a campaign promise. It is a new way of mixing popular culture and political participation, one that belies easy categorization as either oppositional or co-opted.

In sum, Chapter Three argues that blackness and marginality were re-criminalized along with marijuana use, leading to widespread fear and police actions against popular nightclubs in crowded working-class neighborhoods. Yet important figures in the working-class scene demonstrated agency in this process. Neighborhood association presidents who doubled as nightclub owners negotiated to keep their establishments open, using their influence within the

¹⁰³ Idelber Avelar and Christopher Dunn, “Introduction: Music as Practice of Citizenship in Brazil,” in *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship*, ed. Idelber Avelar and Christopher Dunn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.

community, with politicians, and within the police force. When the press joined the attacks, social activists and sound system owners joined the negotiations. It was these negotiations that appear to have been the main force that decided the fate of popular nightclubs—not federal, state, or municipal policy, not socio-economic or ideological trends, and not the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Chapter Five shows that in the 1990s, several of the most prominent among those social activists and sound system owners continued their negotiations in another arena, that of electoral politics. Their political careers depended 1) on their personal fame within the musical scene, 2) on revenue from reggae shows to fund campaigns, and 3) on votes from those sectors of the population who attend reggae shows. At the same time, it appears that the constituencies of these “reggae politicians” have not experienced any concrete changes in socio-economic conditions or opportunities. I argue that the business structures of sound systems and their accompanying music industries provide the political model for the “reggae politicians,” whereby cultural consumption and political patronage go hand-in-hand, allowing regular people to participate in the arrangement strictly as consumers of reggae music.

1.5 SOURCES AND METHODS

The bulk of the research for this thesis was carried out in the city of São Luís over ten months between March and December 2010. This followed a month of exploratory research in the cities of São Luís and Salvador in August 2008.

The first of four main primary source bases for the thesis consists of newspaper articles. The public library of the state of Maranhão, which houses collections of local newspapers, was closed for the duration of my stay. Still, I was able to access archives of the three major

newspapers for my research period. At the headquarters of *Jornal Pequeno* I was given access to the entire archive of the newspaper since its inception in 1951; in an annex of the state library I found copies of *O Estado do Maranhão* from 1973 to 1990 (and issues of its predecessor, *O Dia*, from 1959 to 1973); and in the private archive of a local businessman I gained access to the archive of *O Imparcial*. Aside from these three newspapers, I found relevant articles from other newspapers and magazines as they became available to me, usually thanks to individuals who kept old issues or cuttings of articles. Notable among these were *Jornal Itaqui-Bacanga* and a number of newsletters produced specifically for the reggae scene such as *O Tambor* and *Massa Regueira*. The state's archives also yielded a small number of important legislative and police documents. I was able to photograph relevant newspaper articles using a digital camera, and these photographs remain in my possession.

The second main primary source consists of personal interviews by the author. I spoke with about 75 different people, some of them multiple times, for a count of 65 formal interviews and 20 informal conversations. In selecting interviewees I attempted to reach a broad variety of people—sound system owners, selectors, dancers, political activists, musicians, nightclub owners, record collectors, journalists and media personalities, electricians who operated sound systems, and anyone remotely connected to the history of the reggae scene. I sought out some interviews by approaching people at home or work. I met other interviewees thanks to introductions by mutual friends, who were usually also my informants themselves. Naturally, my list of interviewees depended largely on the individuals' willingness and availability to speak with me. Whenever possible, I used ethnographic methods and asked open-ended questions aiming to contextualize the life of the interviewee. All interviews and conversations were in Portuguese except for four instances where the mode of communication was English. Interviews

were conducted with the use of a Zoom H2 audio recorder and/or by taking notes in a notebook. Conversations occurred in more informal settings and contents of the conversations were written down at the end of the day.

The third method of data collection was participant-observation at cultural events. Although current reggae scenes are different from past scenes, participant-observation methods allowed me to contextualize information in interviews and better understand the nuances of culture in Maranhão. I attended, on average, three reggae-related events a week. Most of these events were sound system events featuring selectors/deejays, some were live performances by reggae bands, and the remainder were miscellaneous events including meetings and celebrations at black political and cultural organizations, fan group meetings, official city events open to the public, academic seminars, and musical jam sessions. I also regularly listened to the many radio programs and TV broadcasts dedicated to reggae. In addition, I was able to play music with local musicians. I joined singers Célia Sampaio and Fabiana Rasta and drummer Nicolau, playing bass guitar in a group we called “Banda Zumbi,” and we were able to rehearse 8-10 times and perform twice. Towards the end of my stay I had an opportunity to rehearse with the band of Norris Cole, a legendary Jamaican producer who has moved to São Luís. And during one of my studio visits, the producers invited me to create a song and sing over a pre-recorded reggae beat. While my knowledge of reggae music was helpful for playing music, it was my knowledge of the English language that seemed to carry more value, especially in the recording studio. Participating in reggae events was a necessary part of the process of meeting and establishing rapport and trust with many of my interviewees.

Fourth, this thesis also counts on a large number of material sources mostly located in the personal archives and collections of my interviewees: records, photographs, and other

miscellaneous material sources. The reggae scene prides itself in the vast number of Jamaican records in the possession of various people in São Luís; thanks to the generosity of the people I interviewed, I could look at, listen to, and photograph many of these records. I also purchased original records and CDs, in addition to bootleg CDs that are unavailable as originals but are freely sold on the informal market. I took photographs with a digital camera whenever possible (although sparingly at nightclubs and sound system events due to the possibility of theft), and my interviewees also gave me copies of photographs in their possession, most of which have never been published. In addition to recorded music and photographs, I accessed various other materials including old flyers for events, pamphlets, electoral campaign literature, letters, cassette tapes with recordings of past radio shows, video recordings, and articles of clothing, through the personal collections of my informants.

This multi-faceted approach helped me listen to as many voices as possible to construct the history of reggae in São Luís. Although each source had its strengths and weaknesses, the combination of sources helped me to paint a more comprehensive picture of the reggae scene. As much as possible, I tried to hear the voices of a variety of participants of the reggae scene. The specific anecdotes and events that I chose to represent in the narrative were usually stories that were told to me with great purpose, by multiple informants. Still, the stories I have collected remain but a fraction of the myriad histories of São Luís do Maranhão that are in sore need of recording and reproducing.

2.0 “INNA MARANHÃO STYLE”: CARIBBEAN MUSIC IN THE FORMATION OF CULTURE IN SÃO LUÍS, 1945-1986

Our culture of dancing is a very Caribbean one.

- Saci Teleleu, Professor of Dance
São Luís, November 2010

The West Indian sailors grew weary as their ship moved further away from familiar waters. They sailed past French Guiana, bearing southeast along the Brazilian coast until the port of Belém at the mouth of the great Amazon River. They had no money to pay the prostitutes they coveted, but a few of them reluctantly parted with their beloved Caribbean records in lieu of cash. Their consorts knew they could sell the records to Carlos Santos, a local businessman who bought and sold used records at a discount price in the Belém market. Santos was pleased at the diversity of music he received this way. He had American and British pop, rock, and R&B records, but also music from around the Caribbean, including recordings featuring a new rhythm from Jamaica. During one of his business trips to São Luís in the neighboring state of Maranhão, circa 1976, the owner of a local record store introduced him to an avid music collector named Riba Macedo. Eager to win a new customer, Santos gave Macedo several Jamaican discs including *The Front Line* by Nolan Porter. Macedo suspected that he was the exclusive owner of *The Front Line* in

his town. He played the discs at local parties and found that his audiences enjoyed hearing the slower, relaxing rhythms on the LP.¹

The preceding tale is part of a foundation story that attempts to explain the existence of a mass reggae audience in São Luís by the mid-1980s, later known as the *massa regueira*. In São Luís, scholars and non-scholars alike have generally accepted that foundation story. Locals tell with nostalgia and passion of how reggae reached their island. They conjure up images of sailors, traveling merchants, short wave radio transmissions and informal markets along the northeastern coast of South America. Yet this version of events is only partly true. My research suggests that it erroneously conflates two distinct historical moments on either side of the mid-1960s. As a foundation story, however, it works brilliantly. This version puts a positive spin on the city's staggering distance, both geographic and economic, from the more “developed” southeast of Brazil. It also exalts the resourcefulness of local entrepreneurship and ascribes a unique nature to Maranhão and its people.

In this chapter, I attempt to write a new foundation story for the reggae scene based on the connections between the Caribbean and the coastal Amazonian region of Brazil. I rely primarily on newspaper accounts, new interviews, musical records and other miscellaneous sources. The broad narrative of this chapter is that the popular classes of Maranhão (primarily São Luís and the surrounding *baixada maranhense* region)—despite major obstacles—developed an affinity first for Caribbean-originated music in the post-war years, then for a blend of international music by the 1970s, and then a reggae-dominated scene by the mid-1980s. This

¹ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras à Ilha do Amor*, 59-60; Karla Cristina Ferro Freire, “A Trajetória do Reggae em São Luís: da Identificação Cultural à Segmentação,” *Revista Internacional de Folkcomunicação* 5, no.10 (November 2007); Tarcisio Jose de Melo Ferreira (Tarcisio Selektah), conversation with author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, August 10, 2008; José Ribamar da Conceição Macedo (Riba Macedo), interview by author, Rosário—MA, December 8, 2010.

evolving set of musical scenes in Maranhão reveals the ardently cosmopolitan nature of popular culture in the region.

This chapter argues firstly that in the 1950s and 1960s, Maranhenses cultivated a popular music scene based on a wide variety of Caribbean rhythms. During these years the scene depended on traveling entrepreneurs and sailors who brought merengue, cumbia, boleros, cadence, calypso, compas, guaracha, and other Caribbean popular styles to the coastal areas of the Amazon basin located in the states of Maranhão and Pará. As they organized cultural events, including traditional spiritual events, Maranhenses borrowed freely from these sources of music, mainly because they liked to dance to the rhythms. The Caribbean-Maranhão nexus changed in the 1960s when the military government of Brazil closed several routes to the Caribbean in order to crack down on contraband goods.²

Having blocked this informal trade, the central government promoted large international music corporations to distribute music through subsidiaries and affiliates in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, the popular sectors of São Luís instead began listening to a wide range of international hits through the radio, including songs from the Caribbean and especially from Jamaica. (That the rise to preeminence of Jamaican music was spurred by the central government's import-substitution policies is just one of the ironies of this transnational tale.) This brings us to the second argument of the chapter: that in the 1970s, Jamaican music became an important part of a cosmopolitan working class music built not through direct material exchanges with the Caribbean, but through the domestic music industry centered in southeast Brazil. In the early 1980s, renewed access to imported records (now obtained through collectors

² The relationship of the city of Belém (in the state of Pará) with the Caribbean follows the same general trajectory as the city of São Luís does. The rural lowland regions close to the two urban centers also follow a similar trajectory. The timeline and the details of the scene are slightly different, in part due to Belém's closer geographical and economic proximity to the Caribbean.

in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) changed the industry, but domestic releases were still very important. Remarkably, then, a reggae mass was built without any direct contact with Jamaica. This finding contradicts widely held popular beliefs on the origins of the reggae scene in São Luís.

Third, I suggest that Jamaican reggae—especially the roots and lovers rock styles, and the music of Jimmy Cliff—most successfully bridged the older, Caribbean-based sound from the 1950s and 1960s with the newer international sound popular in the 1970s. In other words, I argue that as the youth of São Luís danced to reggae, they experienced a blend of modern and traditional cultural expressions that they could identify with and dance to. Reggae not only fit within the local pantheon of Caribbean and international rhythms but also rejuvenated it. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, Jamaican music was syncretized and re-sycretized on the dance floor with a variety of national and global rhythms including rock, disco, lambada, zouk, etc. The preference for reggae was not intentionally ideological. On the contrary, the lack of information about reggae music or its accompanying Rastafari cultural worldview allowed local audiences to continue to think of Jamaican music primarily as romantic music for dancing. As a result, Jamaican music did not fall into negative stereotypes that often accompany oppositional youth sub-cultures for reasons of style.³ Rather, constructed around dance, the scene flourished.

The fourth argument of this chapter concerns the rise of an industry around Jamaican music.⁴ Sound systems and underground nightclubs, despite financial and organizational

³ Compare this to, for example, Dick Hebdige's tale of politically contested sub-cultures including Jamaican sub-cultures in England. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

⁴ According to Keith Negus, "an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry." I use the term "industry" to describe the way people organized themselves in the commercial aspects of producing reggae sound system events in São Luís. Industry may not seem to be the right word to use when we consider that for decades, sound system organizations remained in the informal sector and did not actually record, produce and market their own music. However, they did produce elaborate audio systems; they operated under a parallel complex set of rules regarding the music that they had obtained from elsewhere; and they relationships they built with the scene were

weaknesses, created a niche among São Luís's urban popular sectors in the 1970s. The consolidation of this informal entertainment industry resulted in the consolidation of the popular music scene. I argue that sound system operators found certain advantages in playing Jamaican records in the 1970s: the sound frequencies in recordings from Jamaica suited the technological changes they were making in their sound system apparatuses, and vice versa. The rarity of imported Jamaican records was a blessing in disguise for sound system owners, because once they found a way to import hard-to-find Jamaican music they began to market them as exclusive products, which in turn helped elevate their sound system brand. As competition between sound systems rose, nightclubs opened in every neighborhood and people flocked to events, making the fledgling industry quite profitable. By the mid-1980s the industry and its accompanying scene were attracting a mass of fans that came to be known as the *massa regueira* (reggae masses). Once radio was incorporated as a mass advertising tool in 1985-86, the industry—for the most part, still in the informal sector—had truly arrived.

2.1 CARIBBEAN ROUTES TO PARÁ AND MARANHÃO, 1945-1968

The post-war Caribbean music scene in Pará and Maranhão remains mostly a mystery. Recollections of that time period are vague, and it is hard to determine exactly when a given song or record was heard. My sources and informants begin in the late 1960s, so my reconstruction of earlier era necessarily relies on second-hand information and slim empirical

similar in many ways to industry-scene relationships. See Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1999), 14.

evidence. There is, however, enough information to reconstruct a rough geography of Maranhão's Caribbean music scene before 1968 and situate it within social and economic structures.

The Caribbean, despite its peripheral economic role, was firmly at the center of pan-American cultural dialogue in the early 20th century. Rhythms such as danzón, son, mambo, guaracha, and (by the 1930s) the bolero criss-crossed the Spanish Caribbean, enticing women, men, and children to dance.⁵ Advances in recording and commercialization launched Caribbean music far—boleros, especially, captured the musical imagination of Mexico and soon spread to the entire Latin American continent. Post-war Brazil, meanwhile, was beginning to embrace new cultural influences from abroad, led by the urban middle classes of Rio de Janeiro and other metropolises. In the words of José Ramos Tinhorão:

Thanks to a positive trade balance from the sale of raw materials during the war, the country opened its doors to imports. The urban masses indulged in shopping sprees to bring them closer to modernity, through the use of Ray-Ban sunglasses and blue jeans, the consumption of whiskey, the search for adventure in shadowy nightclubs... and, naturally, through the popular rhythms of the day played by international bands—fox-blú, bolero, be-bop, calypso and finally, from the 1950s onwards, rock 'n roll.⁶

In the 1940s, boleros gained popularity in Brazil thanks to a craze in Mexican films and their soundtracks, led by *Santa—O Destino de uma Pecadora* (1945) and *Palabras de Mujer* (1946). Singer Francisco Alves released versions of boleros in Portuguese to popular acclaim in the late 1940s, but the original recordings in Spanish of songs such as “Dos Almas” (Don Fabian),

⁵ José Guerrero, “Vida, Passion y Muerte del Bolero,” in *El Bolero en la Cultura Caribeña y su Proyección Universal: Memorias del III Congreso Internacional Música, Identidad y Cultura en el Caribe*, ed. Darío Tejeda and Rafael Emilio Yunén (Santiago de los Caballeros: Instituto de Estudios Caribeños, 2010), 245-47; José Loyola Fernández, *En Ritmo de Bolero: El Bolero en la Música Bailable Cubana* (Havana: Unión, 1997).

⁶ Tinhorão, *História Social de Música Popular Brasileira*, 307.

“Perfídia y Frenesi” (Alberto Domingues) and “La Última Noche” (Bobby Collazo) were also successful in their own right.⁷

Samba musicians also entered a post-war transnational musical dialogue that tied together North American jazz, the Caribbean bolero, and Brazilian samba.⁸ Boleros helped strengthen the blossoming genre of samba-canção (a romantic take on samba). Composers of samba-canção such as Herivelto Martins and Lupicínio Rodrigues incorporated bolero style into their compositions, resulting in a percussive, polyrhythmic music that some called sambolero. Singer Nelson Gonçalves gained international fame (and commercial success) in the 1950s with his brand of romantic music. Social nightclubs in the southeast played boleros, samba-canções and samboleros interchangeably for their patrons to dance to, usually in couples. Meanwhile, samba-canção’s nationwide exposure on the radio helped popularize boleros and their Caribbean rhythmic and melodic elements throughout Brazil, even as far as Belém and São Luís. These cities lacked the urban middle classes of the southeast in the 1950s and 1960s. Elite couples, however, could dance to boleros and samba-canções at elite social clubs.⁹

Despite their exclusion from the dance halls of high society, São Luís’s popular sectors could listen to hit boleros on AM radio equally. And they soon found other sources of Caribbean music, thanks to their geographical proximity to the Caribbean. There are several accounts, albeit hard to verify, of short-wave enthusiasts from Maranhão and also from Pará picking up Caribbean radio signals.¹⁰ A more reliable source of Caribbean music, however, was via sailors

⁷ Rodrigo Faour, *História Sexual da MPB: A Evolução do Amor e do Sexo na Canção Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2006), 55.

⁸ Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*.

⁹ Faour, *História Sexual da MPB*, 56; Heloisa Duarte Valente, “Da Suave e Morna Batida dos Corações Ardentes aos Corpos Pulsantes,” in *El Bolero en la Cultura Caribeña y su Proyección Universal: Memorias del III Congreso Internacional Música, Identidad y Cultura en el Caribe*, ed. Darío Tejeda and Rafael Emilio Yunén (Santiago de los Caballeros: Instituto de Estudios Caribeños, 2010), 511-12.

¹⁰ Many of my informants mentioned that this occurred, but were unable to lead me to anyone with a first-hand account.

and their sea route. The island of São Luís lay at the southwestern extreme of a coastal transportation line that connected the city to the southern Caribbean via the lowland riverine basin known as the *baixada maranhense* or via Belém do Pará at the mouth of the Amazon River. While the land routes from São Luís to the *baixada maranhense* and to Belém and beyond were long and treacherous, the sea route was quick and easy. Travelers constantly moved between Belém and the Guyanas at mid-century. Small ships carrying cargo to and from Paramaribo (Surinam) and Cayenne (French Guiana) regularly docked in Belém, São Luís and nearby smaller ports in the 1950s and early 1960s (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Caribbean Islands and Northern Brazil

The most lucrative post-war enterprise along the São Luís-Guyanas transportation line was contraband trade. Sidestepping the Brazilian government's strict tariffs during this period, ships carried Brazilian coffee to the Guyanas for resale on the world market. The same ships also

imported a variety of other goods, especially restricted and high-tariff goods like alcohol and tobacco products.¹¹ Armed forces patrols regularly intercepted vessels along the coast of Maranhão, Pará and the federal territory of Amapá. The vessels often docked in smaller ports of the *baixada maranhense*, as did two yachts that were caught leaving Praia de Bate Vento (in the municipality of Cururupu) in March 1961 with a cargo of coffee destined for Paramaribo. Alternatively, ships from southeast Brazil carrying coffee might skip their scheduled stops in São Luís or Belém and travel directly to the Guyanas.¹²

The ships' sailors also brought music. The sailors hailed from many nations, a motley crew. It is likely that some of the sailors of small ships that visited Maranhão also traveled to ports in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.¹³ The sailors' preferred music presumably included those styles popular in their homelands or frequently visited port cities; in the post-war decade (1945-1955) these styles tended to be Trinidadian calypso, Cuban mambo and son, and Haitian meringue, in addition to the ubiquitous bolero. Also, since the route to Brazil often passed through Cayenne, it is probable that sailors had access to popular songs from the other islands in the French-speaking Caribbean (Haiti, Martinique and Guadeloupe). The lack of sources from this time period makes it difficult to identify those Caribbean records that may have taken the sea route to northern Brazil. However, old-timers in Belém and São Luís remember

¹¹ Lamén, "Mobilizing Regionalism at Land's End," 29.

¹² "Luta Contra o Contrabando," *Jornal Pequeno*, March 7, 1961; "Forças Armadas na Repressão ao Contrabando," *Jornal Pequeno*, March 14, 1961; "Contrabando," *Jornal Pequeno*, May 13, 1964. Contraband trade was a consensus national political issue in the early 1960s; presidents Jânio Quadros and João Goulart and opposition leader Carlos Lacerda all railed against it. Stopping it was a different matter. From what I have gathered, much of the illegal import-export business along the northeastern coast of the continent appears to have remained strong until the crackdown following the 1964 military revolution in Brazil.

¹³ Mid-century, the Gulf of Mexico featured major ports including Miami, New Orleans (both in the United States), Havana (Cuba) and Veracruz (Mexico). In the adjacent Caribbean Sea, ships commonly passed through the ports of Kingston (Jamaica), Colón (Panama), Limón (Costa Rica), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Cartagena (Colombia), Puerto Cabello (Venezuela), San Juan (Puerto Rico), La Ceiba (Honduras) and Port of Spain (Trinidad & Tobago).

how sailors brought Caribbean music to the bars and bodegas near the ports where their ships were docked.¹⁴

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a collection of rhythms known locally as “merengue” became the hottest international craze in the coastal areas of Pará and Maranhão. It appears that the frequency of Caribbean sailors’ trips to Pará and Maranhão increased during the period of João Goulart’s presidency (1961-1964), at least if we believe the tone of Brazilian media outlets that began to increasingly clamor against maritime smuggling. More and more Caribbean music was being recorded and distributed internationally by this time. Jamaican-American singer Harry Belafonte’s album *Calypso*, released by RCA Victor in 1956, became the first LP to sell over a million copies worldwide. From the French Caribbean emerged the genres of cadence (*kadans*) and compas (*kompa*). Colombian cumbia and Dominican merengue also became continent-wide sensations. One sound system owner in Belém recalled the popularity of merengue records by Dominican bandleaders Luis Quintero and Angel Vilorio in the late 1950s. Others from the same city recalled the music of Dominican band Trio Reynoso, famous for a variant of merengue known as perico ripiao. And many remembered frequently hearing records by two Colombian super-groups—Aníbal Velásquez y Su Conjunto and Los Corraleros de Majagual—that popularized cumbia and guaracha in the early 1960s.¹⁵ Famous cumbia songs of the early 1960s such as “Cumbiamberita,” “Festival en Guararé,” and “La Pollera Coloral” could still be heard playing in public spaces in São Luís fifty years later. Although many Caribbean rhythms played

¹⁴ Andrey Faro de Lima, “‘No Caribe, seu Porto de Mar!’: O Transnacional na ‘Invenção’ da Cultura Paraense” (Paper presented at the VI Simpósio Internacional do Centro de Estudos do Caribe no Brasil, São Luís, Brazil, November 3-6, 2010).

¹⁵ Bernardo Farias, “O Merengue na Formação da Música Popular Urbana de Belém do Pará: Reflexão sobre as Conexões Amazônia-Caribe,” *Revista Brasileira do Caribe* 11, no. 22 (Jan-Jun 2011): 249-50.

in Pará and Maranhão in the late 1950s and early 1960s (especially merengue and cumbia) the locals called them all by the umbrella name of “merengue.”¹⁶

Although boleros entertained a cross-class audience, merengue and cumbia were working-class musics. “Merengue” first established itself in the port areas (Campina in Belém, Praia Grande in São Luís) in bars frequented by sailors, traveling merchants, prostitutes, and other members of the urban working class.¹⁷ Merengue’s association with sailors and prostitutes quickly gave it a bad reputation and kept it from entering elite urban social clubs.¹⁸ Also, radio stations, lacking a supply of cumbia and merengue records from distributors or labels, failed to pick up many of the songs that played in establishments near the port. Rural communities along the coast of Pará and Maranhão, however, were open to playing and dancing to the newer genre alongside older Caribbean boleros and Brazilian romantic songs. Likewise, recent rural migrants to the cities of São Luís or Belém enjoyed the new genre. Although working class communities lacked the funds to build infrastructure and import records and sound equipment, they innovated. Often, the only time a rural or poor urban community could afford a P.A. system was during one of the many annual popular festivals. Caribbean music thus began to enter a working-class niche.

Meanwhile, in the urban centers of southeastern Brazil, Caribbean music—so desired in the late 1940s and early 1950s—began to lose favor. Firstly, urban youth were captivated by rock n’ roll music from the United States and Britain. Secondly, nationalist-minded policymakers and musicologists tried to instead promote Brazilian genres that, in their view, were being diluted

¹⁶ In Belém, the same genres came to known under the umbrella name of “lambada.” Lamen, “Mobilizing Regionalism at Land’s End,” 35.

¹⁷ In Belém, the popular dances in establishments near the ports were called *gafieira* dances. Lima, “No Caribe, seu Porto de Mar,” Lamen, “Mobilizing Regionalism at Land’s End,” 36.

¹⁸ Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, interview by author, Sá Viana—São Luís, September 1, 2010; Bernardo Farias, “O Merengue na Formação.”

by foreign music by a process of cultural imperialism.¹⁹ Those critics also denounced bossa nova and tropicália as foreign imitations of jazz and pop music respectively. Thirdly, within the universe of Brazilian music in the 1960s, boleros and romantic music began to be associated with the ideologies of rurality and backwardness. In the words of one musicologist, “the subsequent evolution of the Brazilian bolero [in the late 1950s] followed two basic tendencies: 1) the “cafona” or “brega,” characterized by tacky exaggeration, vulgar sentimentalism and deterioration of the idiom; 2) the refined, relying on careful musical arrangements, eventually triggering the genre of bossa nova.”²⁰ Brega was suddenly stigmatized for being an imitation and for being bad music. This process marginalized and compartmentalized popular Caribbean rhythms further within the national Brazilian imagination.

Interviews with Ludovicenses confirm the immense popularity of the singers of romantic brega music on the island of São Luís.²¹ Singers like Milton Santos de Almeida (Miltinho), Agnaldo Timoteo, Altamar Dutra, Lindomar Castilho, Evaldo Braga and Waldick Soriano spearheaded the music that fell under the genres of “brega” or “bolero” to major commercial success in the 1960s. Paradoxically, it was the commerce-poor states of Pará and Goiás and the interior regions of the northeast states (including Maranhão) that were most closely identified with the genre. The new generation of urban Brazilians began to look down upon populations that listened to brega and its Caribbean cousins such as cumbia and merengue—including the working classes of São Luís and the *baixada maranhense*. By 1968 Caribbean music was forgotten by the urban centers of the southeast and by major phonographical companies and

¹⁹ Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition*, 18-22. Stroud identifies music critic and editor of the *Revista de Música Popular* Lúcio Rangel, along with prominent public commentators such as radio announcer Almirante and journalist Ary Vasconcellos, as important advocates of this position.

²⁰ Valente, “Da Suave e Morna Batida,” 512.

²¹ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 60-61. “Ludovicense” is the official term in Portuguese for a person from São Luís, although many people use the term “Sãoluisense” colloquially.

radio stations. Yet Caribbean music was very much alive in north, northeast, and central Brazil. In the late 1960s the people of Maranhão still listened and danced to a variety of Caribbean rhythms loosely organized under the labels of “bolero” (for the slower rhythms) and “merengue” (for the faster rhythms).

2.2 THE SCENE: POPULAR FESTIVE SPACES, SOUND SYSTEMS, EARLY NIGHTCLUBS

How did popular sectors listen and dance to Caribbean music in the city? They could hear hit songs on the AM radio stations Gurupí, Ribamar and Difusora but rarely would they hear a band play those songs live. Troupes of musicians that played covers of current radio hits did so mostly at elite social clubs. In order to hear the hit songs from the radio at a working-class party, someone had to have a *radiola* or a sound system. The *radiola* was effectively an extension of the radio, both literally and functionally. The basic sound system consisted of three components: the audio input source (a radio or a record player), the amplifier, and the output device (a speaker). Sailors and other international travelers brought back to São Luís the odd machine made by RCA, Philips, or by a Japanese brand; others would settle for a sound system made in Brazil under ISI (import-substitution) policies, such as ABC, Delta, Wilkason and EASA.²² By the late 1960s, more advanced products made by Gradient and Polyvox—domestic brands that grew during the so-called “economic miracle” period—began to enter the market as well.²³

²² See Lamén, “Mobilizing Regionalism at Land’s End” for the parallel process in Belém.

²³ Antônio Matos, interview by author, João Paulo—São Luís, September 26, 2010; Antônio Cardoso Rodrigues (Seu Antônio), interview by author, Vinhais—São Luís, August 22, 2010.

Owning a sound system or *radiola* in the 1960s and early 1970s was “a luxury,” rare among working-class Maranhenses.²⁴ Due to the continuing high costs of imported components, regular purchasing of new audio equipment was limited to a select few: usually, government workers, military officers, or successful business owners.²⁵ Working-class residents of São Luís often went to great financial lengths to obtain a basic sound system, often second-hand, which might allow them to invite their friends over for house parties. Sound system owners could also sometimes make a profit (through payments in money or kind) by playing music at these parties. Traveling with coveted audio equipment was a risky proposition given potential damage or theft—and as one Navy corporal found out the hard way, even leaving it at home was not completely safe. A man dressed in a sailor’s uniform arrived at the corporal’s house in the neighborhood of Vila Ivar Saldanha in May of 1974 and informed the corporal’s wife that her husband had sent him to pick up his sound system. The “sailor” then proceeded to disappear with the audio equipment.²⁶

For those in São Luís with knowledge of electronics in the 1960s and the early 1970s, fixing up an array of used parts and building speakers from scratch was a more affordable alternative than buying a sound system. Working-class electricians, both trained and amateur, mounted sound systems in their free time, either for themselves or on commission for sale. To build larger sound systems for use in parties, they usually had to modify the amplifiers (especially the equalization settings) and design speakers that together would produce clear sound frequencies. The best working-class electricians could also modify sound systems to include an array of speakers—in the 1970s, usually not more than four—that, spread across a large room, transformed that room into a makeshift dance floor. Carne Seca and Nestábulo, for

²⁴ Riba Macedo, interview.

²⁵ Antônio Matos, interview; Charles Brown, interview by author, Jordoa—São Luís, October 24, 2010.

²⁶ “Falso Marujo Rouba Radiola,” *Jornal Pequeno*, May 24, 1974.

example, two of the leading sound system owners in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were experienced electrician engineers; still, they consulted other experts for new tricks of the trade (Nestábulo, for example, worked with electrician Mayernes). By constantly updating their electronics and renewing their sound, Carne Seca and Nestábulo gained the reputation of having the best sound systems in town.²⁷

Sound system owners held respect among the working class because they possessed something most people didn't have. They were generally middle-aged and older men with community ties. Sound systems in the 1960s were identified by the name of the owner: *radiola do Nestábulo*, *radiola do Apolinário*, *radiola do Nonato*, etc.²⁸ Sound system owners usually needed help from several other individuals to produce an event, so they brought along family members or trusted hires to transport the sound system, to connect the cables, and to stand guard. Sound system owners also chose someone to be the “selector” or *discotecário* to select songs to play. Audiences chose to attend a party based on the name of the sound system, and in contrast the role of the selector remained a subordinate one, especially in the early 1970s. This was largely because sound system owners also owned the collection of LPs, so selectors were replaceable employees. Most sound system owners purchased locally available LPs that featured recognizable songs that were already hits on the television or radio, so the sequence of songs was almost predictable—in fact audiences regularly requested hits of the moment to be played multiple times in one night.²⁹

²⁷ Isaías Oliveira Costa, interview by author, Santo Antônio—São Luís, August 18, 2010; Antônio Matos, interview.

²⁸ Tarcisio Ferreira a.k.a. Selektah, “Radioleiros dos Anos 70,” Reggae em Notícia, *Jornal Itaqui-Bacanga*, 1-7 August, 2010.

²⁹ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010. I will be using the grouping “various informants” when there were more than five informants and the information they provided was generally considered common knowledge.

Where might common Ludovicenses and recent migrants from coastal Maranhão go to dance to Caribbean and other international music played on sound systems?³⁰ Migrants from coastal and interior Maranhão were fond of the rural festive spaces they knew from their hometowns, spaces that usually synthesized religious celebrations and dancing to non-spiritual popular music over the course of an event. Many had tried to recreate those moments in the city. The simplest way to do so was through informal house parties meant for family and friends. Sound system owners could either host events themselves or play at in-house celebrations of their friends and neighbors. A successful party sometimes prompted the organizer to make it an annual event, especially when it was a birthday or anniversary party. Those sound system owners that hoped to make steady revenue were always looking for new venues to play music, whether at a formally organized space or a makeshift venue. What did popular festive spaces in urban São Luís look like? How were they organized?

The first type of popular festive space surrounded the large, seasonal folk/cultural festivals found throughout Brazil. The calendar of seasonal celebrations in post-war São Luís began with the Carnival season that peaked with pre-Lenten festivities (usually in February). Carnival in Maranhão was primarily an urban phenomenon; from the 1940s onwards the São Luís carnival was celebrated almost exclusively in the city center, thereby restricting the proliferation of carnival events in the peripheral neighborhoods.³¹ It appears that the centralized nature of the local Carnival and the structured organization of live samba presentations were not conducive to playing recorded Caribbean music. The rest of the festive calendar, being less scripted, was more open to innovation. The other major festive season celebrated by the people of Maranhão, annually in June and July, featured the folkloric/popular festivals of Bumba-meu-

³⁰ For comparisons and interactions between elite and working-class scenes, see section 3.1.

³¹ Eugênio Araújo, *Não Deixa o Samba Morrer: um Estudo Histórico e Etnográfico sobre o Carnaval de São Luís e a Escola Favela do Samba* (São Luís: Edições UFMA/PREXAE/DAC, 2001), 46-48.

Boi (or simply Boi) and of the Catholic saints São João, Santo Antônio and São Pedro. As late as the 1970s, the municipality of São Luís still maintained prohibitions against Boi celebrations in the center of the city. As a result, Boi flourished in the margins of the city and rural areas of the island, where migrants could more freely recreate the festive atmosphere of the countryside.³²

During Bumba-meu-Boi and other June-fest celebrations, residents of popular neighborhoods usually set up tents to host *arraiais* or dance presentations for São João and the other saints. Taking advantage of the tent-covered space, organizers often asked someone with basic audio equipment to play recorded music—often Caribbean music—after the formal presentations had finished. One such invitee was José Ribamar Mauricio da Costa, who we met before as “Carne Seca,” a native of the town of Santa Inés in the interior of Maranhão who claimed to have owned a sound system since 1951.³³ In São Luís in the late 1960s he began to organize *arraiais* or dance presentations in open spaces on the northern bank of the river Bacanga, close to where he stayed with family members. When the festive season was over he continued these parties as secular sound system parties. Residents of the traditional working-class neighborhoods of Madre Deus and Lira and the squatter colonies in Areinha remember flocking to Carne Seca’s sound system parties to hear international and Brazilian popular hits.³⁴

In the city of São Luís, the month of July was a particularly festive one because each Bumba-meu-Boi group carried out an elaborate final ceremony known as *morte do boi* or “death of the bull.” Residents of the southern bank of the river Anil recall how Boi schools contracted sound systems in the 1970s to play records once the folkloric/popular rhythms of Boi, played on live instruments, had ceased for the day. Prominent among them were the schools of Mestre

³² Antonio Evaldo Almeida Barros, “O Pantheon Encantado: Culturas e Heranças Étnicas na Formação de Identidade Maranhense (1937-65),” Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2007.

³³ “Carne Seca: Um dos Pioneiros do Reggae,” *Massa Regueira: O Jornal do Reggae* 1, no. 1 (1996), PCD.

³⁴ Messias Cutrim Veloso, interview by author, Goiabal—São Luís, October 2, 2010.

Apolônio Melônio (*pandeiro* rhythm) and Mestre Leonardo (*zabumba* rhythm) in the neighborhood of Liberdade and the school of Mestre Laurentino in the neighborhood of Fé Em Deus to the east. The sound system of José de Ribamar Silva (Zé Roxinho) often played at the death-of-the-bull ceremony in Liberdade, since Zé Roxinho was from Liberdade, while the sound system of Moisés known as Radiola Bem Amada usually played in the ceremony in Fé Em Deus. It was simplest for neighborhood festivals to utilize sound systems from within the neighborhood, which helped to develop lasting social and economic relationships between the festivals, local audiences, and local sound system owners.³⁵

The second type of festive space consisted of spiritual celebrations known as *festejos* and *festas do divino* that were hosted at spiritual houses ranging from Catholic churches to Afro-maranhense religious houses (Casas de Mina, Nagô, and Jeje) to other spiritist faiths. *Festejos* worshipped that particular religious house's patron saint or *orixá*, or in the case of *festas do divino*, a sacred spirit. Like their rural counterparts, urban spiritual events usually had a secular component of music and dance as well. These annual events typically lasted a week and a half each, which generally meant a significant amount of down time, when participants would be present on the grounds of the spiritual house but would not necessarily be busy. So spiritual houses found it useful to contract a sound system because it helped attract more people and filled in the non-ceremonial hours or the evening after-hours. In the neighborhood of Liberdade, for example, the Casa de Mina (part of an Afro-Maranhense spiritual tradition) held its annual festival soon after the end of the Bumba-meu-Boi festival cycle and always invited a sound system to play. Likewise, in the neighborhood of Sacavém, the spiritist house of Cosme and Damião regularly depended on sound systems for its annual *festejo*. These events allowed even

³⁵ Jesus Marques (Jesa Marques), interview no. 2 by author, Liberdade—São Luís, November 10, 2010.

the poorest people to eat, drink, socialize, and dance to popular music, which was often Caribbean music in the form of boleros or “merengue.”³⁶

Seasonal and spiritual festivals were common fixtures in both rural and urban areas of Maranhão. The city of São Luís, however, offered cultural possibilities that rural areas and small towns could not. The third type of venue for sound system parties were pre-existing urban cultural associations, such as samba schools or amateur athletic associations. Each year, once carnival season was over, samba schools faced long months of recess. Some samba schools preferred to rent out their practice space for other events in order to generate revenue. In the neighborhood of Liberdade, just north of the city center, the samba school Duque do Samba leased its backyard, known as Mela-Mela, for weekend dances. For the first half of the 1970s, Zé Roxinho built a loyal following there with his basic sound system: borrowed tube amplifiers with low potency, 10-inch and 12-inch speakers.³⁷ Circa 1976, in the neighborhood of Sacavém (a peripheral neighborhood that occupied much of the land held by the city’s Water and Sewage Agency), the rival samba schools Favela do Samba and Salgueiro had fallen on hard times, and began to host weekly events with the sound system Som Guarany of one José Ribamar da Conceição Macedo, known as Riba Macedo.³⁸ Athletic associations also provided spaces for sound systems to play. In the sparsely populated neighborhood of Aurora, João Ramalho managed an athletic association called Clube Recreativo Palmeirinha with spacious training grounds for the club’s amateur football team. Circa 1977 Ramalho built a sound system, invite

³⁶ Célia Sampaio, interview by author, Vila Zumbi dos Palmares—São Luís, June 11, 2010; Barros, “O Pantheon Encantado.”

³⁷ Jesa Marques, interview no. 2.

³⁸ Araújo, *Não Deixa o Samba Morrer*, 139; Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 64.

selectors and advertise parties; by the mid-1980s, Palmeirinha had become one of the largest popular clubs of the city.³⁹

Neighborhood associations or “Resident’s Unions” were the fourth type of venue for sound system events.⁴⁰ Neighborhood associations helped working class communities build political and social networks, in the process becoming cultural centers and developing international music scenes. Starting with the working class neighborhood of Presidente Vargas (later renamed Lira) in 1959 and spreading east in the 1960s, neighborhood associations covered the highly populated corridor between Centro and Anil. In the neighborhood of Liberdade, the Resident’s Headquarters (adjacent to the old slaughterhouse that formed the backbone of the community for decades) began to host regular weekend parties featuring the sound systems of Zé Roxinho (known as Águia do Som) and of Nilton Borges (known as Hi-fi Santa Luzia).⁴¹ Another of the city’s cultural hubs was the João Paulo market area, including the neighborhoods of Coroado, Jordoa, Barés, Ivar Saldanha and Barreto. By the late 1960s, the Resident’s Union of Coroado, the Beneficent Association of Barés (ABB), and the Resident’s Union of Jordoa each began to attract people of all ages from the neighborhood on the weekends with sound systems. The Beneficent Association of Barés (ABB) on Guaranis Street, for example, counted on Negão Gerson and Canela to sponsor sound system parties. With two 10-inch or 12-inch speakers placed in the corners of the association space, the console of the sound system against the back

³⁹ João Ramalho, interview by author, Aurora—São Luís, December 19, 2010; Raimunda Nonata Almeida Santos (Didica), interview by author, Santo Antônio—São Luís, July 30, 2010.

⁴⁰ According to Araújo, neighborhood associations themselves had often gained an organizational foothold by partnering with samba schools (as in the case of Favela do Samba in Sacavém), and vice versa. Araújo, *Não Deixa o Samba Morrer*, 132-33.

⁴¹ Ana Lúcia Duarte Silva, “De Matadouro a Liberdade: a Formação Histórica-Cultural de um Bairro de São Luís,” Bachelor’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 1997; Jesa Marques, interview no. 2.

wall, a collection of LPs present, and an assortment of ice-cold beer and bootleg liquor for sale, the association presidents in charge of the space opened the doors to local audiences.⁴²

Neighborhood associations at night were good imitations of the bars and nightclubs near the old harbor in the city center that, as we have already seen, played Caribbean music under the name of “merengue” for sailors, prostitutes, and other revelers. Soon, actual nightclubs also began to emerge in the peripheral neighborhoods, albeit unregistered, illegal ones. This was the fifth type of venue for sound system events and Caribbean music. One of the first entrepreneurs to open a nightclub was Aurino, a Maranhense from the town of São Mateus who had lived in São Paulo state for a few years. He arrived in São Luís circa 1971 and opened a nightclub named Rock Clube in the neighborhood of João Paulo. He chose a location just two blocks away from the Beneficent Association of Barés (ABB) and as such came in to direct competition with ABB for audiences. Aurino and his selector Chico Maioba aimed to attract a more youthful audience by ignoring older Caribbean genres and playing rock n’ roll, soul and other international hits. For music, he relied both on local record stores, and on his brother in São Paulo, who sent him the latest hit LPs with international music. Aurino was successful in attracting the youthful audience he hoped for. However, circa 1975, several violent incidents outside the nightclub prompted opposition from the Baptist school across the street, forcing him to relocate. He began to rent the space of the Resident’s Union of Jordoa, in the adjacent neighborhood of Jordoa, and contracted the sound system known as Som Pop for weekend events. When Zé Baldez, the president of Jordoa’s neighborhood association, saw Aurino’s success, Baldez decided to organize sound system parties himself rather than rent out the space, thereby dislocating Rock Clube once again, this time to Dr. Emiliano Macieira Street in nearby Vila Ivar Saldanha. Baldez entered into a

⁴² Aponísio Paulo de Sá Filho (Paulo Caribe), interview no. 2 by author, João Paulo and Jordoa—São Luís, September 26, 2010; Antonio Furtado da Silva (Netto Vinil), interview by author, João Paulo—São Luís, September 25, 2010.

partnership with selector Luizão and they called their new club Pop Som. Within a couple of years, circa 1977, a new nightclub owned by Chico, named Globo de Ouro, was operating in the same neighborhood of Ivar Saldanha, on the nearby Inácio Cutrim Street.⁴³

By the mid-1970s, multiple nocturnal cultural spaces existed across the peripheral neighborhoods of São Luís, mostly located at the headquarters of neighborhood associations, sometimes at other cooperative associations such as samba schools or football clubs, and sometimes as private ventures as in the case of Rock Clube and Globo de Ouro. The high density of people and communities in the João Paulo/Jordoa/Ivar Saldanha area meant that several popular nightclubs and/or neighborhood associations could survive within a few blocks of each other there. Other highly populated neighborhoods such as Liberdade also featured competition between two or three venues. Still, most neighborhoods, at any given time, featured one location that was in vogue and dominated the local scene for international music.⁴⁴

By the late 1960s, the working-class international music scene was strong in several spots across the city. In Liberdade, north of the city center, the neighborhood association congregated local youth on weekends. Across the river, in the neighborhood of São Francisco, the cultural space known as Quilombo was frequently rented out for working-class sound system parties. Moving south from the city center, Carne Seca's sound system (known as Sonzão de Carne Seca) played frequently in a neighborhood association in Areinha (in addition to the aforementioned outdoor parties in Areinha and Madre Deus). Moving southeast, the neighborhood of Fátima housed the nightclub RBV and the Resident's Union of Fátima (União do BF)—the latter, in particular, drew large numbers of working-class youth, especially on Sunday afternoons and evenings. In Aurora, upstream on the banks of the Anil, the aforementioned Clube Palmeirinha

⁴³ Paulo Caribe, interview no. 2.

⁴⁴ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

had begun to host sound system events. The neighborhood of Sacavém featured parties organized by Riba Macedo's Som Guarany sound system. Meanwhile at the neighborhood associations of Coroado and Barés (ABB), the selector/sound system owner named Edmilson Tomé da Costa (or simply, Serralheiro) began to play regularly.⁴⁵ Selectors began to gain fame around town; in addition, music enthusiasts who aspired to becoming selectors often carried their collection of LPs to clubs with an offer to play the LP in return for free entrance to the club.⁴⁶ The steady growth of the number of nightclubs and the corresponding growth in audiences provided new opportunities for aspiring sound system owners. The informal working-class music scene of São Luís had formed.

Working class youth attended sound system dances, then, at house parties, seasonal and spiritual festivals, pre-existing cultural associations, residents unions, and informal nightclubs. What music did they hear, and what music did they want to hear? Did new musical and commercial trends in the late 1960s and early 1970s affect the way they listened and danced to the music?

2.3 CARIBBEAN MUSIC IN SÃO LUÍS I: THE JIMMY CLIFF PHENOMENON, 1968-1976

Jamaican music of the 1960s and 1970s reached Maranhão primarily through the global connections created by the international music industry. Most Jamaican music in the late 1960s and early 1970s was actually being produced in the financial metropole of Britain (albeit mostly

⁴⁵ Didica, interview; Jesa Marques, interview no. 2; Riba Macedo, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 2; João Ramalho, interview.

⁴⁶ Nayfson Henrique dos Santos (Natty Nayfson), interview by author, Liberdade—São Luís, December 14, 2010.

by Jamaicans for Jamaican audiences). Conversely, the Brazilian government promoted the growth of a domestic music industry in the late 1960s, providing support for domestic labels such as Copacabana, Som Livre, Ariola, Continental, and RGA while blocking imported records and requiring record companies outside of Brazil to license their music through Brazilian affiliates. The commercial framework was in place: Jamaican music produced in Britain and distributed by a major label could be licensed to companies in southeastern Brazil, and if those records were re-released in Brazil, Maranhenses could now legally buy them. Still, the actual process took a while to develop, because in the absence of information about Jamaican culture, initially there was no demand for it, especially in the peripheral region of Maranhão. As we shall see, the music of Jimmy Cliff was the exception to this rule and ended up as the catalyst that sparked Brazilian demand, including Maranhense demand, for Jamaican music.

The urban working class of São Luís, poor as it was, did participate in the rise in consumption of cultural goods in Brazil in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Brazilian labels based in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro did not heavily distribute records to the relatively small market of São Luís; instead they relied mainly on radio stations to divulge their music by sending them promotional copies of new releases. Many of these records still found their way in to private record collections of Maranhenses through sale, trade, or appropriation. Most labels employed part-time sales representatives in São Luís. Some of these representatives, like Edivaldo Assis and Zé Branco, also worked as radio jockeys for the leading radio station, Difusora AM. Record collectors could also access the catalog of a music label through that label's sales representative, but placing an order for a previously unheard international record through a catalog was considered a hit or miss proposition. Most sound system parties in the 1960s and 1970s contented themselves by playing easily available records that audiences recognized from the

radio. It was only a select few sound system owners who were willing to take risks on unknown records from outside of Brazil.⁴⁷

Another phenomenon of cultural consumption in 1960s Brazil was television. Although the average working class household in São Luís could not afford a television set, the television medium still had significant impact on cultural patterns in the city. Television companies struck gold with their made-for-TV music festivals in the mid-1960s that showcased a variety of artists.⁴⁸ In addition to the Brazilian musicians who performed, a few token international artists were invited to play. One of these was a young, rising singer named Jimmy Cliff who represented the newly independent nation of Jamaica. In October 1968, Jimmy Cliff competed in the third International Song Festival (*Festival Internacional da Canção*) sponsored by TV Globo and held in Rio de Janeiro. Cliff even won the prize in the international category with the performance of his song “Waterfall.”

Meanwhile, at the festivals of both TV Record and TV Globo, Tropicalist musicians Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil clashed with official censors over the political content of their songs, and with a large part of the studio audience over style. They stormed out of the festivals, criticizing them for being counter-revolutionary in a time of youthful revolution. Geraldo Vandré’s “Pra Não Dizer Que Não Falei De Flores,” a passionate song of protest against the military government, became a popular anthem. By December 1968 all three artists were imprisoned. Their music had contributed to a wave of popular protest against the military government, which responded by passing Institutional Act No.5 (AI-5) to enable a wave of repression of intellectuals, musicians and artists. Gil and Veloso themselves were exiled after brief stints in prison, while Vandré was tortured by the military police. Jimmy Cliff absorbed this

⁴⁷ Gerson Moreira Veras, interview by author, João Paulo—São Luís, August 20, 2010; Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, January 12, 1981.

⁴⁸ José Ramos Tinhorão, *Música Popular—do Gramofone ao Rádio e TV* (São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1981), 178-82.

rare moment in the Brazilian music scene. He had befriended Gil and Veloso, even joining Gil on stage for a set of alternative concerts the Tropicalists had arranged in October at the Sucata nightclub in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil and its musical scene made such a profound impression on Cliff that he stayed for several months, allegedly writing several songs there including his first international hit “Wonderful World, Beautiful People.”⁴⁹

Jimmy Cliff released his self-titled album in December 1969 on Trojan Records to unprecedented commercial success in the UK and the USA with hits such as “Wonderful World, Beautiful People,” “Vietnam” and “Many Rivers To Cross.” In 1970, the Brazilian label Companhia Brasileira de Discos (owned by Philips) released a Jimmy Cliff LP in Brazil for the first time. The LP, titled *The Greatest Hits*, featured five songs from Cliff’s self-titled album in addition to the Cat Stevens cover “Wild World” and the song that Cliff had performed in São Paulo in 1968, “Waterfall.” For artwork the label chose the rainbow-colored cover from *Wonderful World, Beautiful People* (A&M, 1970) for the front, and the photograph of Cliff on a motorcycle from the re-issue of *Hard Road To Travel* (Beverly, 1970) for the back. *The Greatest Hits* made a splash in Brazil. The record was distributed to radio stations and stores across the country, including in São Luís, where the LP eventually came to be known by collectors as the “*disco da moto*” (the motorcycle record) because of the picture on the back cover.

The Jimmy Cliff LP fit within the craze for international pop and rock music that was sweeping Brazil. Brazilian bands, influenced by a variety of British and North American bands (led, inevitably, by the Beatles), were producing their own music in the late 1960s known as *jovem guarda* or *iê-iê-iê* (the Brazilian cognate of “yeah-yeah-yeah”). Many popular *jovem guarda* songs were simply Brazilian versions of international hits. One such songwriter from southeast Brazil, Rossini Pinto, wrote a version of the Jimmy Cliff LP’s first track “Suffering In

⁴⁹ Dunn, *Brutality Garden*; Davis and Simon, *Reggae Bloodlines*, 84.

The Land” with Portuguese lyrics and called it “Sinto Mas Não Sei Dizer.” The Rio de Janeiro band The Fevers then recorded the song and released it on their self-titled EP in May 1970 alongside three other versions of international pop hits, including “Let It Be” by The Beatles. Just as Jimmy Cliff’s own musical output had been influenced by Brazilian music, here was Jimmy Cliff’s LP reciprocating the influence on Brazilian iê-iê-iê. Jimmy Cliff’s music was an instance of a Jamaica-Brazil transnational flow during the fecund artistic moment of the late 1960s, a period otherwise dominated (at least in the Brazilian context) by the one-way movement of music from the North Atlantic to the Brazilian periphery. Although Cliff would not return to Brazil until 1980, he had already laid an important foundation for Jamaican music in Brazil.⁵⁰

Despite the success of Cliff’s LP, record labels in Brazil did not immediately seek out other Jamaican records to release, instead adopting a cautious approach with several pilot releases. Rio de Janeiro-based label Copacabana released Kingston-based Dave and Ansel Collins’ “Double Barrel” as a seven-inch under the Trojan Records banner in 1971 and it quickly became a hit in São Luís.⁵¹ A year later the São Paulo-based label Discos Beverly re-released *Monkey Spanner* by Dave and Ansel Collins with four songs, of which the title track saw some airplay in São Luís. Discos Beverly also released a compilation LP called *Ton Ton: Caia Em Tentação* in 1971 with an eclectic mix of international music. Alongside two Jamaican songs—“Monkey Spanner” by Dave and Ansel Collins and the Jimmy Cliff-written “Let Your Yeah Be Yeah” performed by Jamaican band The Pioneers—the LP included songs by a Missouri bluegrass band (The Dillardes), a Brazilian who sang exclusively in English (Terry Winter), and a Roma Catalan rumba singer (Peret). The follow-up LP in 1974, entitled *New Tonton*, featured

⁵⁰ Cliff also continued his transnational collaborations with Gil and Veloso in England in the 1970s, which will be discussed in section 2.7.

⁵¹ Trojan Records was one of Britain’s premier labels for Jamaican music in the 1960s and 1970s. See Michael De Koningh and Marc Griffiths, *Tighten Up!: The History of Reggae in the UK* (London: Sanctuary, 2003).

Jamaican band The Maytals' "Monkey Man" alongside tracks by The Ronettes, Daisy Duke, and other U.S. artists. Collectors in São Luís recall how they discovered now-classic Jamaican songs such as "Monkey Man" precisely through these motley compilations.⁵²

The cultural allure of the United States combined with its strong influence on global economic markets, ironically, helped spread Jamaican music. In 1971, Discos Beverly released a compilation LP called *USA Click* with a misleading image of the United States flag featured across the cover—misleading, because in addition to the aforementioned "Double Barrel," the LP featured four Jamaican songs from the Trojan Records vault (The Upsetters' "Shocks Of A Mighty," Horace Faith's "Black Pearl," Bob and Marcia's "We've Got To Get Ourselves Together" and Dandy's "You're Coming Back"). An LP called *L.A. Reggae* appeared in 1972 on Discos Copacabana, with a mixture of originals and pop covers performed and produced by Los Angeles-based musicians in a reggae rhythm. But the biggest international hit⁵³ of 1972 in São Luís, "I Can See Clearly Now," belonged to an African-American who loved Jamaican music: Johnny Nash. Nash was a fan of Bob Marley's work, had invited him to Sweden for a recording session, and ultimately ended up recording and popularizing several Marley songs. Nash's LP *I Can See Clearly Now* featured three songs written by Marley ("Stir It Up," "Guava Jelly" and "Comma Comma") and one song co-written by Nash and Marley ("You Poured Sugar On Me"). Epic Records released Nash's LP in Brazil, marking the first time a song written by Marley was

⁵² Jota Kerly, interview by author, Centro—São Luís, September 2010; Aponísio Paulo de Sá Filho (Paulo Caribe), interview no. 3 by author, João Paulo—São Luís, October 30, 2010.

⁵³ Calling any song a "hit" in São Luís is a subjective proposition, given the absence of musical charts evaluating the commercial success of that song. In the world of sound systems, a song was commercially successful if it was requested repeatedly by audiences, and contributed to the commercial success of the sound system. Selectors, sound system owners, and club-goers I spoke all used the term "hit" ("*sucesso*") to describe songs that they remembered as very popular. Whenever I found a consensus among my informants over a song being successful, I have described it here as a "hit."

released in Brazil. After the title track, a huge success in São Luís, Maranhenses also developed a taste for “Stir It Up,” “Guava Jelly” and “You Poured Sugar On Me” on the dance floor.⁵⁴

From then on, most international hits released by Brazilian labels that incorporated elements of Jamaican rocksteady and early reggae (the drumbeat, the bass-line, the keyboard chop and/or the guitar skank) and had a general Jamaican swinging feel became hits on the dance floors of São Luís. Paul Simon’s “Mother and Child Reunion” was a major local hit in 1972, while in 1973 Ludovicense favorites included “If” by Orleans (a pop-rock band formed in Woodstock, New York) and “In The Summer Holidays” by Sharif Dean, a pop singer of French and Algerian descent. Versions and covers of Jamaican songs by non-Jamaicans (mostly Europeans and North Americans) remained crucial in bringing Jamaican culture to Brazil and especially to areas with little direct contact overseas, such as Maranhão. In 1973, a cover of The Kingstonians’ rocksteady classic “Singer Man” by Nolan Porter, a Los Angeles-based soul man, was a huge success in São Luís, as recalled by old-timers. A year later in 1974, Eric Clapton’s cover of Bob Marley and the Wailers’ “I Shot the Sheriff” was also received well by local crowds. The Rolling Stones’ version of Eric Donaldson’s “Cherry Oh Baby” was another cover that preceded the Jamaican original on the dance floors of São Luís.⁵⁵ Indeed, almost all the Jamaican music that reached Brazil in the early 1970s did so via the global recording industry. The music of Jimmy Cliff, because of his visit to Brazil, could be considered an exception.

The years 1972-73 were a watershed moment for the globalization of reggae. Two releases in particular put Jamaica firmly on the global map. The first was *The Harder They Come*, Jamaica’s first feature film, directed by Perry Henzel. None other than Jimmy Cliff was cast in the lead role, as an outlaw fighting against an oppressive system. The movie gave a Third

⁵⁴ Thed Wilson, interview by author, João de Deus—São Luís, November 15, 2010; Jesus Marques (Jesa Marques), interview no. 1 by author, Liberdade—São Luís, June 10, 2010.

⁵⁵ Seu Isaías, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 3.

World twist to the blaxploitation genre and conversely gave the new sound of reggae a reputation of being outlaw music.⁵⁶ The second was the release of Bob Marley and The Wailers' *Catch A Fire* on Chris Blackwell's Island Records in April 1973. *Catch A Fire's* highly political lyrics especially on "400 Years," "Concrete Jungle," and "Slave Driver" presented the world with a new type of revolutionary singer: one backed by Rastafari spirituality. Both *Catch A Fire* and the soundtrack to *The Harder They Come* were unanimously regarded as classic albums with powerful songs. São Luís, it would seem, was musically ready to receive these songs. Yet it was not to be. *The Harder They Come* did not play in theatres in São Luís and the soundtrack was not released domestically. As for *Catch A Fire*, the cover photograph of Bob Marley smoking a large marijuana spliff must have caught the attention of the military government censors. According to some of my informants, military censors (at the height of their repressive powers at that moment) must have blocked the domestic release of *Catch A Fire*.⁵⁷

What impact did the censorship of *Catch A Fire* have on the musical scene of São Luís? Not much, suggested several of my informants, arguing that even when the record was eventually released in Brazil with a blank white cover, its songs did not become crowd favorites on the dance floor. However, crucially, the suppression of the *Catch A Fire* record was accompanied by the suppression of information about Bob Marley, The Wailers, Rastafari, Jamaica, marijuana smoking, and other accompanying messages and images that might otherwise have had a significant impact in São Luís. The record *Kaya* (Island, 1974), also by Bob Marley and The Wailers, met a similar fate at the hands of the military censors thanks to the back cover depicting a marijuana plant; according to several record collectors in São Luís, the

⁵⁶ See Mike Alleyne, *The Encyclopedia of Reggae: the Golden Age of Roots Reggae* (New York: Sterling, 2012).

⁵⁷ Multiple informants in São Luís assured me that *Catch A Fire* was banned by the military censors and several informants suggested that *The Harder They Come* might have been banned, although it was hard to find concrete corroboration.

album was released a year or two later with a blank white back cover lacking the marijuana plant. Although most Ludovicenses did not regularly buy records, they would have seen the LP and its cover art at a musical event, at a friend's house, or in a record store. In this case the military's tactic of preventing any positive association with marijuana seems to have worked, at least in Maranhão where imported records and information on popular culture abroad were harder to find than in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. The censorship of the two main vehicles that took Jamaican culture to international audiences in 1972-73 (*Catch A Fire* and *The Harder They Come*) also had another consequence: for the next few years the majority of Maranhenses who listened and danced to songs known elsewhere as reggae, had still not heard the name of the genre, and therefore danced to it simply as international music.

The censorship of *The Harder They Come*, on the other hand, did not prevent Jimmy Cliff's superstardom in São Luís. His albums were released and distributed in Brazil throughout the 1970s, including to the radio stations of São Luís. EMI-Odeon, EMI's affiliate in São Paulo, released *Unlimited* in 1973; the track "On My Life" received substantial radio airplay in São Luís while "Under The Sun, Moon And Stars" was a hit in several nightclubs, especially in the neighborhood of Liberdade.⁵⁸ The following year, Phonogram released the LP *Struggling Man* in Brazil with each song title translated into Portuguese alongside the original English. Also in 1974, the LP *House Of Exile* appeared with a glowing tribute to Cliff on the back cover, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration:

Jimmy Cliff is without a doubt the most versatile artist Jamaica has produced. He has been responsible for numerous artists of the "Great Era" playing on the Reggae rhythm. People like Desmond Dekker and the Pioneers, to cite a few. Last year (1973) Jimmy found enormous success in the first feature-length film of

⁵⁸ Jesa Marques, interview no. 1.

Jamaica “The Harder They Come.” His performance was warmly received with critics’ praises ... he is indisputably considered the first and best Reggae artist.⁵⁹

Finally, the 1975 Jimmy Cliff LP *Follow My Mind* was released in Brazil the following year by Reprise (a division of Warner Records), capping a four-year period of Jimmy Cliff fever in São Luís. *Unlimited*, *House Of Exile* and *Follow My Mind*, especially, were must-own records for sound systems. And as we saw at the start of this chapter, men who danced well to Cliff’s music, dressed and accessorized to look like Cliff, or simply had style, began to adopt the nickname “Jimmy Cliff” so that each neighborhood of São Luís had at least one.⁶⁰

Since fans of Cliff had not yet heard the name “reggae,” some of them generically labeled the international songs they heard as “Jimmy Cliff,” as if it was the name of a genre. Most just called it “international music.” Indeed, in the mid-1970s most Jamaican music continued to arrive in São Luís through records produced in Britain or North America and in compilations alongside non-Jamaican hits. Audiences heard these songs primarily at sound system events. Aplonísio Paulo de Sá remembers frequenting Rock Clube in the neighborhood of João Paulo as a teenager during the first half of the 1970s and hearing songs with reggae rhythms such as Johnny Nash’s “Guava Jelly,” Nolan Porter’s “Singer Man,” Paul Simon’s “Mother And Child Reunion” and Eric Clapton’s “I Shot The Sheriff” alongside soul and rock hits such as Manu DiBango’s “Soul Makossa” and Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Proud Mary.” AM Radio was the second major source of international music for audiences in São Luís. Radio selector Florisvaldo de Sousa played a variety of international genres and his show remained immensely popular throughout the first half of the 1970s. In the second half of the 1970s radio selector Jota Kerly carried the torch by playing international rhythms, including Jamaican rhythms, on his

⁵⁹ Liner Notes to Jimmy Cliff, *House of Exile*, EMI EMC-3035, LP, 1974. This passage was likely written by Julio Barroso or Otávio Rodrigues, who will be introduced in section 2.4.

⁶⁰ Silva, *Da Terra Das Primaveras*.

radio program *Parada dos Astros*. According to one source, selectors Fernando Leite and Camilo Sidney, who were known for their forró radio shows in the 1970s, also played Jamaican songs on the air.⁶¹

Local audiences did not differentiate between Jamaican music and other international pop music in theory, and neither in practice, i.e. on the dance floor. And why would they? International pop music had become very global by the mid-1970s. English, North American and Jamaican artists were borrowing from each other freely, so that ska, reggae and rocksteady rhythms appeared frequently on English pop albums just as Motown songs were frequently recorded in Jamaican studios. To most Ludovicenses, the song lyrics were all the same—unintelligible. In the absence of information about reggae or Jamaica or Rastafari, they built their own unique international music scene as a composite of Jamaican rhythms, English and North American pop, and other Caribbean rhythms including cumbia, merengue and boleros.

2.4 CARIBBEAN MUSIC IN SÃO LUÍS II: EXCLUSIVITY AND EXPANSION, 1976-1985

Residents of São Luís fondly recall dancing to the songs on the ultra-popular Jimmy Cliff records of the mid-1970s, especially *Follow My Mind*. Fans could easily buy the album at local record stores, second hand from friends and acquaintances, or even at newspaper kiosks. The ubiquitous availability of *Follow My Mind* didn't help sound system owners, however. Sound systems prided themselves on exclusivity in the 1970s—exclusive records, exclusive technology, exclusive sound. Each entrepreneur in the sound system business tried to build their brand by

⁶¹ Paulo Caribe, interview no. 3; Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, May 10, 1987.

outdoing their competitors. The parameters for judging sound system were two-fold: the quality of sound and the quality of songs.

In the mid- to late-1970s, even though domestically made electronic products remained expensive, they became more available in Maranhão and more attainable for sound system owners. Accordingly, sound system engineers updated their technology and innovated their machines. First, the tape deck became popular. Second, transistorized (or solid state) amplifiers hit the market, challenging the existing valve-based (or tube-based) amplification. Third, multi-channel amplifiers gradually replaced two-channel amplifiers, allowing for more speakers to be attached. The remaining innovations were home grown, made by electrical technicians experimenting with equipment. These changes happened gradually and often depended on the sound system owner's individual choice of which technology he wished to employ. This process of innovation, I argue, represented a small-scale informal industry that operated as an integral part of the popular music scene. Let's examine these innovations in greater detail.

Much of the technological innovations in the 1970s began with the big three sound system owners: Carne Seca, Nestábulo, and, by the end of the decade, Riba Macedo. Carne Seca's frequent trips to Belém allowed him to purchase the latest electronic gadgets that sound system owners in Belém were using.⁶² Often when he integrated a gadget into his sound system *Sonzão do Carne Seca*, it set off a new trend in São Luís. Circa 1975-76 Carne Seca placed a tape deck in his elaborate sound console. Despite creating additional work for the selector to rewind and fast-forward the rolls of tape, the tape deck quickly became very popular with sound systems. Sound system owners could now leave their records at home, with two major advantages: the records could not be stolen and the identity of the artist and song could more

⁶² Almeida and Lamen, *Projeto Sonora Paraense*.

easily remain a secret, since the record and its identifying label were not physically present at the sound system event.⁶³

Several sound system owners, including Carne Seca and Nestábulo, have laid claim to have been the first to incorporate multi-channel amplifiers systems into their machines. For this they usually depended, at least in part, on electrical engineers, some trained professionals, others apprentices. These engineers were front and center of any developments in the quality of sound systems. In the mid- to late-1970s, the most popular type of speaker arrangement (known locally as the *baianinha*) consisted of a single box with a woofer, a horn and a tweeter (for low, mid and high frequencies respectively). These were compact and portable speakers, producing a maximum of 100-150 watts of valve-based sound. Sound engineers such as Nardinho (based in Liberdade) and Antônio Matos (based in João Paulo) were developing home grown techniques to split the sound between a greater array of speakers, while maintaining the quality of the sound at high volumes. For example, Antônio Matos, working on Carne Seca's sound system, tweaked the speakers' horns (responsible for mid frequencies) to allow a higher wattage, which in turn enabled higher volume. The new multi-channel amplifiers helped by multiplying the number of potential speaker connections and enabling innovations.⁶⁴

Nestábulo and Riba Macedo were among the first to use transistorized amplification. Transistor technology improved sound, eliminating humming and buzzing, and allowed for clearer sounds at high volumes. It wasn't that valve-based amplification was inferior; in fact, many sound system owners swore by the warm, penetrating sound created by the valves. (Well in to the 1980s, sound system owners such as Serralheiro resisted a move to transistorized

⁶³ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

⁶⁴ Charles Brown, interview; Antônio Matos, interview; Boaventura Alves, interview by author, Coroadinho—São Luís, August 14, 2010; Seu Antônio, interview.

equipment, using valve-based equipment faithfully.⁶⁵) Transistorized amplifiers, though, offered advantages for larger musical events because they allowed for more power and a cleaner sound.⁶⁶ This change in the sound system itself seems to have had a major impact on musical styles chosen by selectors and audiences. The new technologies were perfectly suited to the new wave of Jamaican reggae (notably, productions by Lee “Scratch” Perry and King Tubby), with its clearly divided frequencies, booming syncopated bass and sharply defined treble sounds. Unbeknownst to each other, Jamaicans and Maranhenses had created sound systems with similar characteristics. And both audiences and selectors in Maranhão seemed to like how Jamaican music was sounding on their sound systems.

In the mid-1970s, buoyed by the success of Bob Marley and the Wailers in the U.S., Island Records released a compilation series *This Is Reggae Music* and licensed it to several key global markets. *This Is Reggae Music* aimed to introduce the music to non-Jamaicans but also to define the reggae genre in order to create a global market for it. In Brazil, the Beverly label released *This Is Reggae Music* in 1975 or 1976. Collectors in São Luís identify the first *This Is Reggae Music* LP as “sugarcane plant record” (*disco pé de cana*) because of the picture of a sugarcane plant on its cover.⁶⁷ This prompted other labels to also release compilation LPs. Brasidisc Gravações responded by releasing the LP *Reggae From Jamaica* circa 1977. Another release around the same time, by an unidentified label, was the LP *Roots Rock Reggae*. A showcase LP titled *The Front Line* (Virgin, 1976) was released in Brazil and quickly won the nickname “*disco mão de arame*” (fist of barbed wire) in São Luís thanks to the image on the

⁶⁵ Wellington Rabelo, interview by author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, September 23, 2010

⁶⁶ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

⁶⁷ Riba Macedo, interview.

cover. Beverly, via Island, then released volumes two and three of *This Is Reggae Music*, as well as a series of compilations under the same name (and with the same cover): *The Front Line*.⁶⁸

To write descriptions of the new genre, record labels employed journalists and music enthusiasts from the southeast. Two important writers whose words reached Maranhão were Julio Barroso and Otávio Rodrigues. Barroso's words graced a 1977 version of *The Front Line* while Rodrigues wrote the description for *Roots Rock Reggae*. Barroso's description, for example, explained the rise of the rockers style in Jamaica and introduced the various artists on the LP: the Gladiators, the Mighty Diamonds, Johnny Clarke, U-Roy, Delroy Washington, I-Roy, and Keith Hudson. For some collectors of international music in São Luís, this marked the first time they had seen or heard the name of the genre: "reggae."⁶⁹ Although Brazilian labels marketed select compilations widely, local record collectors still did not have access to the majority of reggae records that were taking the world by storm. São Luís's record collectors remember long hours spent at the record store, cultivating relationships with record label representatives and radio stations, poring over hundreds of records, or taking risks by ordering unknown titles from catalogues. As such, they were particular, but not orthodox. Any record from anywhere in the world, if it had a catchy rhythm, would do. This ensured that alongside the highly popular reggae compilations, other international styles continued to reach São Luís in the mid- to late-1970s.

Impressively, the city's dance floors accepted an eclectic mix of these styles. Although each style encouraged new and corresponding dance moves, taken together the rhythms were close enough for selectors and audiences to include them in the same nightly sequence. One of these styles was disco, which had become an international craze in the 1970s. Audiences in São

⁶⁸ Tarcisio Jose de Melo Ferreira (Tarcisio Selektah), interview by author, Vinhais—São Luís, October 9, 2010.

⁶⁹ Jesa Marques, interview no. 1.

Luís labeled disco “fast international music” and danced to it accordingly. People recall, for example, Hamilton Bohannon’s “Disco Stomp,” Carl Douglas’s “Kung Fu Fighting” (both released in Brazil in 1975) and Jesse Green’s “Nice and Slow” (released in 1977).⁷⁰ The 1977 movie *Saturday Night Fever* starring John Travolta and its soundtrack also found success in São Luís. At least one of my informants remembers similarities in dancing to Jimmy Cliff and dancing to disco music.⁷¹ Another set of rhythms came from the French Caribbean. For example, Martinican singer David Martial scored a big hit in São Luís with “Célimène,” released in the Caribbean in 1976 and in Brazil in 1978. The faster rhythm of zouk could easily be played alongside merengue during parties. A related group of rhythms came from the neighboring state of Pará. Carimbó (popularized by the singer Pinduca) and lambada (recorded by Carlos Santos and others in Belém) were Brazilian adaptations of Caribbean rhythms themselves, and as a result they fit seamlessly into the cosmopolitan musical sequence of Maranhão’s dance floors.⁷²

Meanwhile, reggae or reggae-influenced songs from unlikely places in the world kept arriving in São Luís via the Brazilian recording industry, and kept audiences dancing. In 1977, there was “Rasta Soul Raggae” (sic) by Blue Reggae Band originally released on the Italian label Aris, and “White Witch” by U.S. rockers Andrea True Connection.⁷³ In 1978 there was “Harlem Reggae,” originally released on a French label, by John Ozila, a French West African singer. In 1980 arrived “Crossing A River” by Swedish pop group Secret Service and “Tide Is High” by U.S. pop group Blondie. English reggae band Black Slate’s 1980 album *Amigo* was released in Brazil a year later, and “Reggae Everytime” became a staple hit on the dance floor of the nightclub Pop Som. Also in 1980 came several reggae covers originally released in France: a

⁷⁰ Seu Isaías, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 3.

⁷¹ Netto Viníl, interview by author, September 25, 2010.

⁷² See section 2.5; Lamen, “Mobilizing Regionalisms at Land’s End.”

⁷³ Andrea True, an adult film actress from Tennessee, spent time in Jamaica in the 1970s working in advertising and later formed the band Andrea True Connection.

version of the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" sung by Bernie Lyon and the LP *Rockers Reggae* by T. Brothers featuring reggae versions of Otis Redding, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones and more. All of these records were released in Brazil; they reached the hands of selectors in São Luís either through local radio stations, through local record stores, or from the catalogues of record labels.⁷⁴

Most Jamaican or Jamaican-influenced songs that became hits in 1970s São Luís were not hits in Jamaica. (One of the exceptions was Junior Murvin's "Police and Thieves," released in Brazil in 1976.) Conversely, those artists that rose to success in Jamaica and were considered worldwide leaders in roots reggae (Burning Spear, Culture, Dennis Brown, Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh, and even Bob Marley) were relatively unknown in São Luís in 1980. Maranhão's peripheral position in relation to the global economy and absence of any connection to Jamaicans had left it dependent on Brazilian labels for Jamaican music. Imported records were extremely hard to find in the 1970s. Maranhenses also lacked information about the Rastafari cultural worldview that accompanied the genre elsewhere in the world. Still, this didn't appear to hurt the popularity of the rhythm on local dance floors (if anything, it helped audiences focus strictly on the dancing potential of the rhythm). Even as soundsystem owners and selectors began to recognize said dancing potential and specifically seek out Jamaican music towards the end of the decade, among the general population reggae remained incognito, syncretized.

The imported records that did arrive in São Luís did so rarely and through secret channels. At some point in the late 1970s, Zé Roxinho, owner of sound system Águia do Som, began drawing audiences with a certain Caribbean record featuring cadence, calypso, and reggae songs. The record, *Talon Haut* by Midnight Groovers, was released in 1976 on the obscure Guadeloupe-based label Disques Debs International, featuring an equally obscure band whose

⁷⁴ Seu Isaías, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 3.

members hailed from the lesser Antilles (Dominica, Martinique and St. Thomas). Zé Roxinho had found an imported record. Try as they might, for years, Zé Roxinho's rivals could not identify the record let alone find another copy. How did Zé Roxinho obtain the record? Was it through a sailor friend, or did he travel himself? Did it pass through French Guiana, or Surinam perhaps? Either way, Zé Roxinho was not telling. *Talon Haut* thus entered lore of local record collectors as an "exclusive" record, one that raised the profile of its host sound system (in this case, Zé Roxinho's Águia do Som).⁷⁵

In an effort to protect their investments, sound system owners went to great lengths to hide the sources of their exclusive records. In the 1970s sound system owners regularly tore the labels off records or scratched off the names of songs and artists. They often traveled to gigs with their records hidden in the wrong cover (creating bizarre situations where selectors would pull unidentifiable Jamaican records out of Roberto Carlos album jackets) in order to maintain exclusivity.⁷⁶ They also began to call songs by nicknames, or *melôs*, in order to hide their real names. *Melôs*, literally "melodies," were names affixed to songs (commonly, songs with non-Portuguese lyrics) in order to make it easier for Brazilians to remember them. This process was often innocuous. Names of *melôs* often derived from a song's identifying features, such as the bird sounds in the background that affixed Toots and the Maytals' "Gone With The Wind" with the name *melô do passarinho* (melody of the little bird).⁷⁷ Or, a song could be named for a phonetic similarity, as in the case of Lizard's "Satta I" which turned into *melô de Satanás* (melody of Satan).⁷⁸ As the importance of exclusive records rose, sound system owners began to

⁷⁵ Jesa Marques, interview no.1.

⁷⁶ Boaventura Alves, interview.

⁷⁷ Tarcisio Selektah, interview. Various individuals and groups in the music world used *melôs*. In this case, the domestic 1980 release by Ariola/Island of Toots and the Maytals' "Gone With The Wind" came with the name *melô do passarinho* already printed on the cover.

⁷⁸ Seu Antônio, interview.

use *melô* names to obfuscate the identity of every song on their rotation, intentionally keeping rival sound system owners (and audiences) in the dark.

In the late 1970s, exclusive records were the rare exception, not the norm. As such, they were worth their weight in gold. Since São Luís's peripheral position within Brazil's trade economy made it harder to find imported records, aspiring sound system owners had to be creative in finding a source of foreign discs, often through a series of intermediaries. For imported music to reach São Luís it usually had to traverse one of three routes: from Belém to the north, São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro to the south, or directly from abroad. The informal markets of Belém were no better than those of São Luís given their lack of access to a European or Jamaican source of reggae music, so the answer was increasingly to be found in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Riba Macedo, an avid collector of discs, recalls how he found the blurb-writer Julio Barroso's name on the back of one of the *The Front Line* LPs and wrote a letter addressed to the record label with a request to forward to Barroso. In the letter, he explained the difficulty of obtaining imported music in Maranhão and his desire to own some of the "reggae" that was appearing on compilation LPs. This happened at some point in the late 1970s. Barroso promptly sent him two 45s released in Brazil by Discos Caravelle (most probably in 1970-71) and licensed from the UK label Ember Records: The Maytals' "Monkey Man"/"Night And Day" and Desmond Dekker's "You Can Get It If You Really Want"/"Perseverance." ("You Can Get It If You Really Want" was written by Jimmy Cliff). Macedo maintained the exchange with Barroso, who then sent him a copy of the *Catch A Fire* LP and the compilation LP *Roots, Rock, Reggae* featuring The Heptones' "Book Of Rules," a Joe Gibbs-produced Jamaican hit from 1973. Although these records had been released in Brazil, they had not necessarily made it to São Luis

before, and as such would qualify as exclusives. Regular correspondence by mail with a reliable contact in the southeast, then, was a discreet and effective way to obtain exclusive records.⁷⁹

Some sound system owners were travelers themselves. Carne Seca and Zé Roxinho both worked as beef salesmen for much of their lives, moving between the capital and the interior of Maranhão. Carne Seca's travels took him to Belém and beyond, where he established and maintained connections with other traders who in turn frequented the Caribbean. Through these contacts he turned up quite a few exclusive records. Others took advantage of domestic travel opportunities (almost always work-related travel) to buy rare records. For example, Boaventura, the president of the Resident's Union of Bairro de Fátima, began to attend conferences for leaders of neighborhood associations across Brazil and looked for records in the cities he visited.⁸⁰

Circa 1979, José de Ribamar Moraes Ferreira (known as Zequinha), a young Afro-Ludovicense who was a fan of reggae, migrated to São Paulo to work. One Saturday he wandered in to the mega-music store Museu do Disco and found the small reggae section, with records by Jimmy Cliff, Gilberto Gil and several other artists. "You like those?" observed a nearby salesman. "Well then," the salesman continued, "you should talk to this guy right here," pointing to a tall blond customer nearby: "he's the king of reggae." The tall blond man, who introduced himself as Betão, instantly made friends with Zequinha and insisted on calling him "*baiano*" (Bahian). "I'm not Bahian," Zequinha reminded him, "I'm from São Luís do Maranhão." "Well, Baiano," Betão insisted, "the imported records here are way too expensive. Come check me at home." Zequinha recalled "going crazy" when he saw Betão's extensive collection of rare records, including some reggae records that they listened to together. Betão put

⁷⁹ Riba Macedo, interview.

⁸⁰ Boaventura Alves, interview.

Zequinha in touch with fellow record collector Roberto Rasta, who in turn introduced him to an Englishman named Eric who brought records from England every three months. Zequinha remembered working on Sundays to finance his hobby because each imported record usually cost him a week's wages. In 1981, he returned to São Luís on a visit armed with forty-five LPs, imported records and domestic releases, by the likes of Peter Tosh and Burning Spear. Zequinha's records were extremely popular with his friends and acquaintances because of their status as exclusive records. One by one the LPs were borrowed and never returned.⁸¹



Figure 3. Cassette tape mailed by Zequinha Rasta in São Paulo to Boaventura Alves in São Luís⁸²

⁸¹ José de Ribamar Moraes Ferreira (Zequinha Rasta), interview by author, Cidade Operária—São Luís, August 1, 2010.

⁸² From the personal collection of Boaventura Alves (hereafter cited as PCBA).

Many Maranhenses migrated to cities in the southeast for work in the 1970s and 1980s. They started to discover new Jamaican music—mostly domestic releases but also some imported records—at music stores in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. By 1980, any sound system owner with commercial aspirations needed a constant source of exclusive records. The simplest solution was to maintain a reliable contact who either lived in the southeast or traveled there frequently. Zequinha began to send materials by mail—not valuable records, but cassette tapes—to his friends in São Luís, including to Boaventura Alves at the Resident’s Union of Bairro de Fátima (see Figure 3).⁸³ Thed Wilson, who had built the sound system *WA Som* before moving to Rio de Janeiro to work as an electrician in the mid-1970s, sent records from Rio back to his brother Zé Chinelo in São Luís.⁸⁴ Zé Baldez, proprietor of Pop Som, maintained contact with a friend in São Paulo who sent him records bought at *Museu do Disco*. Eventually the people at the store started to send lists of newly acquired records directly to Baldez, who then ordered records directly from them based on the recommendations that his selector Neturbo made.⁸⁵

On the whole, Jamaican music had been hard to find in 1970s Brazil; the songs that made it were but a drop in the vast bucket of Jamaican recordings available elsewhere. All that changed in 1980. German recording company Ariola, which already had a licensing deal with Island Records, entered the Brazilian market. This meant that Island’s reggae catalogue could be released (and in the case of some records, re-released) in Brazil. The releases included hit records by the likes of Ijahman, Jacob Miller, Zap Pow and Max Romeo in addition to the catalog of Bob Marley and the Wailers. These records were among the most successful roots reggae of the 1970s, featuring modern bass lines and drum patterns mixed by the best Jamaican

⁸³ Boaventura Alves, interview.

⁸⁴ Thed Wilson, interview.

⁸⁵ José Baldez (Zé Baldez), interview by author, Coroadinho—São Luís, October 30, 2010.

sound engineers from Lee Perry on.⁸⁶ According to my informants, the biggest hit records of 1981—those of Jacob Miller, Bob Marley and Bunny Wailer—contributed significantly to Jamaican rhythms reaching new neighborhoods and new audiences. Following the bonanza that was the Island catalogue came Guyanese singer Eddy Grant’s “I Don’t Wanna Dance,” the city’s biggest dance hit of 1982. The same year, a trio of releases by northeast Brazilian artists popularized the reggae rhythm even among audiences that preferred listening to music with Portuguese lyrics: these releases were “Morena Tropicana” by Alceu Valença (an artist from Ceará), “Vento Norte” by Grupo Karetas (from Pernambuco), and “O Gavião Vadio” by Maranhão’s own Niceas Drumont. The trio of Brazilian songs, especially, could also be heard regularly on most local radio stations.⁸⁷

Maranhenses remember the sudden bonanza of Jamaican songs from the early 1980s fondly. Many of the songs began as sound system exclusives and quickly lost their exclusivity while other songs arrived as non-exclusives, meaning that the songs were essentially in the local informal music sector’s version of the public domain. Although sound system owners initially had mixed feelings about this development, they soon realized that they benefited from the rising public demand for the music. A new generation of nightclubs rose to the occasion, in the process replacing some older hangouts. Those nightclubs that contracted the best sound systems and selectors flourished. People who organized house parties also benefited unconditionally. The suddenly widespread availability of Jamaican music in São Luís in 1980-82 was accompanied by a technological democratization as well: that of the cassette tape. Cassette tapes had become inexpensive and ubiquitous by the early 1980s. Most selectors and record collectors began to record exclusive songs on cassette tapes for sale to friends or customers. Sometimes the sound

⁸⁶ Carlos Albuquerque, *O Eterno Verão do Reggae* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1997), 71.

⁸⁷ Tarcisio Selektah, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 3; Jesa Marques, interview no. 1; Seu Isaías, interview; Nato Macedo, conversation with author, Rosário and São Luís, December 8, 2010.

system's or selector's audio vignette was overdubbed all over the recording, but for the right price one could buy a "clean" song, i.e. one without the interference of the selector's name.⁸⁸ As cassette tapes spread informally throughout the city, so did Jamaican music.

Sound system owners reacted to the influx of Jamaican music by investing even more heavily in the search for exclusives. They preferred imports, and if possible rare imports. Music stores in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro were good options for imported records in the 1980s, especially if one found a unique, exclusive copy of a record (or if one bought up all copies of a record to block other Maranhenses from purchasing them, as Serralheiro was reputed to have done).⁸⁹ In the early 1980s a new possibility for obtaining records emerged: the sea route. Porto de Itaquí, the newly built port on the island of São Luís, was greatly expanded in August 1984 to the tune of more docks and higher volume of traffic with the inauguration of the Alumar (a multinational metallurgic conglomeration) refinery adjacent to the port.⁹⁰ Maranhenses now traveled abroad and foreign sailors also sailed to the island with greater frequency, thus opening up a source of records that had been closed two decades earlier. These imported records soon opened up a new world of Jamaican music over the course of the 1980s. Curiously, because the process was driven by entrepreneurs combing record shelves for danceable rhythms, rather than by record companies looking to promote the next new thing, this "new world" was largely an old one.

By the mid-1980s, most reggae scenes around the world were content with the widely marketed roots reggae bands that continued to define the Jamaican sound—Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, Culture, Third World, Black Uhuru. The scene in São Luís, however, was

⁸⁸ Mr. Benedito Barros Martins (Biné Roots), interview with author, São Francisco—São Luís, December 14, 2010; Mr. Carlinhos Tijolada, interview with author, Bairro de Fátima—São Luís, October 4, 2010.

⁸⁹ Otávio Rodrigues, *Folha de São Paulo*, September 9, 1988. Quoted in Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 74.

⁹⁰ Carlos Andrade, "A Evolução de uma Empresa Além Mar," special issue, *Jornal da Soamar*, July 2000, <http://www.portosma.com.br/especial/alumar.php> (accessed December 3, 2011).

different. There were rocksteady and early reggae cuts from the 1960s by Cornell Campbell, Delroy Wilson, Derrick Morgan, Roy Shirley, Owen Gray, and Justin Hinds. There were covers of 1970s R&B songs by less well-known Jamaican artists such as Jackie Brown, Jackie Edwards, and Eric Donaldson. There were the more obscure songs by Junior Murvin, Hugh Mundell, the Gladiators, and Horace Andy that were hits in Jamaica in the 1970s but not elsewhere (until they reached Maranhão). And there were hits in the lovers rock style by Dennis Brown, John Holt, and above all by Gregory Isaacs. Among non-Jamaicans worldwide, only the keenest observers of the Jamaican scene would have kept pace with these artists. Yet in São Luís their songs were universal dance floor favorites. These artists and their sounds collectively formed the backbone of São Luís musical style in the 1980s.⁹¹

The popularity of the Jamaican rhythm and the increasing profits of sound systems and nightclubs spurred the urban working-class scene to steadily expand. The increase in availability of Jamaican records, the more widespread dissemination of those records, the sound systems' creation of an artificial music chart through the use of exclusive songs, the technology that allowed for changes in sound—these are measurable processes that, I argue, took place in São Luís. Taken together, were they enough to spark the creation a full-fledged music and dancing scene based on Jamaican rhythms? No. The brew needed one more crucial ingredient: dance.

⁹¹ Songs (not artists) drove the São Luís scene since artists' names were often kept secret in order to maintain exclusivity. At the time, singers may only have been recognizable by their voices. In time, however, rival record collectors and selectors discovered the name of the record and that knowledge, as it were, entered the public domain. Collectors carefully nurtured this information over the years and when the chance arose, bought a copy of an old record. As a result this information became available.

2.5 DANCE

During interviews, it was very common for my informants, in retrospect, to describe non-Jamaican songs that found success on popular dance floors in the 1970s as “songs that we danced to as if they were reggae.” From this statement it appears that in the 1970s, people danced to a variety of international genres in a similar fashion; then something happened that codified that dancing style as reggae dance. As a result, since the mid-1980s, reggae dancing in Maranhão has been considered a unique and distinct style.⁹² When and how might this change have occurred? This section argues firstly that in the 1970s Maranhenses danced not one style, but a variety of styles that co-existed and interacted on dance floors. Secondly, in the crucial period of the early 1980s—approximately from 1979 to 1983—a perfect storm of new music, technological changes, and social interactions on the dance floor led to the creation of a new style, directly derived but distinct from the previous styles.

Historical dance moves are hard to quantify, since they are not written sources. Even more so in the case of São Luís in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when dancers were responding to a plethora of rhythmic styles from across the globe. Oral histories, however, can help to retrieve a memory codified in the body. Most of the oral histories that form the basis of this research, unfortunately, did not touch on the importance of dance, and will need to be supplemented by further research. Still, based on a combination of interviews and participant-observation, we can put forward several theories here that may explain, especially in conjunction with each other, the mystery of how Jamaican music became so popular in São Luís.

⁹² See, for example, Michael Turner and Otávio Rodrigues, “The Maranhão Version: Reggae Time Warp in Brazil,” *The Beat* 26, no. 1 (2007).

One possible theory has been advanced by sound system owner Riba Macedo. Macedo recalls how his sequence of songs on the dance floor usually lingered on one rhythm for two or three songs, and then had to switch to a different style to keep people happy. These rhythms in the 1970s included *jovem guarda*, disco, pop, and rock—for the most part, fast rhythms.⁹³ Macedo noticed that he had to play slower tracks once in a while to allow dancers to rest. So at times he played Jamaican songs with its slower pace but nonetheless captivating groove. Some couples suddenly began to venture a slow dance together. It likely took some courage to break the dominant mold of solo dancing; why might they take the risk?

The answer lies in the social interactions on São Luís's dance floors. Some neighborhood association events featured a mix of ages, from teenagers to middle-aged persons. The older club-goers may have remembered their favorite boleros and longed for a slow dance to reminisce. And while the faster genres of international pop and disco were the rage in urban São Luís, many of the youth that attended nightclubs and sound system events would have been recent migrants from rural areas themselves. Others were born in the city, but as first-generation urbanites, their parents likely listened to boleros, merengues, cumbias and other Caribbean styles. Perhaps Jamaican music provided a bridge between nostalgia and modernity, between romance and thrill. Research by Silva has suggested that the politics of the dance floor were highly gendered, including the culture of two women dancing together, the culture of the *raspa* where men might trip up women who refused their invitation to dance, and the culture of men attempting to show a certain prowess on the dance floor.⁹⁴ Perhaps these gendered interactions led dancers to test the boundaries of familiarity and innovate new dance moves.

⁹³ Riba Macedo, interview; also, Jesa Marques, interview no. 1.

⁹⁴ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*; also see Netto Vinil, interview; Didica, interview; Aguinaldo Araújo Ferreira Filho (Guiu Jamaica), interview by author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, October 13, 2010.

Jamaican music of the 1970s was a slower version of rocksteady, which itself was a slower version of ska. Although not as slow as the bolero, and not as fast as the merengue, 1970s Jamaican rhythms would have presented an intriguing challenge on the dance floor. The speed of the song may not have been much different from the speed of a forró or a xote, northeastern styles meant for dancing in pairs that Maranhense youth would have been familiar with. So, a couple might have danced to a Jamaican song at the pace of a forró, xote, or even cumbia, but they would have had to adapt to the compact Jamaican rhythm by staying close together as they would while dancing to a bolero or a merengue. Meaning that they would necessarily have innovated their dancing. Saci Teleleu, a professor of dance who grew up attending sound system dances in the neighborhood of Anil, argued just that: that the dance moves that would later come to encompass the maranhense reggae style were a mixture of three prior styles, namely bolero, merengue, and forró.⁹⁵ It is perhaps significant that lambada from Belém was also extremely popular on São Luís's dance floors in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁹⁶ Lambada, a faster rhythm, also Caribbean in origin, and also created in conjunction with sound systems, itself mimicked Dominican merengue and Haitian compas. The national and regional lines of music and dance were truly blurred in 1970s and 1980s Maranhão.

Perhaps this should not come as a surprise. Scholars have traced how popular rhythms from Jamaica, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil have developed according to their national histories, but they have also recognized certain continuities in the African-based rhythms that were invariably syncretized with European dancing styles.⁹⁷ Moreover, popular dances in the Caribbean often united migrants with rhythmic experiences and expectations they

⁹⁵ Saci Teleleu, interview by author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, November 8, 2010.

⁹⁶ Riba Macedo, interview.

⁹⁷ Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots*; Fryer, *Rhythms of Resistance*; Rosa, "Choreographing Identification."

had learnt from their experiences among the islands and around the Caribbean region.⁹⁸ By mid-century in the Caribbean, syncretized popular dance styles generally followed the same dancing pattern of three to one side and three to the other side, alternating the feet while pausing on the fourth beat, all over a musical 4/4 pattern. Why not dance in similar fashion to the Jamaican rhythms of the 1970s? Maranhenses, at least, tried it.

Another quip I heard many times in São Luís, especially from selectors who had made their livelihood watching dancers dance, was: “Maranhenses dance reggae to the bass line.” At first, this didn’t make sense to me. Wouldn’t they be dancing to the rhythm as whole, including drums, bass, keyboards, guitar, and percussion? The drums, keyboards, and guitars in Jamaican music play fairly metric, straightforward parts, and while they interlock intricately, there is not much room for a dancer to sway one’s hips to those instruments alone. Reggae bass lines, especially those identified with deep roots reggae of the 1970s tended to be extremely syncopated. This created a certain level of swing, but unlike the loose, sweeping movements allowed by boleros, it was a swing that was limited by the steady, narrow rhythm of the remaining instruments. The intricate syncopation of the bass line might have also lent itself to more intricate moves for couples.

There is also another possible reason for why the bass might have been so important: the transformation of the low-end frequencies during this period. Electricians and sound system owners in the late 1970s and early 1980s in São Luís and Belém placed much emphasis on who had switched to transistorized technology if their sound system’s low-end frequencies were strong and penetrating. At this very juncture, Jamaican producers were also in the process creating songs to match the changes in electronic technology, and much of their efforts went towards manipulating the low-end frequencies that corresponded to the bass guitar and kick

⁹⁸ Putnam, *Radical Moves*.

drum sounds. The Jamaican scene of the 1970s even earned the nickname “bass culture” for its booming bass sounds played through sound systems. It appears that sound systems in Maranhão, created with much of the same technology and techniques used in Jamaica, may have been ideally suited to play the songs coming out of Jamaica. The low-end theory, then, suggests the importance of electrical engineers and technicians and the sound systems they built in the creation of parallel scenes based on Jamaican music. Recent research from Belém has emphasized the central role of the electronic technician or the sound-system builder in the working-class music scene there from the 1950s onwards.⁹⁹ Similarly, scholars studying Jamaican music have begun to look at the interactions of sounds with bodies.¹⁰⁰

Circa 1982, while the sequence of songs on dance floors still mixed various styles of international music (a number of my informants remember, in particular, Michael Jackson’s hit record *Thriller* in 1982-83), overall, selectors were responding to the wishes of audiences and progressively playing a higher percentage of Jamaican music. For the growing number of adherents to the scene, it was an exciting time. I believe that 1982 was a turning point in the creation of a mass reggae audience in São Luis, the moment when Jamaican music definitively began to dominate the sequence of songs on the dance floors of popular clubs. Still, strikingly, the term “reggae” was still alien to many people in São Luis as was any piece of information about reggae—Jamaica, Rastafari, Afrocentrism—thanks in large part to the secretive ways of sound system owners. This began to change only after reggae appeared in the city’s radio programming.

⁹⁹ Almeida and Lamen, *Projeto Sonora Paraense*.

¹⁰⁰ Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*.

2.6 REGGAE ON THE RADIO, 1985-1986

By mid-1985, Jamaican music was extremely popular on the São Luís's dance floors. But with cultural spaces still segregated by class, and with sound system owners and radio selectors operating in separate economic and cultural spheres, Jamaican music was still not on local radio. Radio was the most popular form of mass communication in São Luís in the 1980s, more widespread than television or newspapers, especially for a working class suffering from a nationwide (in fact, continent-wide) economic depression. AM radio with its local programming was the most popular, while short wave radio continued to allow operators to embark on transnational sonic adventures through their radio sets. Indeed, some people in São Luís claim to have heard Jamaican music on short wave radio, but this is difficult to verify.

Prior to 1985, the stations Gurupí, Ribamar, Timbira, and Difusora boasted credibility and a strong listenership. Surprisingly, it was a niche radio station that catered primarily to elites that first experimented with a program that exclusively played Jamaican music. Mirante FM needed to boost both their transmission quality and their programming quality if they wanted to win any viewers in the highly competitive world of radio. So, in July 1985, radio Mirante FM installed new broadcast transmitters with 5,000 watts of power that led to a stronger signal across the city's airwaves, allowing them access to the numerous working-class neighborhoods of São Luís.¹⁰¹ They also revamped their musical programming. Among the new programs was *Reggae Night*, presented by selectors Ademar Danilo and Fauzi Beydoun.¹⁰²

Reggae Night debuted to little fanfare. The newspaper announcement seemed innocuous enough: "With the blessings of Bob Marley, a radio show that will get you high, one hour in

¹⁰¹ Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, August 4, 1985.

¹⁰² The radio program was named after the 1983 Jimmy Cliff song "Reggae Night" that played successfully in São Luís.

duration.”¹⁰³ Initially it was an obscure hour: 11 pm to 12 midnight on Saturday. Yet despite Mirante FM’s cautious skepticism, the show was a runaway success. Ademar Danilo described the reggae radio show as “necessary,” something the popular sectors had been waiting for.¹⁰⁴ The station quickly received an unprecedented spate of telephone calls and letters from listeners of Reggae Night complaining that the show’s timing clashed with Saturday night sound system parties. This forced Mirante FM to reschedule Reggae Night for the primetime slot of 8 pm on Friday. Public demand made the radio show phenomenally successful as people throughout the city tuned in on Friday nights.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, owners of sound systems and clubs saw opportunity in radio. Several months into Reggae Night, Beydoun and Danilo had started to exhaust their personal collection of reggae records on the air. They needed to find a new source. In late 1985, they negotiated a mutually beneficial deal with Pop Som’s owner Zé Baldez and selector Neturbo. Baldez would lend his collection of reggae LPs to Beydoun and Danilo, and in return Reggae Night would regularly advertise events at Pop Som, with no money exchanged. Thanks to this arrangement listeners could hear the same reggae songs from the nightclub on the radio. Pop Som’s advertising coup had resulted in a boost in audience. It raised the bar for clubs in the reggae scene and simultaneously provided a blueprint for others to follow. Sound system owners soon realized the importance of having an exclusive source of citywide radio advertising, and were willing to pay for it. According to some informants, Ferreirinha, owner of sound system Estrela do Som and reggae club Espaço Aberto in the neighborhood of São Francisco (adjacent to Mirante FM’s radio tower) was the first to officially lease a time slot on the radio, in order to play Estrela do

¹⁰³ “No Ar a nova progamação Mirante FM,” *Jornal Mirante* (supplement of *O Estado do Maranhão*), July 7, 1985. The original quote read: “*Sob o signo de Bob Marley, um programa que vai fazer a sua cabeça, com uma hora de duração.*”

¹⁰⁴ Ademar Danilo, interview.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Som exclusives and to advertise reggae events at his club. Radio stations saw this new arrangement as a win-win proposition.¹⁰⁶

Reggae Night's popularity altered the rules of the game for São Luís's radio stations. While AM radio stations remained, by far, more popular in São Luís and the *baixada maranhense*, the annual survey of radio listenership ratings by IBOPE (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics) released in December 1985 suggested that FM radio had begun to make inroads into AM radio's dominance in the city. Within the FM radio rankings, Mirante FM and Cidade FM climbed to first and second place respectively.¹⁰⁷ One component of the rise was the strength of radio waves, which for FM radio are stronger (over a smaller radius). The other component was choice in music. Within a month of the revamping their programming schedule, Mirante FM had won over a portion of Difusora FM's listeners. Cidade FM, especially, aimed to attract the city's youth with foreign genres like reggae, punk rock, and break beat—"alien music for the careless youth to violate our ears and our senses," according to one newspaper columnist.¹⁰⁸ A wide range of Maranhenses apparently disagreed. While the FM stations still catered to elite audiences, both young and old, Reggae Night showed them the potential of tapping into the vast working-class audiences of the city.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, in a climate of rising competition for listeners, both AM and FM radio stations rushed to emulate Reggae Night with reggae-driven radio shows of their own. In 1986 Radio Difusora attracted Fauzi Beydoun away from Mirante FM along with the formidable partnership with Pop Som, launching Reggae Pop Show with considerable pomp. Not to be outdone, Cidade

¹⁰⁶ Ademar Danilo, interview; Zé Baldez, interview; Luis Fernando Santos Costa Ferreira (Ferrerinha), interview by author, São Francisco—São Luís, December 1, 2010

¹⁰⁷ Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, August 4, 1985.

¹⁰⁸ Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, December 8, 1985.

¹⁰⁹ Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, August 4, 1985; Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, December 22, 1985. Still, most residents of São Luís relied on AM radio stations, especially those living in the corridor of peripheral neighborhoods in between Centro and Anil, and southward across the Bacanga river where FM waves were still a novelty.

FM stole Difusora's thunder, launching their new radio show Reggae Clube presented by Carlão Brasileiro, one day before the launch of Reggae Pop Show. Radio jockey Jota Kerly re-introduced a heavy dose of reggae into his weekly show Parada dos Astros on Difusora AM. In 1987, the top-ranking radio station, São Luís AM, made Ademar Danilo a proposal he could not refuse to lead their reggae charge, while DJ Tony Tavares was contracted by Radio Educadora AM to present Show do Reggae on Saturdays. Radio jockey Carlos Nina, who had been contracted to play forró music, was told two months into his contract that he would have to switch over to reggae. In the words of a newspaper columnist on all things radio—"whoever doesn't keep up [with the reggae wave], dies."¹¹⁰

Scholar Ramúsyo Brasil describes the entry of radio into the São Luís reggae scene and industry as a process of "mediatization." He argues that the transformation of the means of communication allowed for the crystallization of fractured cultural practices into a newly "mediatized" cultural scene.¹¹¹ This argument rings true when comparing the structure of the post-1985 scene to the previous six years (roughly, 1979-1985). In that period, radio and other mass communication systems did not play the Jamaican music being played in the "underground" scenes in different neighborhoods, and audiences were not linked by information about the music. However, as we have seen in this chapter, social negotiations and technological changes, especially on the dance floor, united the different neighborhoods of the city into a single coherent scene even before 1985. And looking back to the pre-1979 period, it is perhaps not surprising that radio would fit well with that scene. After all, the radio and the sound system

¹¹⁰ Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, April 4, 1987; Sintonia Grossa column, *Jornal Pequeno*, May 3, 1987; Ademar Danilo, interview by author. Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 88.

¹¹¹ Marcus Ramúsyo de Almeida Brasil, "São Luís, a Jamaica Brasileira: O Reggae dos Toca- Discos à Produção Midiática," master's thesis, Universidade Paulista, 2005; Marcus Ramúsyo de Almeida Brasil, "Percurso Histórico das Mídias de Reggae em São Luís/MA: 30 anos," paper presented at 4th Encontro Nacional de História da Mídia, São Luís, Brazil, May-June 2006.

developed together. The sound system—or as it was locally known, the *radiola*—was but an extension of the radio, a means of amplifying the sounds of a radio broadcast. What occurred in 1985-1986 was the inverse: radio was now broadcasting those songs being played on *radiolas* to a larger audience. Radio and *radiola* operated on the same quality control standards—1) the quality of the songs played, and 2) the quality of the transmitters and the strength of the radio waves. Only this time, the power balance had shifted toward sound systems. Radio was no longer a force dictating popular musical preferences, but a marketing institution to further the interests of those players in the sound system industry who could afford to invest in a radio show.

By the end of 1986, radio had become an essential component of the popular Caribbean-based music scene and radio presenters joined club disc jockeys as local celebrities. The working class-led music industry that played Caribbean and other international hits now had a new configuration. The three features of a successful business were a technologically sophisticated sound system, a steady source for purchasing rare imported Jamaican music, and a presence on radio. In the late 1980s popular clubs and soundsystems would be divided into two camps—those with an advertising presence on radio and those without.

2.7 COMPARISONS: JAMAICA, BRAZIL, BAHIA, MARANHÃO

A quarter-century earlier, as Jamaica became an independent nation, the local music industry comprised two elements—sound systems and recording studios. During the 1960s they operated in symbiotic fashion. Sound systems such as Duke Reid’s Trojan and Clement “Coxsone” Dodd’s Downbeat depended on small recording studios for their material, and the studios depended on sound systems to make their records successful. Radio stations, on the other hand,

avoided playing locally produced music, instead aiming to please the xenophilic Jamaican elite with music from the U.S., including Motown, Chicago soul and James Brown. While these artists profoundly influenced the development of rocksteady and then reggae, the homegrown Jamaican music industry developed mostly *in spite of* radio's cold shoulder.

In contrast, in São Luís, after 1986, the local popular music industry consisted of an alliance between sound systems, nightclubs, and radio stations. The excluded component here was a local recording industry. Although the recording industry in São Luís suffered from inferior technology and musicianship, a new crop of musicians emerged in the mid-1980s and began to contribute to the underground international music scene.¹¹² Sound systems, however, wanted exclusive records, because exclusive records elevated the sound system's commercial brand in comparison to other sound system brands. An LP produced by an artist in Maranhão was easily available and thus of less interest to sound systems. Instead, the sound system-led industry in the 1980s played exclusively international music (and especially Jamaican music). In São Luís, then, the new reggae industry developed with its own rules and arrangements, without a local recording sector.

Reggae had spent years camouflaged amidst other music in São Luís, and no one outside the city and its hinterland (nor many people within the city) knew that such a scene was brewing until after 1986. Reggae scenes had also slowly developed elsewhere in Brazil: a mass-based culture arose in Salvador (Bahia) and strong sub-cultures arose in metropolitan cities like Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and São Paulo. Unlike São Luís, other Brazilian scenes were driven by bands rather than by sound systems. And only in São Luís and Salvador did reggae audiences hail mainly from the working-class masses. Other cities relied on smaller audiences drawing largely from the middle class.

¹¹² More on these musicians in section 4.4.

Already in the 1970s Bahians Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, back from exile, were flying reggae's flag in Brazil. Veloso had experienced a vibrant Jamaican cultural scene in England during his period of political exile there: "Walk down Portobello road to the sound of reggae, I'm alive," Veloso proclaimed on *Transa*, his first album upon his return.¹¹³ It was Gilberto Gil who became Brazil's first well-known reggae artist, however. In 1979 Gil released "Não Chore Mais (No Woman No Cry)" to resounding success with a variety of audiences throughout Brazil. Gil's release came at an opportune time, when a reggae wave was sweeping the globe. Months later, in 1980, the extensive reggae catalogue of Island records was re-released in Brazil via Ariola to the fanfare of Bob Marley's visit to Rio de Janeiro. Later that year Gilberto Gil and Jimmy Cliff joined for a series of triumphant mega-concerts in football stadiums in Salvador, Recife, Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. As researcher Leo Vidigal would write later, reggae was alive and kicking in Brazil by the year 1980.¹¹⁴

What did reggae mean, however, to Brazilians? Within the highly regionalized musical topography of the nation, Brazilians began to identify reggae with the state of Bahia, and particularly with black Bahia. Bahian audiences in the late 1970s had embraced the rhythm, as seen by the euphoria surrounding Jimmy Cliff and Gilberto Gil's concert in the Fonte Nova stadium in 1980. Reggae quickly grew local roots in Bahia, influencing the music of future reggae stars like Nengo Vieira and Edson Gomes. Local musicians also incorporated reggae into Bahian rhythms, creating the new rhythmic style of samba-reggae. Scholars have emphasized the rise of an Afrocentric cultural movement centered in the Bahian capital Salvador from the mid-1970s onwards, led by carnival blocs, educational associations such as Ilê Aiyê and by musical

¹¹³ Caetano Veloso, "Nine out of Ten," in *Transa*, Philips, BR-6349 026, LP, 1972.

¹¹⁴ Leonardo Alvares Vidigal, "O Reggae no Brasil," *Massive Reggae*, <http://paginas.terra.com.br/arte/massivereggae/regbras.htm> (accessed December 5, 2007); Albuquerque, *O Eterno Verão do Reggae*, 71-78.

ensembles such as Olodum;¹¹⁵ many of these organizations borrowed samba-reggae rhythms and the colors of red, gold and green (the colors of both African independence movements and Rastafari) to anchor their programs of black consciousness. To those Brazilians who knew of reggae's Afrocentric messages, their image of the music fit in seamlessly with the emerging picture of Bahia's black cultural renaissance. For example, Cliff and Gil both wore African-themed clothing on their stage, reinforcing the connection between their music and Afro-Bahian cultural trends.

In comparison, reggae in Maranhão flew under the radar until the latter half of the 1980s. Afro-Maranhense culture in general maintained a much lower national profile than its counterparts in Bahia, Pernambuco or Rio de Janeiro. Since the São Luís reggae scene did not advertise itself outside the city, it was largely unknown in other parts of Brazil. Moreover, São Luís had not undergone an Afro-cultural movement in the 1970s like Bahia's Afro-renaissance or the Black Soul movement in Rio de Janeiro, nor was it an important center for black political mobilization. So observers of reggae elsewhere did not think of looking towards Maranhão. And as we have seen, it wasn't until the mid-1980s that Maranhenses themselves began to use the term "reggae" with regularity.

Yet curiously, São Luís played an important part in Gilberto Gil's rise as Bahia's first reggae icon. In Gil's own words, from a 1995 interview:

I had already been introduced to reggae during our last year in London, when I was starting out in Portobello, but I wasn't deeply involved enough to really get excited about it. It was either 1973 or 1974, when I was back in Brazil already, in Maranhão, when I truly felt the music. It hit me when I heard reggae on the beach, in its tropical habitat. Soon afterwards I decided to write a version of "No Woman No Cry."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Crook, "Black Consciousness"; Crook and Johnson eds., *Black Brazil*, various chapters; Risério, *Carnaval Ijexá*.

¹¹⁶ Gilberto Gil, interview by Marcelo Fróes, Marcos Petrillo and Haroldo Zager (1995), in *Gilberto Gil—Encontros*, ed. Sergio Cohn (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azogue, 2007), 206-225. Gil confirmed this account directly to me: Gilberto Gil, conversation with author, Pittsburgh, PA, November 15, 2012.

São Luís radio host Jota Kerly recalled more details of this event in his 2010 interview with me:

Gilberto Gil performed here in São Luís in 1976, when Jimmy Cliff's music was all the rage. After Gil's concert, Radio Difusora organized a party for him at the Bar and Restaurant Carangueijo at Olho D'Água [on the beach]. The barman put on Cliff's latest record [Follow My Mind], which had sold 2,000 copies locally. When "No Woman No Cry" began to play, a surprised look came over Gil's face. I was sitting near him: "It's Jimmy Cliff," I offered, "singing a Bob Marley song." "Wow," replied Gil, "a dream song." Soon after, thanks to that encounter, he produced his hit song "Não Chore Mais."¹¹⁷

This encounter reminds us once again of how, in the history of reggae in Brazil and especially in the history of reggae in Maranhão, many processes occurred in a counter-intuitive fashion. Gil's cover of "No Woman No Cry" was actually, at some level, a cover of Jimmy Cliff's cover of "No Woman No Cry" that Gil had heard in his visit to São Luís, a town that did not cultivate Bob Marley as its premier reggae star. The São Luís scene not only lacked reggae's global icons including Marley, Rastafari, marijuana, Afrocentricism, and oppositional politics, but during the crucial years of the 1970s it also lacked a direct material connection with Jamaica. Still, against all odds, reggae took over.

2.8 CONCLUSION: FOUNDATION STORIES AND ROUTES TO THE CARIBBEAN

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, then—the period in which a mass reggae audience developed in São Luís—the vast majority of Jamaican records present in the city were not imports. Rather, they were Brazilian releases. Even when sound system owners began to play "exclusive" imported records, the vast majority of these imported records came from stores in São Paulo or

¹¹⁷ Jota Kerly, interview.

Rio Janeiro (that in turn had obtained those records from Europe). There was no secret Caribbean source, no hidden route to Jamaica. So why is it that in the year 2010 in São Luís, most people—academics and non-academics alike—firmly believed that their city’s affinity to reggae derived from a direct material connection to Jamaica? For example, one researcher of the reggae scene told me confidently in 2010 that it was common wisdom that Jamaican music first came to São Luís in the 1970s by three pathways: sailors from the Caribbean, short wave radio from the Caribbean, and travels by sound system owners to the Caribbean. The researcher had ignored what was by far the main source of Jamaican music: Brazilian releases sold in local record stores. Why this discrepancy?

Part of the blame lies with sound system owners and record collectors themselves. Many tried to hide the sources of their records by inventing an aura of secret Caribbean pipelines to throw potential competitors off the scent. These stories were told and retold over the years, giving rise to mythical foundation stories. Strikingly, the first academic study on this topic, carried out by Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, had correctly emphasized the importance of stores in Belém (Carlos Santos’s Feirão de Discos), São Paulo (Museu do Disco), and Rio de Janeiro (Modern Som) as sources for Jamaican music.¹¹⁸ In interviews with Silva in 1991, sound system owners admitted there was no mysterious connection to the Caribbean—just a lot of hard work in locating, negotiating, and buying records from sources around Brazil. Silva’s research was published as a book in 1995 and quickly became the authoritative text on the subject. Yet as time has passed, Silva’s specific findings seem to have been ignored by amateur and professional researchers alike.

I believe that the connection to Jamaica gained such political and cultural importance in the 1990s that Ludovicenses began to conflate those periods when there *did* exist material

¹¹⁸ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 52, 59.

connections to the Caribbean (pre-1968 and post-1990) with those periods when the direct trade of cultural goods was mostly stopped (1968-1990). Most people in São Luís, of course, did not know this first hand. Researchers or not, they were participating in the collective creation of a memory, the invention of a foundation myth. To someone in the post-1990 reggae scene trying to understand its history, it must have seemed intuitive that there existed a secret trading route to the Caribbean in the 1970s and 1980s. After all, how else could a particular variant of reggae have become so popular in São Luís and not elsewhere in Brazil? Accordingly, the newly created foundation stories privileged those elements that made Maranhão unique in comparison to the rest of Brazil (and especially Maranhão's economic polar opposite, São Paulo)—geographical proximity to the Caribbean, entrepreneurial resourcefulness despite a lack of economic development, a unique cultural history—all of which suggested a direct, clandestine trade of records with the Caribbean in the 1970s and 1980s. Other researchers began to look even further back in time, to the supposed shared origins of African slaves that arrived in Jamaican and Maranhão and even to the supposed shared origins of indigenous peoples from the two lands.¹¹⁹ To complete matters, observers in the 1990s and 2000s constantly remarked how São Luís seemed so similar to Kingston, reinforcing the foundation myth.

The similarities between Maranhão and Jamaica were nevertheless real, but they took the form of parallels that shaped common outcomes and shared tastes rather than direct interchange. Their peoples were linked by the reaches of the global music industry, by their common technological efforts, and by their affinity to Caribbean rhythms. Reggae undoubtedly had multiple levels of cultural relevance in Jamaica; what is fascinating is that the same music found cultural relevance in São Luís as well, despite the lack of local recording artists, the inability to understand the lyrics, and the failure of political messages to cross over. In essence,

¹¹⁹ Paulo Caribe, interview no.1.

Maranhenses loved how Jamaican reggae played on local sound system machines made them feel and made them dance. And that was enough to lay the foundation for the birth of the “Brazilian Jamaica.”

3.0 DIAMBEIRO! MARGINAL!: CRIMINALITY AND POPULAR MUSIC UNDER DICTATORSHIP, 1968-1989

On January 23rd, 1981, residents of São Luís who picked up a copy of the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* and turned to the crime page were greeted with the headline: POLICE OFFICERS LOCATE THE LOWLIFE “JIMMY CLIFF.” Beneath the headline was a photograph of a young black man, shirtless but wearing a short necklace, smiling (see Figure 4):

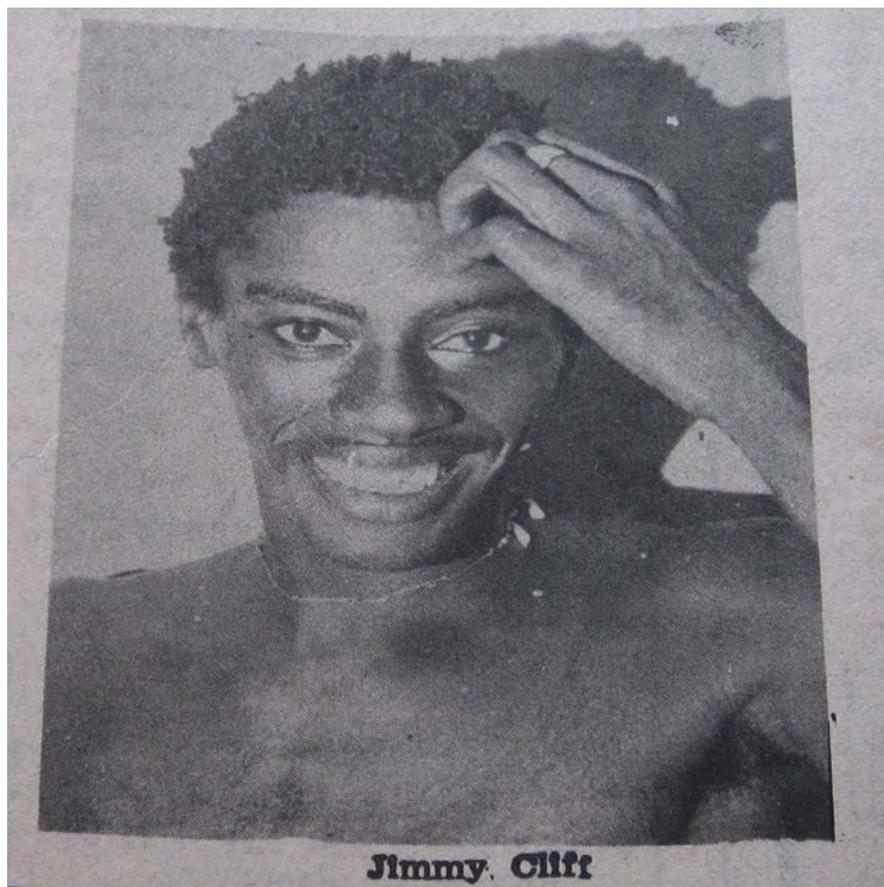


Figure 4. Police Mugshot of Francisco das Chagas Costa Rodrigues a.k.a. Jimmy Cliff

Nestled next to the photograph was the following text:

After consecutive searches the police officers of the 2nd Police District succeeded in finding and arresting the lowlife Francisco das Chagas Costa Rodrigues, alias Jimmy Cliff, a criminal element who had been wanted for a long time. He is the author of various thefts in the periphery of the neighborhood of João Paulo in addition to physical attacks on his victims.

Jimmy Cliff will likely be transferred in the next few hours to the *Delegacia de Furtos e Roubos* (Police Station for Theft) where he will be subjected to interrogations, so that we may know the extent of his “work.”¹

Most people reading the article probably accepted the newspaper’s version at face value. After all (they might have thought) bandits were everywhere in São Luís, especially in the swamps surrounding João Paulo, and the photograph of Francisco das Chagas probably only reinforced their image of what a bandit looked like. If the news of his capture provided momentary relief, it was likely soon replaced by the continuing fear of falling victim to another thug from the city’s burgeoning peripheral neighborhoods. They likely remembered the unnerving frequency with which they read or heard about stories of violent theft, perhaps even recalling an attack against their own person. They also may have assumed that “Jimmy Cliff” was a *diambeiro* (marijuana user) in addition to being a bandit since the description of his alleged crimes fit the profile of contemporary local ideas of a *diambeiro*.

Regular readers of the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* may have also been a little confused by the report. Some may have been under the impression that the police had already caught the accused in question several months earlier. If they had re-read the October 4th, 1980 issue of the newspaper they would have found a picture of “Jimmy Cliff” under the headline DANGEROUS HOODLUMS CAPTURED, and they would have realized that this was a different Jimmy Cliff, whose real name was Antonio José da Silva.² Yet others may have been even more confused—*wait, I*

¹ “Agentes Localizam o Lunfa ‘Jimmy Cliff,’” *O Imparcial*, January 23, 1981.

² “Capturados Perigosos Marginais,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 4, 1980.

thought Jimmy Cliff was a policeman? For if they had read the January 4th, 1981 issue from nineteen days earlier, they would have noted that one José Murilo Costa Ferreira, a policeman also nicknamed “Jimmy Cliff” but unrelated to the other Jimmy Cliffs, had been attacked by two fishermen with fishing knives. According to the reporter, “Jimmy Cliff only managed to escape death because he was a police officer in the state’s department of Public Safety, gifted with a knowledge of martial arts, and with superior ability he managed to dodge the blades aimed for his thorax.”³ The confused readers might have wondered where the name “Jimmy Cliff” came from and why all these dangerous Jimmy Cliffs were appearing in their city.

Others reading the original January 23rd article, though they might not have known this particular man, surely noted his nickname with a smile. These readers would have probably counted themselves among the city’s many fans of Jamaican superstar musician Jimmy Cliff. If they were collectors of vinyl records, they may have even noted how similar this “lowlife Jimmy Cliff” looked to the portrait of the real Jimmy Cliff on the cover of his self-titled 1977 album.⁴ Yet others reading the article, however, would have immediately recognized “Jimmy Cliff” from the nightclub *Pop Som* in the neighborhood of Jordoa. They probably remembered watching “Jimmy Cliff” slow-dancing with a partner on the dance floor, and perhaps felt a pang of admiration or envy as they recalled his sublime dancing skills. Maybe, someone had even warned them to avoid “Jimmy Cliff” because he was a thief. Francisco das Chagas a.k.a. “Jimmy Cliff” was notorious for being one of the best dancers of *Pop Som* and simultaneously, one of the most dangerous men of the area.

Had someone elsewhere happened to read the January 23rd article about Francisco das Chagas (the “lowlife Jimmy Cliff” from the mugshot) and proceeded to compare it to the 1972

³ “Desordeiros Tentam Matar o Agente Jimmy Cliff,” *Jornal Pequeno*, January 4, 1981.

⁴ Netto Vinil, interview.

Jamaican film *The Harder They Come* starring the real Jimmy Cliff, they would have been struck by an apparent coincidence. The scene described by the reporter from *Jornal Pequeno* appears to be straight out of the storyline from *The Harder They Come*. In the movie, Cliff's character Ivan is a poor rural migrant to Kingston seeking his fortune. Like Francisco das Chagas, Ivan divides his time between the urban musical scene and a life of crime. He sings on a hit record but is unable to escape the cycle of poverty and violence that plagues those that live in the slums of Kingston. By the end of the film, Ivan is both a folk hero to the poor and a reggae superstar. The Jamaican police finally track Ivan down on a beach as he tries to escape, and in the resulting shootout they kill Ivan in broad daylight.⁵

Francisco das Chagas Costa Rodrigues was a Brazilian rudeboy.⁶ His life mirrored that of Ivanhoe “Rhyging” Martin, the real-life Jamaican Ivan whose story inspired *The Harder They Come*, and countless other rudeboys. In a matter of months Francisco das Chagas a.k.a. Jimmy Cliff was back on the streets and once again was a wanted man, this time for his alleged role as the leader of a gang responsible for a series of robberies in the peripheral neighborhoods of Sacavém and Coroado. In mid-May of 1982 state police officers arrested one Alcides Sousa Vieira, popularly known as “Cibinha,” allegedly a member of Francisco das Chagas’s gang, and for the next two weeks they combed the slums of São Luís for Francisco das Chagas. “Jimmy Cliff” managed to evade the cops and even put in surprise appearances in the nightclub *Pop Som*, until police officers from the *Delegacia de Furtos e Roubos* finally tracked him down on May 29th in the neighborhood of Coroado. Police claimed that he was in the process of robbing a house, but witnesses claimed that Francisco das Chagas was unarmed and surrounded by the

⁵ Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come*, directed by Perry Henzell, DVD (Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 2000 [1973]).

⁶ Rudeboy (or rudie, rudebwoy), synonym to badman, “combined racial protest with a class-antagonistic morality among militant poor black men,” according to Deborah Thomas. Rudeboys were tough, street-smart, stylish, and often violent. See Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 72.

police when “they shot him in the middle of the street, just because they had been looking for him for a long time,” and only afterwards did he stumble into the house. Francisco das Chagas was taken to the state hospital in critical condition with a bullet in his kidney while the police refused to release the name of the policeman who shot him.⁷

In this chapter I argue that in the 1980s, São Luís’s Jamaican music scene came to be associated with criminality by a broad cross-section of society and media. In the 1970s and early 1980s, a society already built on extreme economic inequality was thrown into disarray, as elite families watched in horror as the brackish backwater and riverine mangrove areas were occupied by poor migrant families and turned into slums. Nightclubs and speakeasies sprouted in the heart of these slums, in the least accessible areas: along the muddy river banks, behind old buildings, next to drug havens. The greatest fears of São Luís’s elite—poverty, blackness, violence, drugs, and sin—converged, sparking a wave of repression of working-class youth. Sound system parties were often targeted by the police, but through a series of negotiations, sound system owners managed to keep the fledgling scene and industry alive.

Similar processes underway in Jamaican society had shaped perceived links between poverty, crime, and music. This was unknown to people in São Luís though. There was almost no information about Jamaica in São Luís, and even the movie *The Harder They Come* was not locally distributed until the end of the 1980s. By mid-decade, insiders and outsiders began to recognize the overwhelming dominance of Jamaican music in the marginalized areas of São Luís. For those in the periphery that enjoyed Jamaican music, it represented a refuge from daily poverty and violence. For others, however, reggae came to represent the poverty and violence they believed was tearing their beloved city apart. Reggae became associated with criminality,

⁷ “Polícia Prende Perigosos Assaltantes,” *Jornal Pequeno*, May 16, 1982; “Crime do Coroado: Ladrão Jimmy Cliff foi Baleado pela Polícia,” *Jornal Pequeno*, June 1, 1982.

and it took an organized effort by defenders of the culture to keep it from being banned altogether.

3.1 THE CITY AND ITS FEARS I: THE PERIPHERY

In the late 1960s, the state government under José Sarney (1966-1970) in close collaboration with SUDENE (Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast) and the central military government in Brasilia, carried out a shock economic plan with a series of ambitious infrastructure projects in Maranhão. These included the building of highways (linking the Amazonian region to other parts of Brazil via Imperatriz in Maranhão's interior), railway lines, ports, dams, and bridges, primarily in order to develop the mining economy of the region. First, the state sought to redistribute vast amounts of inhabited land to mining and agribusiness conglomerations from outside Maranhão. Accordingly, Sarney's administration passed a land reform law (*Lei das Terras* no. 2979) in June 1969, allowing itself to sell off vast areas of fertile and mineral-rich land in the southern and western parts of the state. Maranhão thus entered a period of economic development spurred by the concentration of land and industry in the hands of a few. Sarney and his successors were able to carry out these reforms without public opposition thanks to their alliance with the military brass who controlled the central government and were increasing repression of the public in the late 1960s. Small farmers and fisherfolk in rural Maranhão, already in a precarious position, were unceremoniously forced off their land. In the quarter-decade between 1970 and 1995, the proportion of land owned by smallholders (under

10 hectares) fell by 45% (5.6% of the total area in 1970, 3.1% in 1995).⁸ Sarney's parallel pledge to distribute land to smallholders fell far short of the projected numbers and tens of thousands migrated away from Maranhão's fertile, abundant countryside. Most of them, it appears, ended up as squatters on the island of São Luís.⁹

In the 1960s many residents of older neighborhoods in São Luís were afraid to enter the expanding peripheral neighborhoods and slums. In crowded neighborhoods like Liberdade, Vila Palmeira and Coroado, the only available places for newcomers to settle were often on the edge of the water. *Palafitas*, or wooden houses built on stilts, filled the banks of the two brackish rivers of São Luís, so that during high tide the houses stood over water and during low tide they stood over mud. Fisher people in Maranhão had for centuries lived in similar dwellings in more spacious rural settings along freshwater rivers; those of them that migrated to São Luís (especially to the area of Liberdade) in the first half of the 20th century built new *palafitas* along the bay. As neighborhoods became more and more crowded, families began to move further inland and build more makeshift housing along the mangrove banks, so that the last few streets of these neighborhoods were actually mud flats with wooden planks placed over the mud for people to walk. When they were first settled, these squatter areas of the city had no public amenities: no sewers, no electricity, no water, no roads, no public transportation.¹⁰

⁸ Luis Antonio Câmara Pedrosa, "A Reforma Agrária no Nordeste: o Caso do Maranhão," Associação Brasileira de Direito Agrário, <http://www.abda.com.br/texto/LuisACPedrosa.pdf> (accessed July 18, 2012).

⁹ José de Ribamar C. Caldeira, "As Mudanças Sociais no Maranhão," São Luís, 1978; Antônio José de Araújo Ferreira, "Políticas Territoriais e a Reorganização do Espaço Maranhense," Ph.D. diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2008.

¹⁰ See Raimunda Barbosa Costa, "Prática Social das Uniões de Moradores de São Luís do Maranhão," master's thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 1984; José R. Trovão, "Transformações Sociais e Econômicas no Espaço Rural da Ilha do Maranhão," Ph.D. diss., Universidade Estadual Paulista—Rio Claro, 1994; Prefeitura Municipal de São Luís, *Legislação Urbanística Básica de São Luís* (São Luís: Secretaria Municipal de Terras, Habitações e Urbanização (SEMTHURB), 1997); Wilson de Barros Bello Filho, *História do Planejamento Econômico no Maranhão: Uma Arqueologia dos Planos Estaduais de Desenvolvimento* (Rio de Janeiro: Papel Virtual, 2004); Luiz Rios, *Geografia do Maranhão*, 4th ed. (São Luís: Central dos Livros, 2005); Heitor Ferreira de Carvalho, "Urbanização em São Luís: Entre o Institucional e o Repressivo," master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 2005.

For most people that lived in the older, richer areas of Centro and Monte Castelo, the periphery was becoming a dangerous area to avoid altogether. But they could not avoid contact with recent migrants. By the late 1960s, the poor were ubiquitous in the city. In addition to domestics, gardeners, and cooks who worked in the houses of the rich, unemployed youth began to occupy streets and sidewalks as unlicensed vendors, car washers, and parking attendants. While many among the rich hoped for the poor to remain segregated in the periphery and in the police pages of the newspaper, this was becoming increasingly impossible as the flood of poor migrants pushed into more central spaces as well. (See Figure 5)

While policing the streets of São Luís was a problem, elites had more success in restricting access to their social world. The three main social clubs for traditional elites of São Luís during this period were Casino Maranhense in the city center and Grêmio Líteo Português and Jaguarema Recreation Clubs in the neighborhood of Anil. Other exclusive clubs included RBV in the neighborhood of Fátima, and the Sergeants Club in the neighborhood of João Paulo for officers of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; these clubs hosted families with certain status and wealth although many of them came from humble backgrounds.¹¹ Grêmio Líteo, for example, maintained itself as a club primarily for Portuguese immigrants and secondarily for Brazilians of Portuguese descent. In the fifty years from the club's founding in August 1931 up to 1981, only one of its seven presidents was not born in Portugal.¹² The vast majority of the city's population, including the Afro-Maranhense population, was excluded from this cultural sphere.

¹¹ Jokson, Launé Macedo (Jokson Macedo), interview by author, Rosário and São Luís, December 8, 2010; Aponísio Paulo de Sá Filho (Paulo Caribe), interview no. 1 by author, João Paulo—São Luís, May 27, 2010.

¹² "Grêmio Líteo Comemora, hoje, seu Jubileu de Ouro," *O Imparcial*, August 1, 1981.

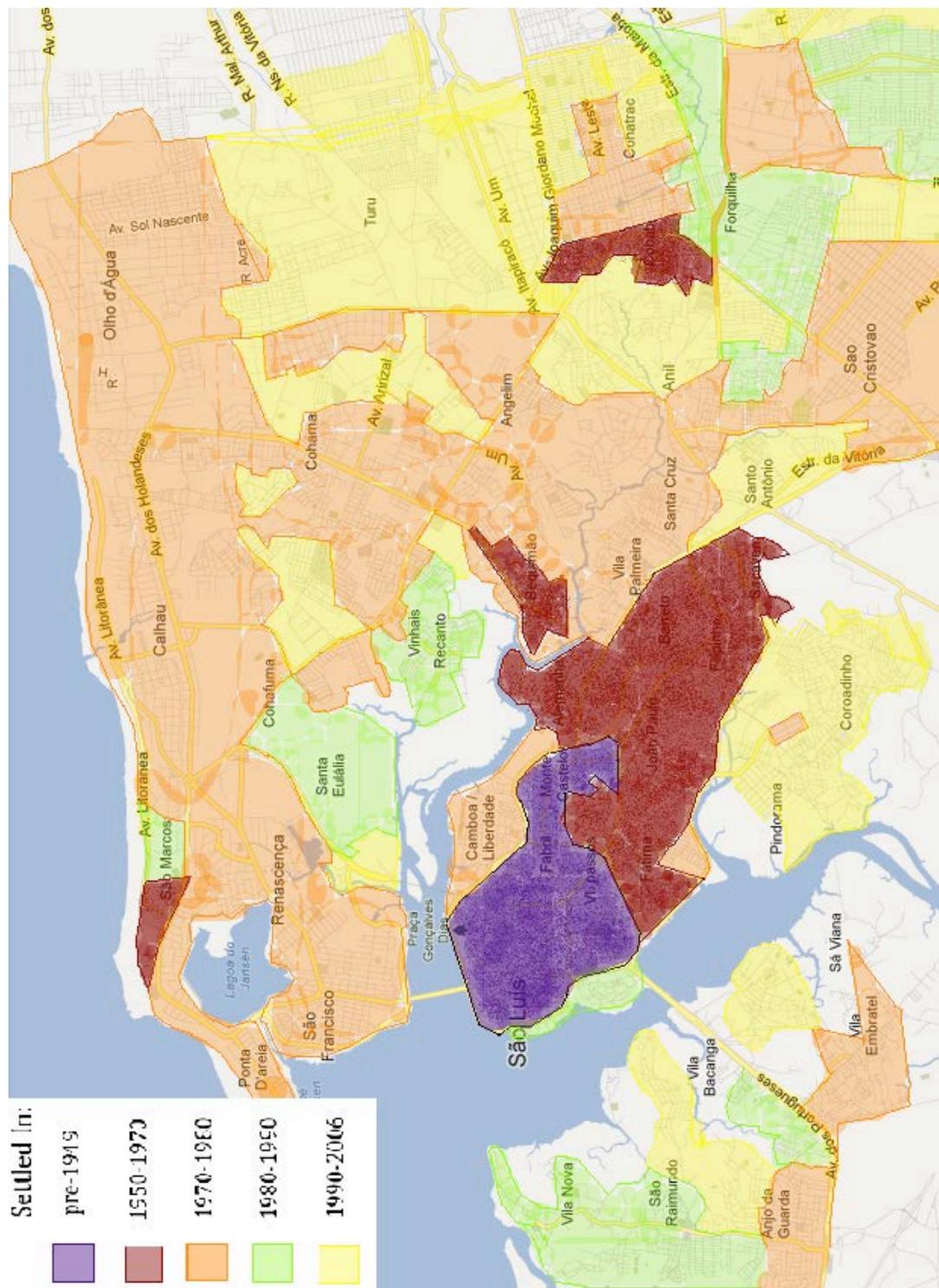


Figure 5. Chronological Settlement of Neighborhoods in the city of São Luís¹³

¹³ Prefeitura Municipal de São Luís, *Legislação Urbanística Básica de São Luís* (São Luís: Secretaria Municipal de Terras, Habitações e Urbanização (SEMTHURB), 1997), 67.

As the elite social club Casino Maranhense prepared for their New Year's Eve festivities to herald in the year 1969, they fortified security, deciding for the first time to require members to show their membership cards.¹⁴ Across town, for their annual New Year's Eve "Friendship Ball," Jaguarema Recreation Club even took measures to prevent the entry of non-members with forged documents; in their official announcement of the event, the club's board of directors exhorted their guests:

not to allow strangers to accompany their families, unless they have invitations, which may only be obtained at the club's Secretariat... by members themselves, as long as they present their membership card and payment receipt for the current month's dues. At the doors of the club we will need to see this receipt, as well as the membership cards for any dependants, in order to allow entry.¹⁵

The "Friendship Ball" may have had a very small circle of friends, but the name of the band playing at Casino Maranhense's New Year's event was even more ironic: "The Untouchables."¹⁶ These parties, at least for the poor majority of the residents of São Luís, truly were untouchable. Poor youth from the periphery, both men and women, knew that if they approached the doors of the elite clubs, they ran the risk of being chased away unceremoniously by security guards.¹⁷

Carnival parties were also segregated. In theory Carnival allowed participants to invert social norms, but in reality elites' fear of theft and violence had driven them increasingly toward restricted Carnival balls. Popular sectors participated extensively in Carnival but were segregated from elite sectors within urban festive spaces.¹⁸ However, while elites approved of the general idea of Carnival, they viewed Bumba-meu-Boi disparagingly as a festival of poor, rural people prone to violence. According to one informant who spoke to ethnographer Eugênio Araújo,

¹⁴ Casino Maranhense Governing Junta, "Casino Maranhense," *O Imparcial*, December 25, 1968.

¹⁵ Clube Recreativo Jaguarema Directorate, "Clube Recreativo Jaguarema," *O Imparcial*, December 25, 1968.

¹⁶ Casino Maranhense Governing Junta, "Casino Maranhense," *O Imparcial*, December 25, 1968

¹⁷ Paulo Caribe, interview no.1.

¹⁸ Araújo, *Não Deixa o Samba Morrer*, 46-48.

participants of Boi carried a stigma of being “drunks, vagabonds, pimps, troublemakers, [and] criminals.”¹⁹ This was the social context that kept the working-class cultural scene, and its musical preferences (discussed in the previous chapter), separate from the elite cultural world.

Denied access to ballroom dances with live bands, working-class people that lived near the center of the city depended instead on sound systems and sound-system events to hear their favorite records, especially if they were not played on AM radio. Good sound systems required good amplification and ample power: this resulted in loud sound outputs in crowded neighborhoods. Carne Seca, for example, received a fair share of negative attention for his events in the neighborhood of Madre Deus. Even though Madre Deus housed artists, musicians and other bohemians, many residents resented nocturnal parties they associated with sin and debauchery. In early October of 1968, a local newspaper published a letter by a disgruntled resident of Madre Deus denouncing Carne Seca for disturbing the neighborhood peace with his sound system. Also alleging that Carne Seca stole some construction materials, he invited police intervention. These accusations forced Carne Seca to defend himself publicly in a letter to another newspaper, where he argued that “he never disturbed the public peace” and rather than playing loud music he only “spent his afternoons and nights fixing radios.”²⁰ It is not clear if Carne Seca’s accuser was using the alleged theft to draw attention to the loud music he played on his sound system, or vice versa, but the insinuation of night-time sound system parties was enough to cast moral doubt on Carne Seca. In his defense, Carne Seca emphasized his legal profession as electronic engineer and downplayed his informal work of organizing sound system parties. This suggests that in the late 1960s, sound systems in working-class neighborhoods

¹⁹ Cited in Araújo, *Não Deixa o Samba Morrer*, 97.

²⁰ “Carne Sêca se Defende,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 9, 1968.

already carried a strong negative connotation, representing (in the minds of some) an illegal profession and an immoral social activity.

Research from Rio de Janeiro and Belém, two other Brazilian cities with important working-class music scenes driven by sound system parties, suggests that sound systems have regularly been targets of police repression since the late 1960s. Following the military dictatorship's repressive turn in 1968, the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) of Rio de Janeiro, the military's domestic intelligence wing, became wary of all types of oppositional culture and investigated "*black power*" and "*black soul*" dances where Afro-American funk and soul played on the sound systems.²¹ In São Luís, however, it appears that DOPS was not active in the music scene. Instead, raids on nightclubs and sound system events were left to other divisions of police, which included military police and civil police at the state or municipal level. Police repression coincided with the priorities of local elites, whose fear of working-class slums trumped all other concerns from the late 1960s onwards. In São Luís (as in Rio de Janeiro and Belém), then, police repression of sound systems became one component of a larger campaign of repression of people that lived in working-class neighborhoods and slums. Paradoxically, as sound systems became coveted as a prestigious material good, they also became visible and audible targets for repression. The more sound systems were associated with criminality, the more elites avoided them. In the 1960s and also in the 1970s, sound systems in São Luís remained firmly in the cultural sphere of the working class.

²¹ Alberto, "When Rio Was *Black*"; Almeida and Lamem, *Projeto Sonora Paraense*.

3.2 THE CITY AND ITS FEARS II: THE DEVIL WEED

Public opinion in the 1960s had been ambivalent when it came to marijuana; most people had heard of the substance locally known as *diamba* but few knew about its actual effects, save those who used it. Marijuana is believed to have arrived in the region as early as the 16th century, brought by Africans, and soon became a common recreational and medicinal drug freely smoked by indigenous, black, and mixed people of Maranhão. A widespread moral battle against marijuana in Brazil only materialized in the 1960s, however.²² In the preceding years, local newspapers began to publish sporadic articles about arrests of users of *diamba* but refrained from making moral judgments or demonizing the drug. In July 1967, the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* even published an article that questioned the rationale of the growing fight against marijuana:

JUDGE THINKS CACHAÇA IS WORSE THAN MARIJUANA

Brasília—According to Judge Geraldo Tasso de Andrade Rocha, presiding in the 2nd Criminal Court of Brasília, the addiction to alcohol is much worse than the use of marijuana, since it is responsible for, among other things, innumerable accidents and trafficking...

Upon sentencing Antônio Ferreira to six months of prison and a fine of five *cruzeiros novos* for selling marijuana, the judge gave him the benefit of the doubt seeing that it was his first offense, and suspended the sentence for a period of two years. Those absolved were Fausto Fauzer Daia, Odelino José Pereira and José Machado dos Santos. They had all been caught in the act, and the latter, being a public officer and from a good family, had given a false name to the police.

After presenting his final considerations, the judge quoted several authors and expressed his doubts on whether marijuana was actually a narcotic. He stated that alcohol, being more toxic than herb, had caused much more evil, and that in all the years of his being a judge, he had never tried a traffic accident case in which the accused was under the effect of marijuana. He condemned the scandalous advertisements for *cachaça* on television and their usage of pompous names that only served to corrode the human body and society, placing responsibility on the regulatory authorities.²³

²² Anthony Henman and Osvaldo Pessoa Júnior, *Diamba Sarabamba: Coletânea de Textos Brasileiros Sobre a Maconha* (São Paulo: Ground, 1986); Assunção, "Popular Culture and Regional Society," 278.

²³ "Juiz Acha Cachaça Pior que Maconha," *Jornal Pequeno*, July 18, 1967.

This judge's response was probably shared across all socio-economic classes. While *cachaça* was the known enemy, known as the alcoholic drink of poor Brazilians that led to violence, marijuana had stayed under the radar and out of the criminal justice system until the 1960s.

Public opinion on marijuana usage in Maranhão began to shift beginning in the late 1960s as a result of the criminalization of marijuana users by the state, the police and the media. José Sarney's election to the post of governor in 1965 facilitated the repression of the drug; thanks to Sarney's policy of occupying and commercializing the countryside and his excellent relationship with the top of the military hierarchy, military police were often deployed into rural areas of Maranhão. In 1973, military police began to harass the indigenous peoples known as Tenetehara and Guajajara who lived on reservations in the Amazonian region of Maranhão. Although the Tenetehara/Gujajara had probably grown marijuana for centuries and the Brazilian government's agency for Indian affairs (FUNAI) specifically told the military police to keep their distance, the military police overstepped their boundaries. They carried out a campaign of torture and terror on indigenous reservations for five years, culminating in a large 1978 operation during which they falsely alleged that the Tenetehara/Gujajara were growing large plantations of marijuana for sale. The draconian repression of indigenous marijuana producers in Maranhão set the tone for police actions in urban areas.²⁴

In São Luís, the Vice Squad began to zealously comb the streets of São Luís looking for marijuana users, especially after the passage of AI-5 in December of 1968 curtailed many of the rights of Brazilian citizens. In the city of São Luís, the *Delegacia de Costumes*—the Vice Squad—was given the responsibility of arresting marijuana users. The newfound enemy in the form of the “devil weed” gave a financial boost to a police division that had seemed doomed to

²⁴ Henman, “War on Drugs”; Henman, “A Guerra às Drogas.”

fade away four decades after its founding. Poor people in elite neighborhoods were obvious targets; weeks after the passage of AI-5, residents of the street 24 de Outubro in the elite neighborhood of Monte Castelo complained to the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* of “the large number of *diambeiros* (marijuana users)” living on the street, responsible for “directing abusive words towards the married and unmarried ladies who walk by, and even smoking the ‘devil weed.’”²⁵ Residents of working-class bohemian neighborhoods such as Desterro, where the Vice Squad had decided by 1969 to “exterminate the sale of *diamba*,” were also obvious targets. In March of 1969, José Batista and Bernardina Santos Vitória were quietly smoking marijuana inside a house when police patrolling outside “caught the scent” and violently broke down the front door, promptly arresting the couple. A week later, the Vice Squad chased down a group of men smoking marijuana in the same neighborhood of Desterro, but only managed to capture one man.²⁶ Judging from newspaper reports, most of the Vice Squad’s arrests seemed to be of drug users rather than dealers.

Although several Brazilian psychiatrists had suggested that the intake of marijuana led to violent behavior, public consensus in Maranhão before the 1960s (and common sense) said otherwise. In order for the police to continue to pursue marijuana users, the users had to be criminalized. This was achieved with the help of sensationalist reports placed in sensationalist media outlets, led by the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno*.²⁷ For example, in late March of 1969, a man from a rural area of Maranhão had been drinking all afternoon when the bartender finally refused him a drink; the visibly drunk man then physically assaulted the bartender, seriously

²⁵ “Diambeiros em Ação,” *Jornal Pequeno*, January 14, 1969.

²⁶ “Casal Fumava a ‘Erva Maldita,’” *Jornal Pequeno*, March 15, 1969; “Preso Maconheiro,” *Jornal Pequeno*, March 22, 1969.

²⁷ Parallel processes occurred elsewhere in the Americas, notably in Mexico (1890s-1910s) and in the U.S. (1930s). See Isaac Campos, *Home Grown: Marijuana and the Origins of Mexico’s War on Drugs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and Richard J. Bonnie and Charles H. Whitebread II, *The Marijuana Conviction: A History of Marijuana Prohibition in the United States* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974).

injuring him. In their investigation, the police discovered someone who said that the man had smoked marijuana hours earlier, in the morning. So the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* published an article titled HE SMOKED *DIAMBA* TO SLASH HIS RIVAL, describing the case and drawing a clear connection between “devil weed” as cause and violence as result. Headlines like *MACONHEIRO* BEHIND BARS and *DIAMBEIROS* IN ACTION increasingly made the front page, assuring that the alleged drug users were convicted in the moral court of the public well before any legal proceedings were initiated.²⁸

As reports on marijuana abounded in the press in the 1970s, the military police began to refocus their efforts on stopping the transport and sale of marijuana. To observers, it appeared that no sooner did the police close one point-of-sale, another would rise nearby, leading one reporter to suggest in September 1979 that “the criminal business of marijuana in São Luís grows in frightening proportions, and with it, the Vice Squad springs into action, so as to at least reduce the number of drug smugglers.”²⁹ As police repression increased, marijuana plantations began to move further away from towns into more remote areas of the state, but use of the substance continued normally. Under the law, a simple user of marijuana was differentiated from a smuggler (*traficante*).³⁰ By the late 1970s, the police and media began to treat traders of the drug as dangerous high-profile criminals while treating users more as degenerates prone to criminal activity. However, the public’s moral condemnation of the user remained strong.

Words to describe users of marijuana like *maconheiro* and *diambeiro* gained negative connotations beyond violence—they also became linked to the racial and religious hierarchy in Maranhão. To Catholics with a deep-seated fear of African- and indigenous-rooted spiritual

²⁸ “Maconheiro nas Grades,” *Jornal Pequeno*, December 22, 1968; “Diambeiros em Ação,” *Jornal Pequeno*, January 14, 1969.

²⁹ “Boca-de-fumo foi Desbaratado,” *O Diário do Povo*, September 15, 1979.

³⁰ Barros and Peres, “Proibição da Maconha no Brasil.”

faiths, smoking marijuana echoed the smoking of mystic herbal substances in non-Catholic spiritual celebrations. Marijuana came to represent the devil, and violent or criminal acts committed by individuals allegedly under a marijuana stupor were regularly blamed on devil possession. The only other highly prejudicial term that the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* used with such frequency in the late 1960s similarly to discredit subjects of their news reports was *macumbeiro*, a derogatory word for someone who practices an Afro-Brazilian or spiritist faith. Anyone identified as a *macumbeiro* and accused of a crime was already presumed guilty since he or she was assumed to be under spirit possession. For example, in June of 1969, under the headline MACUMBEIRO ATTACKS WORKER WITH STICK, the newspaper reported that a “healer” from the area of Bacabal attacked his victim simply because the healer “was in a trance ... with a spirit ... chanting the names of indigenous warriors.”³¹ The increasingly linked terms *maconheiro* and *macumbeiro* evoked strong associations for many Maranhenses, drawing on generations of demonization of black and indigenous culture. Following the campaigns against the Tenetehara/Guajajara, whenever indigenous people were arrested for growing or transporting marijuana, it was especially reported with much fanfare.³²

In an interview with one 22-year old São Luís man in the mid-1980s, anthropologist Daniel Touro Linger asked him what it meant and how it felt to be called a *maconheiro*:

It expresses a person’s state of ... moral and physical decadence. People see this as the end point of being useless, as a final consequence. So, since people see it this way, it’s a very serious kind of aggression toward another person. The person really feels the problems in his skin. [The word says] that you are guilty, just a thing of guilt ... I can’t tell you how deep [this word goes] ... it’s something unknown, it’s a *beast* [his emphasis] that sits there always threatening. You feel something that you don’t know how to describe ... the pain is even greater if you use [marijuana], you feel a guilt, the word has an additional sweetening of accusation ... it’s this kind of thing, hey, you’re black, you can’t marry my daughter, right? Because you’re black. If you are a *maconheiro*, you don’t have

³¹ “Macumbeiro Agride Lavrador a Paulada,” *Jornal Pequeno*, June 27, 1969.

³² “Em Plena Selva Maranhense: Estudantes Transam Maconha com Índios,” *Jornal Pequeno*, April 21, 1974.

any right at all to say anything to me or else I don't have any obligation to listen to anything you say because I am superior to you.³³

The connotation of blackness and the feeling of defenseless against the insult suggest that *maconheiro* served, in part, as a racial slur.

Eventually the slur *maconheiro* became so ubiquitous that it could be used to generically describe a criminal or a bad person. Most press reports that used the term, such as the 1982 report headlined MACONHEIRO THIEF SHOOTS AND STABS WIDOW TO DEATH or the 1986 report headlined MACONHEIRO RAPES NINE-MONTH OLD CHILD, never mentioned the actual use of marijuana even once in the body of the article.³⁴ It seemed any type of criminal could be described as a *maconheiro* or *diambeiro* in 1980s Maranhão. Conversely, marijuana users were apparently assumed to be criminals capable of any and every crime, which allowed the police to rhetorically justify their own shoot-on-sight tactics. São Luís's own "Jimmy Cliff," who we met in the beginning of this chapter, was one victim of such heavy-handed tactics. Such strong negative associations meant that police violence in the 1980s against marijuana users or suspected marijuana users continued unrestrained.

In response to the repression, marijuana dealers started to move deeper into the periphery in order to avoid the police. This usually led dealers to inaccessible squatter areas without roads. This further compounded the negative connotations of marijuana usage and its association with the poorest areas of the city. Common locations for *bocas de fumo* (points of sale of illegal drugs) included the riverbank *palafitas* on the northern edge of Liberdade, the muddy lowland areas of Vila Palmeira and Sacavém, the hidden alleys of Bairro de Fátima and Coroado, the

³³ Linger, *Dangerous Encounters*, 139-40. All emphases and brackets are Linger's.

³⁴ "Ladrão Maconheiro Mata Viuva a Tiros e Facadas," *Jornal Pequeno*, May 4, 1982; "Maconheiro Estupra uma Crianinha de Nove Meses," *Jornal Pequeno*, August 28, 1986.

hilltops of Coroadinho, and the railway tracks of Barreto. Coincidentally, these were precisely the areas that nightclubs also sprung up, playing Jamaican and other international music.

3.3 CLUB POP SOM: NEGOTIATING VIOLENCE IN POPULAR NIGHTCLUBS

Residents of São Luís remember the late 1970s and the early 1980s as the “era of gangs.”³⁵ As Pop Som in Jordoa became the most famous nightclub for international music by 1981, it also gained notoriety for late-night violent confrontations between rival groups of youth. Residents of Jordoa began to mobilize the police and media against the nightclub, while Zé Baldez tried to negotiate with his neighbors to keep the club open and functioning. In June 1980, only two months after a girl was raped upon leaving the nearby Rock Clube, the newspaper *Jornal Pequeno* reported the stabbing of a 15-year old Jordoa boy inside Pop Som, by an unknown person who managed to evade the police.³⁶ Baldez quickly wrote a letter published three days later, disputing the veracity of the report and expressing sorrow for the victim’s family:

What happened in the neighborhood of Jordoa on June 16, 1980 did not happen in POP SOM. The fight began and ended on Teixeira de Melo Lane, in front of house no. 311, where the stabbing victim, 15-year old Valter de Jesus Durant, lived. We regret what happened, because the victim is the son of a well-loved couple in our neighborhood.³⁷

Zé Baldez’s efforts to deflect blame from Pop Som and to stand in solidarity with the victims of violence mostly fell on deaf ears. Residents were beginning to equate the nightclubs, especially Pop Som, with any act of marijuana use or violence that took place on a weekend night in the vicinity; according to their logic, since many of the violent offenders or marijuana users had

³⁵ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

³⁶ “Facada,” *Jornal Pequeno*, June 16, 1980.

³⁷ “Pop Som,” *Jornal Pequeno*, June 19, 1980.

either spent the evening dancing at Pop Som or had been waiting outside the nightclub, the nightclub was therefore responsible. One resident of Jordoa in particular, named Luis, in an effort to shut down Pop Som, constantly wrote letters to city newspapers and made complaints at the local police station. “From Monday to Friday,” remembers Baldez, “I lived in the police station.”³⁸ When this approach ultimately did not bear fruit, Luis mounted a political challenge to Zé Baldez’s position as president of the Resident’s Association. Twice, Pop Som came tantalizingly close to shutting its doors. On the first occasion, circa 1980, an officer from the Juvenile Unit decided that enough was enough, and brought two judges of the juvenile court to Pop Som one Friday night. On the second occasion, a group of residents of Jordoa signed a mass petition to the state’s highest law enforcement authority, the Secretary for Security Raimundo Marques, who promised to take action. Zé Baldez met with Secretary Marques and the Juvenile Court Judges, arguing that he was not an offender but a victim of youth gangs; rather than prosecution, Baldez maintained, they could enforce the law by posting policemen outside the club to prevent the entry of minors and troublemakers.³⁹

Pop Som and other nightclubs that played international music in the late 1970s and early 1980s survived because its management was able to walk a tightrope between regular club-goers, off-duty policemen, criminals, gang members, several police departments, and politicians. Sound system owners and club owners negotiated when possible and bribed when necessary. Public opinion held that those youth that frequented nightclubs were 1) lowlifes, 2) marijuana users, and 3) criminals, so nightclub owners countered with a series of measures. Boaventura Alves, president of the association *União do BF* in the neighborhood of Fátima remembers how, circa 1979, he hired security personnel, often off-duty policemen; outlawed men’s shorts, forcing their

³⁸ Zé Baldez, interview.

³⁹ Zé Baldez, interview.

clientele to wear formal pants; prohibited the use of marijuana and enforced this rigorously; and conducted thorough pat-down searches of all club-goers.⁴⁰

This meant that the most dangerous time and place for club-goers was at closing time on the streets immediately around the nightclubs. Women had to watch out for sexual attacks, and everyone had to watch out for thieves and gang members bent on confrontation. Those who frequented Pop Som, Rock Clube, and other nightclubs in the João Paulo area were especially wary of a group of youth from the Barreto slum and the potential for conflict between Barreto youth and their rivals from Coroado; similarly, rivalries between groups of youth from Liberdade and Barrio de Fátima to the west, and between Vila Palmeira and Santo Antonio to the east, kept nightclubs on constant vigilance.⁴¹ Baldez recalls a secret mission one Friday night: Pop Som was in full swing while Baldez and several policemen combed the nearby streets, ditches, bushes and all possible hiding places, until they found and confiscated a large number of guns, knives, machetes and other weapons certain individuals had stashed in the vicinity of the club so they could access them at closing time. It was dangerous to deny these individuals entry, so Pop Som had to let them check their guns and knives at the door, and pick them up on the way out. Still, nightclubs could not prevent violence that occurred outside their doors, and the outcry from sections of the public, especially those living nearby in the periphery, continued unabated.⁴²

The two police departments that commonly visited São Luís nightclubs were the Vice Squad (*Delegacia de Costumes*) and the Juvenile Unit (*Delegacia de Menores*), the latter checking for the illegal presence of minors in the nightclubs. Resident's unions on the whole were able to maintain good relations with policemen thanks to their political clout.

⁴⁰ It is not clear which night club was the first to institute these changes. Ze Baldez claims that when Aurino operated Rock Clube out of the building of the Residents Union of Jordoá, approximately in 1975-77, Aurino installed the rule of no Bermuda shorts.

⁴¹ Interview with Seu Isaias, Interview with Wellington Rabelo.

⁴² Boaventura Alves, interview; Zê Baldez, interview.

Neighborhood association president Boaventura Alves of the União do BF, for example, was himself a policeman by profession, and on-duty policemen sometimes trusted him to enforce the law on their behalf.⁴³ In general, policemen could be negotiated with, befriended, employed, or bribed, but ultimately they were wild cards. The rise in violence in São Luís in the late 1970s and early 1980s was caused, in part, by increased police repression and disregard for human rights. Off-duty policemen frequented nightclubs and often resented that they had to follow the same rules as regular clients: not to wear shorts and to leave their weapon at the door. Sometimes off-duty policemen got into skirmishes with outlaws or participated in drunken fights inside the nightclub. The one instance of a shooting inside Pop Som, recalls Zé Baldez, was when an off-duty policeman pulled a gun after a woman refused to dance with him, ultimately firing and injuring a soldier.⁴⁴

All in all, against strong opposition and thanks to shrewd negotiation with all parties involved, Pop Som continued to stay open and thrive in the 1980s, becoming the most famous nightclub for popular sectors of São Luís. By the mid-1980s, Zé Baldez had succeeded in attracting most of the clientele away from nearby rival clubs, and people began to come from the four corners of the island. Yet outside of the world of club-goers themselves, public opinion of Pop Som and other nightclubs of the periphery remained overwhelmingly negative. First, the loud volumes emanating from sound systems continued to keep nearby residents awake at night and, justifiably, kept them angry as well. Second, fear of the occasional violence that happened outside nightclubs kept the same residents in fear. Despite the clubs' best efforts to enforce laws against drug use, elite and popular sectors of São Luís in the early 1980s associated nightclubs with violence, poverty, blackness and marijuana usage. By grouping the above phenomena

⁴³ Boaventura Alves, interview.

⁴⁴ Zé Baldez, interview; "Agente de Policia Agredido a Tapas no Pop-Som," *Jornal Pequeno*, January 5, 1981; "Tiroteio no 'Pop Som' deixa 2 Pessoas Feridas," *O Estado do Maranhão*, December 14, 1986.

together as immoral behavior, much of the elite and popular classes developed a strong conservative ideology that assumed poor peripheral residents to be steeped in criminality.⁴⁵

As this juncture the music played in working-class nightclubs was overwhelmingly reggae music. Yet neither the club-goers themselves nor the public in general identified it as such. Selectors, sound system owners, record collectors and their business partners who sent them imported records from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were all familiar with the term “reggae” and actively sought out reggae records. Still, in the mid-1980s, international pop music was commonly played in the same nightclubs as well, so the scene was still known under the umbrella term of *música internacional* (international music).⁴⁶ And unlike in Bahia or in the southeast, sound system owners and disc jockeys in São Luís saw no advantage in advertising the term “reggae” before 1985. To most of them it carried no cultural meaning, only musical meaning: heavy bass, danceable rhythm, smooth melodies and unintelligible lyrics. Once radio stations had embraced reggae music by 1986, however, the term “reggae” quickly began to acquire a set of cultural meanings.

As we saw in section 2.6, when the radio show Reggae Night debuted it struck a chord among the masses of the city. I argue here that it came to fruition thanks only to a series of cross-class collaborations. The other new radio programs that Mirante FM launched in July 1985 were geared toward their elite and middle-class listening audience and featured genres like samba, choro, classical music and soft rock.⁴⁷ Reggae Night was different, however. It was launched by Mirante FM journalist Celso Borges and presented by two newcomers to radio, Fauzi Beydoun and Ademar Danilo, all three members of the elite who had earlier visited and were thrilled by the working-class club Pop Som. Their access to a major resource (Mirante FM radio) that the

⁴⁵ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

⁴⁶ Charles Brown, interview.

⁴⁷ “96.1 Megahertz,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, July 13, 1985.

working class did not have was crucial. Still, the initial success of Reggae Night depended on the collaboration of two key sectors of the working-class: Zé Baldez and Neturbo of Pop Som who provided Reggae Night with music to play on air, and the working-class masses of São Luis who responded to the show in overwhelming fashion.⁴⁸

While still a student at UFMA (Federal University of Maranhão) in the early 1980s, Celso Borges met law student Ademar Danilo during their mutual participation in the literary and poetry clubs Akademia dos Párias and Guarnicê. Danilo was a resident of Vila Ivar Saldanha and had spent his teenage years at the neighborhood nightclubs Globo de Ouro, Rock Clube and Pop Som, and was one of few UFMA students who lived in a working-class neighborhood. Danilo accompanied Borges and other university students to the club Pop Som in the early 1980s, in a rare example where elite youth came into contact with the working-class cultural scene. Meanwhile, Fauzi Beydoun, a native of São Paulo who had also experienced reggae scenes in West Africa, arrived in São Luís to work at the newly constructed Port of Itaqui and soon discovered Pop Som.⁴⁹ By entering Pop Som and other popular nightclubs, Beydoun, Danilo and Borges flouted the elite social taboo against nightclubs in working-class neighborhoods. Much like Gilberto Freyre and his elite friends who mingled with working-class samba singers in 1926, they engaged and participated in the vibrant local scene and its particular music.⁵⁰

Beydoun and Danilo fashioned their radio program unlike most other radio programs, and in doing so added a radically new dimension to São Luís's already-existing, but barely-named reggae scene. They chose to teach about the history and culture of Jamaica: in their minds, the essential background for audiences to understand more about the music they loved. Beydoun and

⁴⁸ Ademar Danilo, interview.

⁴⁹ Ademar Danilo, interview; Rodrigues da Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 86-87; Freire, "Que Reggae é Esse," 142-43.

⁵⁰ Vianna, *The Mystery of Samba*, 1-3.

Danilo also created catchy words and phrases related to reggae that they proclaimed on air, in true Jamaican selector style. They translated lyrics into Portuguese on the air, a first for the scene. For example, Fauzi Beydoun, on air one night in November 1986 on Difusora FM's Reggae Pop Show (where he went directly after he left Reggae Night), announced:

...we bring you yet another translation of another beautiful Bob Marley song, "Waiting In Vain." But first we begin with [the translation of] a protest song against the enslavement of black people and against the alienation of minds today.⁵¹

The radio selectors also chose to actively use the word "reggae" as much as possible. For most Ludovicenses, including many who had been faithfully attending nightclubs and dancing to reggae for years, it was the first time they had heard the word "reggae." Though the term "reggae" had been present in town for approximately a decade, it was mostly restricted to album covers and conversations between selectors, hidden from the public. Only after Reggae Night and other radio shows did people in São Luís begin to identify the term with working-class, underground nightclubs. As Rodrigues da Silva suggests, this new information about the reggae genre in the late 1980s helped foster positive self-identification among working-class Ludovicenses who already loved the music without knowing what it was called.⁵²

Researchers of reggae in São Luís agree that radio had a profound impact on the city's reggae scene beginning in the mid-1980s. Rodrigues da Silva suggests that radio shows expanded reggae's audience in and around São Luís and stimulated fans of reggae to participate in a greater variety of social events and activities, thereby strengthening the existing underground scene.⁵³ Given the constant attention from the police, popular sound systems and nightclubs generally avoided advertising in the radio or newspaper before 1985, preferring to stay hidden

⁵¹ Fauzi Beydoun, "Reggae Pop Show Setlist," November 21-23, 1986, PCRHR.

⁵² Rodrigues da Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 94-96.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 86-96.

from the authorities. Reggae Night, however, provided a unique opportunity for advertising. Following the deal between Reggae Night and the nightclub Pop Som, other radio stations, sound systems and nightclubs rushed to join the reggae wave on radio (see section 2.6), thus advertising their events. Most residents of São Luís relied on AM radio stations, especially those living in the corridor of peripheral neighborhoods in between Centro and Anil, and southward across the Bacanga river where FM waves were still a novelty, and so AM stations joined FM stations in broadcasting reggae.

Simultaneously, however, the weight of negative stereotypes held by working-class and elite Ludovicenses alike toward nightclubs in popular neighborhoods now fell squarely on the back of the new term “reggae.” This was the negative consequence of the success of Reggae Night. To many Ludovicenses, from 1986 to 1989, the word “reggae” served as vague description of a youth culture of blackness, poverty, violence, drug use, danger, and lawlessness.⁵⁴

3.4 CLUB ESPAÇO ABERTO: THE MEDIA ASSAULT

Amid the new wave of nightclubs that emerged 1985-87, one nightclub shone brighter than the others. It stood just down the hill from the roundabout of São Francisco, nestled between the upscale neighborhood of São Francisco and the working-class neighborhood of Ilhinha. Since the bridge to the city center was completed in 1968, São Francisco had become the epicenter of elite commercial speculation in São Luís, easily accessible by bus from other neighborhoods. The nightclub was originally an open-air space, rented out on occasion for a variety of events, with a

⁵⁴ “Reggae Empolga os Bairros de S. Luís,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 10, 1987; “Inferno na ‘Boca’ do Túnel,” *O Imparcial*, September 10, 1986.

large cashew tree that stood defiantly in the middle, giving the space its name: Cajueiro. Among those who rented the space in the early 1980s was Luis Fernando Santos Costa Ferreira (or simply Ferreirinha), owner of an amateur football club named Estrela Futebol Clube, who used the space for popular forró parties to finance the purchase of team equipment.⁵⁵ João Ramalho, who himself ran similar sound system events to benefit the cross-town amateur football team Clube Palmeirinha in Aurora, recalls how he began to take his sound system Musical J.R. Som for weekly international music events at Cajueiro in late 1985. Ramalho's selector was the well-respected Jaílder who was known locally from his work with Zé Piloto's sound system Somzão da Ponta D'Areia, with its home base just past São Francisco in the beachfront neighborhood of Ponta D'Areia. Ferreirinha saw an opportunity, made an aggressive offer to the owner of the Cajueiro space and soon took over weekend operations at the club. The success of the international music played on sound systems forced him to abandon his idea of playing forró. Instead, he contracted Jaílder and founded the sound system *Árco-Iris do Som* (Rainbow of Sound) later renamed *Estrela do Som* (Star of Sound). The club itself was renamed *Espaço Aberto* (Open Space).⁵⁶

In 1987, *Espaço Aberto* replaced the nearby *Quilombo* as the most popular club in São Francisco with Ferreirinha's aggressive radio marketing strategy and innovations in the calendar of events, principally when he established the annual parties *Festa da Paz* (peace), *Festa da Recordação* (remembrance) and the anniversary celebrations of *Espaço Aberto* and *Estrela do Som*, drawing in a city-wide public.⁵⁷ But trouble began brewing for *Espaço Aberto* once the elite of São Luís began to hear the music wafting from the popular nightclub that lay within

⁵⁵ See section 1.2 for an explanation of forró.

⁵⁶ Sandra Ferreira, interview by author, São Francisco—São Luís, July 26, 2010; Jaílder (Maestro Jaílder), interview by author, Bairro de Fátima—São Luís, October 4, 2010; Ferreirinha, interview; João Ramalho, interview.

⁵⁷ Sandra Ferreira, interview; Bine Roots, interview; Ferreirinha, interview.

earshot of both the residential and commercial centers of São Francisco. The core public of Espaço Aberto came from the low-lying margins of São Francisco, to the south and east of the rich area, especially Ilhinha, the poor area that through the 1980s gave elites and police constant headaches. Travessa Epiácio Cafeteira, the east-west street connecting Espaço Aberto to the popular neighborhood immediately below the roundabout became dangerous on Friday nights, much like the streets surrounding Pop Som. To make matters worse, as the club attracted patrons from diverse poor neighborhoods across the city, rival groups of youth came into contact, with the potential for violent consequences, leading residents near Espaço Aberto to register complaints at the local 9th district police station. A section of the São Francisco elite, one with connections in the media and law enforcement, had begun to mobilize against Espaço Aberto. As they saw it, the unruly nocturnal youth were too close to home to be ignored.⁵⁸

Espaço Aberto's detractors got their opportunity in October 1987. In the wee morning hours of Saturday October 3rd, after a Friday night of reveling, a man named Nilson S. Nogueira left Espaço Aberto in the company of several friends. They caught the late-night bus no. 618 to Maiobão and headed towards Maiobinha on the eastern outskirts of the city. Inside the bus, a man nicknamed "Paulo Bomba" stabbed Nilson in the chest and escaped. Minutes later, a bleeding Nilson succumbed to the knife wound and died within the bus. The details of the crime and the motive were unclear, and the two newspapers that catered to elite Ludovicenses carried differing versions, but they united in indicting Espaço Aberto with sensationalist headlines in the police pages Sunday morning. YOUTH MURDERED AFTER PARTY AT "ESPAÇO ABERTO," printed *O*

⁵⁸ Bine Roots, interview; Ferreirinha, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview no. 1; Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, interview.

Estado do Maranhão. AFTER A “REGGAE” DANCE, DANCER MURDERED INSIDE A BUS: A RIOT INSIDE “ESPAÇO ABERTO” LED TO A VIOLENT END, proclaimed *O Imparcial*.⁵⁹

O Estado do Maranhão reported that Nilson and his friends were playing a game on the bus when they hit Paulo Bomba by accident. Paulo Bomba, a usual suspect well known to the police according to the newspaper, responded with insults and threats of violence towards the group of youth, and finally with the knife stab that killed Nilson. Yet according to this version of events, the nightclub was neither the cause nor the location of the crime. *O Estado*'s labeling of Espaço Aberto as an *inferninho* (hell or hell-hole) followed the newspaper's general negative attitude towards popular nightclubs, all generically labeled as *inferninhos* by the press around this time. *O Imparcial*, on the other hand, presented a different account of the crime that placed blame squarely on the nightclub:

The crime was a consequence of a violent riot that occurred hours earlier in the reggae club “Espaço Aberto,” which has recently been denounced by the frightened residents of *travessa* Epitácio Cafeteira as the focal point of hoodlums (*marginais*), marijuana people (*maconheiros*) and rowdies (*arruaceiros*)... last Friday night was just another normal evening [at Espaço Aberto] for those who enjoy facing the danger of death... the victim's group ... confronted, in a war of words, Paulo Bomba's group ... because of two underage girls. However, emotions were controlled and there was no melee between the two parties.

But whoever thought that nothing more serious would occur was gravely mistaken. When the music stopped, Paulo Bomba's (sic) group went looking for Nilson's group, who had already left to catch the first late-night bus to Maiobão, which soon appeared. Nilson, Josiel, Joerbete and Henrique boarded the bus a couple of stops before Paulo's group. Nilson was still in the back seat when his rivals entered the bus. Paulo jumped on with a small knife in his hand and with sheer violence and agility, jammed the weapon into Nilson's chest. Nilson's friends only saw that he had been stabbed eight minutes later, when blood gushed forth and the victim's lifeless body toppled over.

The command center for the Secretariat of Security was notified of the murder, and until now the police do not know the whereabouts of either the criminal or his companions. On the other hand, the capital city's police

⁵⁹ “Jovem é Assassinado após Festa no “Espaço Aberto,”” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 4, 1987; “Depois da Dança do ‘Reggae’ Dançarino Assassinado dentro do Ônibus,” *O Imparcial*, October 4, 1987.

superintendent Leofredo Ramos offered that “Espaço Aberto” could have its gates sealed off by the police, if the residents of Epitácio Cafeteira street so desire.⁶⁰

O Imparcial's report painted the nightclub as a hotbed of violence that terrified its neighbors and admitted minors, ultimately creating the conditions for a verbal fight inside the premises that escalated into a crime outside. Their solution: police intervention. It was a narrative that readers understood, one that they had constantly heard for the past decade, even though its accuracy in this case was strongly denied by at least one witness who was inside Espaço Aberto that night.⁶¹ Several letters published the following week in *O Estado do Maranhão* suggested that most readers from elite neighborhoods would support police repression of the nightclub. A letter from Januário de Sousa Ferreira pleaded for police intervention against the “absurd” situation in São Francisco and numerous other areas of the city where the loud music from working-class nightclubs (he made a point to exempt the elite nightclub Gênesis from his complaint) broke the law of silence and was a nuisance to neighbors. A letter from Mauro Sérgio Dutra congratulated Januário for his message, adding that rather than a civilized city that followed laws, São Luís seemed more like a jungle where offenders against the law of silence go unpunished. Antonio José Bastos, a resident of São Francisco, approved of the ongoing increase of patrol cars on the main avenues and roundabouts of the city that “inhibits the hoodlums (*marginais*) and fosters a sense of security for the community.”⁶²

The indictment of one of the foremost popular reggae clubs of the city left several influential people within the Mirante group, which published *O Estado do Maranhão*, in a

⁶⁰ “Depois da Dança do ‘Reggae’ Dançarino Assassinado dentro do Ônibus,” *O Imparcial*, October 4, 1987.

⁶¹ Linaldo Jefferson Pereira Martins, “Espaço Aberto,” *O Que Diz o Leitor, O Estado do Maranhão*, October 11, 1987.

⁶² Januário de Sousa Ferreira, “Lei do Silêncio,” *O Que Diz o Leitor, O Estado do Maranhão*, October 6, 1987; Antonio José Bastos, “Polícia,” *O Que Diz o Leitor: O Estado do Maranhão*, October 6, 1987; Mauro Sérgio Dutra, “Sossego Público,” *O Que Diz o Leitor, O Estado do Maranhão*, October 8, 1987.

political dilemma. On one hand, the Mirante group hoped to mobilize public officials and law enforcement to protect elite communities from the perceived menace of an expanding working class, and popular reggae clubs were becoming public enemy number one. On the other hand, several influential people in the Mirante group from radio executive Celso Borges (who signed off on Reggae Night) to owner Fernando Sarney himself were friends with Fauzi Beydoun and liked the idea of reggae as a cosmopolitan musical style popular in trendy circles in São Paulo or Rio Janeiro. Moreover, several journalists who wrote for *O Estado do Maranhão*—including popular selector Ademar Danilo—were participants in the reggae scene. On the very day of the murder in the bus, for example, *O Estado do Maranhão* had published an article advertising a live show by Fauzi Beydoun and Banda Kartaz. As the term “reggae” grew more popular in everyday usage, these two contradictory local connotations—the trendy foreign musical style and the evil working-class youth culture—came into direct confrontation.

O Estado do Maranhão was ideologically torn, but reporters at *O Imparcial* had their knives out for Espaço Aberto, eager for a follow-up scandal. They didn’t have to wait long—two weeks, to be precise. REGGAE AND RAPE screamed the headline on Sunday, October 18th:

As the 15 year-old girl C.M.L. left the reggae club “Espaço Aberto” alone ... she was being observed by a group of [four male] reggae dancers with “punk” hairstyles ... Near a few trees in a vacant lot [on Epiácio Cafeteira lane] they grabbed her. The boys, who were heavily under the influence of marijuana, began to tear her clothing when she shouted loudly, prompting several residents of the street to open their doors to see what was happening. This forced the hoodlums (*marginais*) to run away into the darkness.⁶³

The report also made reference to the earlier murder inside the Maiobão bus and the general mayhem allegedly visited upon the community by groups of “*regueiros*.”⁶⁴ The article reiterated

⁶³ “Reggae e Estupro,” *O Imparcial*, October 18, 1987.

⁶⁴ Today, the term *regueiro* is used across Brazil for someone who is part of a reggae scene or enjoys reggae music. In Maranhão in the late 1980s the term was only beginning to be used. Ademar Danilo made it a point to use the

that Espaço Aberto was in violation of laws regulating noise level and had created “a focal area for marijuana users, rowdies, and armed robbers.” Reporters also interviewed a couple of women who lived near the nightclub. One affirmed that her house “was ransacked” and the other complained that a week earlier, three youth had broken into her backyard to steal three chickens. They threatened her life if she told the police, according to the report, and told her that “they were taking the chickens and they would return, the next time, to take her pig as well.”

Reporters then proceeded to ask law enforcement when they might shutter the nightclub:

The whole situation is already being observed by officer Pedro Gonçalves of the Vice Squad, where most of the complaints are converging. The officer let slip that he is planning a surprise for club Espaço Aberto.

An operation of disarmament could be triggered at any moment. “If a single knife or even a single joint of marijuana is found on any person within the club, it could warrant shutting down the club,” declared officer Pedro Gonçalves.⁶⁵

Before the club could be shut down, however, members of the public mobilized in support of popular reggae clubs. They argued that the way the media tied the bus murder case (and later the sexual assault case) to Espaço Aberto reeked of discrimination against reggae and *regueiros*. One Linaldo Jefferson Pereira Martins of Monte Castelo wrote a scathing letter to *O Estado o Maranhão* defending the poor masses and arguing that discrimination of reggae was purely an issue of class and race. He asserted that if police wanted to close nightclubs with “*maconheiros*, thieves and loose women” they would have to also close every single nightclub in the country, and especially elite social clubs with their “silver spoon brats, cocaine ... revolvers and well-

word, writing it with two “g”s as “reggueiro.” The word *regueiro*, along with the word reggae, gained a negative connotation in São Luís as part of these negotiations in the press.

⁶⁵ “Reggae e Estupro,” *O Imparcial*, October 18, 1987.

dressed loose women.”⁶⁶ *O Estado do Maranhão* (whose owners from Mirante Group sympathized with the reggae scene) now changed their tone and defended Espaço Aberto. The newspaper started to publish articles written by social activists about reggae’s Jamaican history, trying to educate the public and dispel fears. It is unclear whether their descriptions of reggae as a “hypnotic, liberationist, outlaw, essentially subversive” musical genre and Rastafari as a “sect that mixes Judaism, marijuana, negritude, and religious and magical traditions of disappeared Indigenous people and mother Africa” helped decriminalize the term in readers’ minds, or, ironically, made it sound more dangerous.⁶⁷ Still, the ideological about turn by the city’s largest newspaper company was a significant development.

Activists of the local organization called the Center for Black Culture, or CCN, were especially enraged, and decided to mobilize in defense of reggae. Who were these activists? How did their interventions shape the politics of popular culture in São Luís?

3.5 THE DEFENDERS

The Center for Black Culture (CCN), formed mainly by middle-class black professionals and academics in 1979 in the working-class area of João Paulo not far from several popular nightclubs, has been the city’s most consistent and coherent advocates of black people’s rights and empowerment since its inception. Early on, emboldened by the national Afro-Brazilian outfit *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU—Unified Black Movement) and by the participation of many of CCN members in nationwide black congresses, they attempted to organize locally

⁶⁶ Linaldo Jefferson Pereira Martins, “Espaço Aberto,” *O Que Diz o Leitor, O Estado do Maranhão*, October 11, 1987.

⁶⁷ “Reggae Empolga os Bairros de S. Luís,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 10, 1987; “O Reggae em Festas,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 24, 1987.

around overtly political projects.⁶⁸ Several university professors affiliated with CCN began to research Afro-Maranhense history and culture, which was understudied and underappreciated in the national context. Following the model of the black cultural and educational renaissance of Bahia, CCN activists began to embrace Afro-Maranhense culture and established links with practitioners and consumers of Boi, Tambor de Crioula, and other local African-based folk celebrations.

Through the 1980s, CCN activists tried to make explicit the links between Africa and Maranhão, as Bahian activists and cultural practitioners had already been doing for a decade for links between Africa and Bahia. As CCN searched for ways to connect to common Afro-Maranhenses, the success of the 1985 Carnival bloc took the organization on something of a cultural turn—they found that culture was the best way to connect to local youth. Still, the CCN intelligentsia ignored reggae at first, seeing it as a foreign culture connected to the international pop circuit that only helped maintain black people ignorant of their history. CCN activists played mostly Bahian music at their events, since they themselves preferred rhythms with live drums (*tambores*) that reminded them of Africa rather than the polished, electronic sounds of reggae. To CCN activists, Jimmy Cliff was just another commercial, international singer.⁶⁹

During the few times that reggae was played at CCN, however, local youth activists who frequented the Center would jump up and dance. Rodrigues da Silva recounts how during one event he was surprised both at how a group of Afro-Maranhense girls danced to the rhythm with natural ease, and at how a group of boys in the crowd started calling them “regueiros” pejoratively.⁷⁰ Slowly, as CCN intellectuals learned about reggae along with the rest of the city,

⁶⁸ David Covin, *The Unified Black Movement in Brazil, 1978-2002* (Jefferson, NC: McFarlane and Company, 2006), 48-64.

⁶⁹ Jorrimar Carvalho de Souza, interview by author, Centro—São Luís, September 27, 2010.

⁷⁰ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 17-18.

they began to accept reggae as an African-based music. Watching people at events, they decided that masses of Ludovicenses, mostly black and poor, felt a deep personal identification with reggae. Under the presidency of Magno Cruz in the late 1980s, a previously reluctant CCN opened its doors to reggae sound system events and by the turn of the decade most of CCN's activists were on board with studying, analyzing and promoting reggae—even if many of them personally still preferred Bahian music.

Following the media assault on Espaço Aberto in October 1987, CCN activists vocally defended the nightclub and the reggae scene. They believed that racism and the class divide had led conservative elites to misinterpret a popular art form (in this case, reggae music and dance). They began to rebut anti-reggae claims in the media, arguing that the stereotyping of reggae clubs as “hell-holes for bad boys (*malandros*) to smoke weed” was, in essence, discrimination against black people.⁷¹ Towards the end of 1987 CCN produced pamphlets and hosted a number of discussions and lectures to sway public opinion. They also reached out to possible allies in the reggae scene, who responded positively.⁷²

The Espaço Aberto scandal had made it clear that better communication and organization was necessary between the various groups of people involved in reggae locally—sound system owners, radio personalities, audiences, selectors, activists, journalists. Organization became the focus for reggae's defenders in 1988. So, in the first effort to create a true community out of a disjointed scene and a competitive industry, they organized a three-day seminar/conference called “Reggae: The Sound of Black People” (*Reggae: O Som da Negadinha*) for August 1988. Led in part by Ademar Danilo, who we met as the selector of the radio program *Reggae Night*, the conference was well attended by a diverse set of participants. They came together in

⁷¹ “Reggae: Marginalidade ou Preconceito?” *O Imparcial*, October 28, 1987.

⁷² For more details on CCN events in defense of reggae, see section 3.5.

celebration, publicly recognizing several veteran deejays and sound system owners as pioneers of the local scene and presenting prizes to the two couples who won the *Cobras do Reggae* dance competition: Hernandez and Rose, and Boaventura and Francisca. The participants of the conference also came together in condemning the media for their campaigns against nightclubs, and agreed that reggae was a victim of repression and discrimination in São Luís. On the whole the conference was a success, led by the enthusiastic participation of São Paulo-based journalist, radio personality and “reggae doctor” Otávio Rodrigues.⁷³

As the conference proceeded, however, several ideological rifts between the participants emerged. Firstly, while the intellectuals, black movement activists and human rights advocates all emphasized that most reggae patrons were black and therefore reggae faced discrimination for being a “black art,” Ferreirinha, the owner of *Espaço Aberto*, downplayed both race and racism. Instead he argued that his club was open to audiences of all colors, including whites like himself, and was (or could be) a multiracial space. Ferreirinha’s position was coherent with his strategy to legitimize his nightclub in the eyes of society, while running directly counter to the arguments of his fellow participants that reggae was an element of local black culture. Secondly, journalist and black movement activist Cláudio Farias sparked a firestorm by criticizing sound systems for “withholding information” by hiding reggae records and thereby denying the reggae masses valuable knowledge about Jamaica and black nationalism. Sound system owners led by Ferreirinha quickly vetoed Farias’s suggestion that the scene exchange reggae records freely as a

⁷³ “Seminário de Reggae,” *O Imparcial*, August 5, 1988; “Os Meninos Venenos do Reggae,” *O Imparcial*, August 10, 1988.

“collective good.” They argued that exclusive records were costly and that sound systems had to protect their investments in order to maintain a competitive industry.⁷⁴

The activists’ vision of a democratic reggae scene where participants could share messages of black liberation was in direct conflict with the sound systems’ prerogative to maintain a non-racialized reggae scene in which sound systems’ control of exclusive records allowed them to attract patrons. These fissures had no immediate solutions. Although tensions between activists and sound systems remained, these tensions did not prevent them from calling themselves part of a tentative “reggae community.” Regardless of their differences, both activists and sound systems worked together to change the negative views of reggae prevalent in São Luis and to reduce some of the repression faced by popular nightclubs.

Meanwhile, overall public opinion of the reggae scene remained overwhelmingly negative. In the late 1980s, despite the fact that elite families could now hear reggae music on their radios at home, they still associated it with a lower class of people—with their maids, for example, many of whom enjoyed the reggae shows and listened whenever possible. However, the efforts of CCN and others appeared to have reached at least a section of the population. A number of elite youth slowly began to participate in and patronize an alternate reggae scene. The major media outlets that catered to elite audiences, notably the Mirante media group and the newspaper *O Imparcial*, began to faithfully advertise Fauzi Beydoun’s live performances. Beydoun’s press kit included his *paulista* background, his role as a radio jockey, and his mix of rock, blues, and reggae delivered in a unique, raspy voice. In September 1986 Beydoun joined Banda Kartaz, the music group formed at the Blind School of Maranhão, for a series of concept shows entitled “2000 Years” at the prestigious Arthur Azevedo Theater. With songs such as

⁷⁴ “Seminário de Reggae,” *O Imparcial*, August 5, 1988; “Os Meninos Venenos do Reggae,” *O Imparcial*, August 10, 1988; Henrique Bóis, “Reggae: O Som da Negadinha,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, August 9, 1988; Henrique Bóis, “A Música da Margem de São Luís,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, August 12, 1988.

“Reggae Bumba Boi,” “Civilização Fluvial” (Riverine Civilization) and “Rock-Blues em São Luís,” Beydoun and Banda Kartaz attempted to musically integrate the reggae rhythm with local traditions to create “an urban, universal language that explores regional Afro-rhythms, such as Boi.”⁷⁵ This was a novel idea with potential for cross-class, cross-cultural collaboration.

However, most elite Ludovicenses who liked the sporadic reggae shows of Fauzi Beydoun—a white man from São Paulo—would not even consider venturing into peripheral neighborhoods to mingle with working-class people at their nightclubs and sound system parties. Some observers also argued that Beydoun was attempting to present a different type of reggae from that of sound systems, evident by his constant translations from English to Portuguese, both in his live musical performances and during his radio programs.⁷⁶ In fact, Beydoun was quite involved in the sound system-led reggae scene, and he organized perhaps the most innovative party of 1987, Cobras do Reggae, spanning various nightclubs in different areas of the city and featuring a city-wide dance competition. However, the live music format pursued by Beydoun remained somewhat alien to working-class Ludovicenses, who unlike their elite counterparts, were not used to attending small-sized events with live bands. Also, while many working class Ludovicenses were equally comfortable with the rhythms of reggae and Boi, often at the same event, they were not used to the fusion of the two in the same songs. Beydoun and Banda Kartaz maintained a limited level of popularity with working-class audiences but their live performances mostly fell into a new, elite-based reggae sub-scene. They continued to perform around the city to popular acclaim in the late 1980s, but increasingly their performances were in spaces

⁷⁵ “Fauzi Beydoun, Dois Mil Anos em Cartaz,” *O Imparcial*, September 25, 1986.

⁷⁶ Karla Freire argues this based on interviews: Freire, “Que *Reggae* é Esse?” As a live performer, Beydoun attempted to integrate two common but usually separate strategies: to play covers of popular songs (whether Brazilian or foreign), which he did by playing Jamaican songs, and to play original music, which he did by translating the lyrics of those Jamaican reggae songs into Portuguese.

frequented by elites such as the Tropical Shopping Center or along the northern coast of the island. The class-based segregation of the reggae scene persisted.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, in the nightclub scene, the most successful popular nightclub of the 1980s, Pop Som, had met a worthy match in Espaço Aberto. Despite ongoing tension with the police and sections of the media, Espaço Aberto's events were of high quality and attendance rates had increased. The storm of negative publicity that had begun in October 1987 may have even helped raise the attendance rates. Yet this was a dubious victory, for any rise in popularity among peripheral nightclubs seemed to be accompanied by a rise in violence. Because the nightclub was attracting more and more patrons from around the city, it was inadvertently bringing more rival groups of youth from rival neighborhoods into conflict. The management of Espaço Aberto tightened its security operations, attempting to punish troublemakers with a heavy hand before law enforcement could get involved. They began to hire reggae fans who already frequented the club as security guards. Club-goers especially feared being taken to a particular room known as the "dark room" or the "room of terror" that Espaço Aberto's security guards used for corporal punishment, or at least used the threat thereof, that management saw as necessary to prevent large-scale violent brawls and to enforce order within the club.⁷⁸ Then, in November 1989, just when Espaço Aberto appeared to have weathered the storm, came the real deluge. This time it was the police who were responsible for the violence. To understand the root causes of this particular event, however, we turn to the broader context of politics and law-enforcement of the era.

⁷⁷ "Shows," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 15, 1986; "Shows," *O Estado do Maranhão*, December 3, 1987; "Cobras do Reggae," *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 23, 1987; João Ramalho, interview.

⁷⁸ Ruy Pinto, conversation with author, Madre Deus—São Luís, August 31, 2010; Silvinho Pop, conversation with author, Areinha—São Luís, November 23, 2010.

3.6 THE ATTACKERS

Maranhenses were no strangers to violence in general during the “lost decade” of the 1980s. Governor Eptácio Cafeteira assumed office in 1987 and his administration pledged to combat urban violence in São Luís and other cities as well as the rampant conflicts over land in rural areas of Maranhão. His biggest test came with the victory of Davi Alves Silva in the 1988 mayoral election of Imperatriz. Alves Silva was an ally of landowners and suspected head of the *pistoleiros* (hired gunmen) notorious for using violence against peasants organizing for land rights in the countryside. Cafeteira avoided a showdown between state police and Alves Silva’s forces by negotiating a political truce, allowing Alves Silva to run Imperatriz in return for the new mayor’s pledge to reduce violence. Still, tensions remained high between the two.⁷⁹ Meanwhile in São Luís, the foremost champion of squatters and urban land rights, vice-mayor Jairzinho da Silva was stepping up his efforts to organize and mobilize people of the periphery along with his associate Luís Gonzaga Ferreira (Luizão), who used to be a selector at the nightclub Pop Som in the late 1970s. Elite-run media conflated the confrontational social actions of Luizão (and by extension, Jairzinho) with the overall climate of violence and lamented the Cafeteira administration’s lack of control over the capital city.⁸⁰

To the common man or woman of São Luís the level of violence seemed worse than ever before. By 1989, especially over the last few months of the year, several murders were occurring each day. Talk of crime rose on the streets of the capital and on radio talk shows such as São Luís AM’s Patrulha Policial, and the public organized marches for peace in peripheral neighborhoods like Coroadinho, where residents lived in fear. People who lived near working-

⁷⁹ See Melo, *História do Maranhão*.

⁸⁰ “‘Luizão’ Incendeia Casebres Comunitários,” *O Imparcial*, November 25, 1989; “Comerciária Agredida a Socos por ‘Luizão,’” *O Imparcial*, November 28, 1989.

class nightclubs used the opportunity to aggressively petition Cafeteira, asking the governor to shut down the clubs for operating late, exceeding the legal decibel level, and other abuses. One group from Corrêa de Araújo Street in the heart of the neighborhood of Liberdade petitioned and successfully closed one local nightclub, only to find that the owner of the nightclub used his political influence to re-open it. The media chastised military police for their ineffectiveness, and civil police for their unwillingness or inability to stop rampant theft and other petty crime. All eyes were on the Secretary for Security, Carlos Alberto Salim Duailibe. In response, Duailibe mobilized the military police in the capital, letting loose the special police forces known as ROTAM (Overt Mobile Patrols), teams of roving patrol cars with the capability to sweep into areas of potential conflict and detain suspects. And of all the potential targets for ROTAM, the most obvious targets were the popular nightclubs, where working-class youth were tightly packed in an enclosed space with a single entrance.⁸¹

But involving the military police came with its own risks. People living in São Luís's peripheries were often more afraid of the police than of criminals. As nightclub owners like Pop Som's Zé Baldez knew from experience, when abusive police officers were allowed to enter nightclubs with their weapons, bad things happened. In mid-October 1989, Luiz Sérgio, a corporal of the military police, allegedly drank nine beers and began shooting his .38 calibre Taurus revolver inside a bar in São Luís. A week later, in the nightclub *Som Brasil* in the working-class neighborhood of João de Deus, following a fight between two rival groups, a drunk police officer named Torres was accused of shooting a husband and wife, killing him and wounding her. The following week, in a popular bar in the district of São José de Ribamar, adjacent to the capital, two suspects were accused of shooting two military police officers, killing

⁸¹ "Carta Aberta ao Governador Eptácio Cafeteira," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 1, 1989; "Segurança Maior para o Coroadinho," *Jornal Pequeno*, December 7, 1989; "Polícia Civil de Braços Cruzados," *Jornal Pequeno*, December 12, 1989.

one. Secretary for Security Duailibe's photograph appeared in the newspaper at least three times a week as the public clamored for action, leaving the Secretary with the unenviable task of trying to rein in the police on one hand and giving them more leeway on the other.⁸²

It was in this context that ROTAM forces began patrolling the streets and entering suspected drug havens, nightclubs, and heavily populated areas of the periphery, causing the cycle of repression and violence to worsen. Police officers ignored procedure and shot on sight; criminals returned the favor in kind. Disfigured bodies began to appear each morning in the bushes near the beaches and highways of São Luís, dragged from the scene of the crime—wherever that may have been in the city of São Luís—and dumped there overnight. The media attributed these murders to a mysterious gang they called the “Squadron of Death.” On the morning of October 15th, for example, the bullet-ridden body of a youth was found on the beach of Araçagy. He was later identified as Alan of João Paulo, a suspect in a murder committed three years earlier, leading the police to surmise a possible motive of revenge before shelving the case as another unsolved murder. The public questioned the incident: was Alan killed by old enemies or by police officers acting as vigilantes (*justiceiros*)? Was Alan the latest victim of the “Squadron of Death”? Residents of São Luís began to whisper of a possible collusion between corrupt police officers and organized crime networks—no one could be trusted. On October 18th, another body was found, the face blown away by a shotgun blast; the next day, several bodies were found. A week later, the “Squadron” struck again, this time in Vila Maranhão, a working class suburb to the south; the following week, the victim was a woman, found shot in the neck in

⁸² “Cabo Promove Tiroteio em Bar,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 18, 1989; “Tiroteio e Morte no Clube Som Brasil: Agente Mata Comerciante e Fere Esposa da Vítima a Tiros” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 24, 1989.

the Lago do Cisne area of Paço do Lumiar; and then on November 10th, another body appeared on the beach of Araçagy. Lawlessness had become the norm in São Luís.⁸³

It was under this tense climate that the police blundered into the largest single act of aggression ever against a reggae audience in Brazil. Shortly after midnight on the morning of Saturday November 25th, 1989, approximately 100 military police personnel, participating in a ROTAM sting under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Cantanhede, arrived at reggae club Espaço Aberto in two trucks, two vans and a car. They entered the club en masse and stopped the music. Amidst a rain of boos and jeers from the audience, the police called aside two well-known public figures, journalist and radio personality Ademar Danilo (who we met before as co-founder of the radio program Reggae Night) and Roberto Casau, secretary of the Society for the Defense of Human Rights in Maranhão (SMDDH), in an attempt to separate them from the police action that was about to ensue. When Danilo and Casau refused to cooperate, Lieutenant-Colonel Cantanhede had them arrested along with two other club-goers, Ramón and Agnaldo Filho, amid the loud protests of the remaining 500-odd people in the nightclub. Danilo and Casau were whisked away in a police car, driven around for a while, and then released a few blocks away at the roundabout of São Francisco. With the journalist and the human rights observer out of the way, the remaining police at Espaço Aberto began what newspapers termed a “massacre.” They waded into the crowd, beating, kicking and punching hundreds in the crowd indiscriminately. When they were finished, one group of a dozen victims were rushed to the hospital with

⁸³ “Cadáver de Rapaz Encontrado nas Matas do Araçagy com Marcas de Bala,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 16, 1989; “Jovem mata Comerciante e é Desovado no Araçagy,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 17, 1989; “Cabo promove Tiroteio em Bar,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 18, 1989; “Justiceiros Voltam a Matar: Jovem Executado a Tiro de Escopeta,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 19, 1989; “Tiroteio e Morte no Clube Som Brasil,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 24, 1989; “‘Esquadrão da Morte’ Executa outra Vítima,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 27, 1989; “Com Tiro na Nuca: Empresária encontrada Morta no Loteamento Lago do Cisne,” *Jornal Pequeno*, November 2, 1989; “Filhos de Empresários Matam Policial e Ferem Comissário a Bala,” *Jornal Pequeno*, November 3, 1989; “Esquadrão Executa mais Um nas Matas do Araçagy,” *Jornal Pequeno*, November 11, 1989.

abrasions and broken bones while another group of victims went straight to the 9th District police station to register complaints of police brutality.⁸⁴

The following day, newspaper and radio unanimously condemned the actions of the police. The unprovoked violence at Espaço Aberto was the final straw after an unnerving few months of violence in the capital. It also shifted public focus toward the role of the police in the ongoing violence. To make matters worse, on the following (Sunday) night, ROTAM police officers attacked and locked up four youth who had left the reggae club Palmeirinha and were waiting for a bus at the Outeiro da Cruz intersection. The Center for Black Culture (CCN) and the Society for the Defense of Human Rights in Maranhão (SMDDH) condemned the police's actions, accusing them of racism and disregard for working-class residents of the periphery: "why won't the police interrupt an event at Club Gênesis [a nightclub frequented by elite youth] like they did at [Espaço Aberto], where only blacks and low-income people go?"⁸⁵ Elite media outlets such as the newspapers *O Estado do Maranhão* and *O Imparcial* agreed that the police were guilty of racism towards Afro-Maranhenses. Columnist Ubiratan Teixeira accused the police of savagery, sadism, and bad genetic makeup; Antônio Vieira of CCN reminded readers that under the newly minted Brazilian constitution of 1988, racism was a crime, and could result in legal action. For the first time, it appeared that public opinion in São Luís was on the side of the reggae clubs.⁸⁶

The repercussions of the Espaço Aberto "massacre" not only signaled a turning point for reggae's trajectory in the city, but also had far-reaching consequences for police-societal

⁸⁴ "Operação Desarmamento da PM gera Tumulto no Espaço Aberto," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 26, 1989; "Violência no Espaço Aberto," *O Imparcial*, November 26, 1989; "PM abre Inquérito para Investigar Tumulto no Espaço Aberto," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 28, 1989; Ademar Danilo, interview; Roberto Casau, interview by author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, October 19, 2010.

⁸⁵ "CCN Denuncia Massacre da Polícia aos Negros," *O Imparcial*, November 29, 1989.

⁸⁶ Ubiratan Teixeira, "Sevicia Oficial," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 28, 1989; Carta do Leitor, "Abaixo a Violência Policial," *O Imparcial*, November 30, 1989.

relations and for the social organization of popular culture in São Luís. Prominent members of the reggae industry and scene along with Espaço Aberto owner Ferreirinha secured a meeting with Governor Eptácio Cafeteira, Secretary for Security Carlos Alberto Duailibe, Mayor of São Luís Jackson Lago, State Legislative Assembly President Ivar Saldanha, City Council President Manuel Ribeiro, and military police Commander Colonel Carlos Daniel Barros e Silva. Anticipating a firestorm of accusations, Secretary for Security Duailibe met with Barros e Silva and commander of policing in São Luís Manoel Salvador on the Wednesday following the event. Together they stripped the military police of its enhanced powers and assigned the function of criminal investigation to the civil police. The military police would now act strictly to prevent crime and to enforce judicial mandates in the city, and could not chase suspects. Secretary Duailibe also publicly admitted to the military police's failures, and Commander Silva opened a formal investigation of the police invasion of Espaço Aberto.⁸⁷

The unprecedented meeting with the leaders of the reggae scene forced the city's and state's political elite to acknowledge three problems in how the police operated: racial discrimination, class-based discrimination, and the persecution of popular nightclubs. The politicians promised to protect reggae parties and the people who attended them, heralding a new age where reggae music now carried a measure of legality in the eyes of the authorities as a popular cultural practice. Even if a particular nightclub was not a legal enterprise or if it flouted laws against public disturbance, in its defense, it could now use some of the political capital won by the reggae scene at large. It was also a moment of unity between power brokers of the reggae industry and advocates for black culture. One week after the police invasion, these two groups united to organize a protest rally in Plaza Deodoro, the traditional location for

⁸⁷ "Entidades Denunciam Violência," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 30, 1989.

political demonstrations in the city. And the demonstrators emphasized the message of non-violence “the best way they knew: listening and dancing to reggae.”⁸⁸

3.7 CONCLUSION

The successful rally at Plaza Deodoro was the dawn of a new phase in the city’s relationship with the popular music scene. The events of the week, from the police invasion to the meetings culminating in the rally, attracted a new wave of public curiosity towards reggae and in particular to the club Espaço Aberto. For the city’s youth, the police action confirmed the reputation of Espaço Aberto and other reggae clubs as places where dangerous yet exciting things happened. Yet unlike the mostly negative publicity towards the club in October 1987, the events of November 1989 gave the club a new image: that of a musical scene speaking out against the unfair authorities.

Until the end of 1989, most Ludovicenses could ignore reggae if they chose to, and instead listen to other trendy genres like forró, lambada, or pagode. The events of November 1989 changed all that. From 1990 onwards reggae occupied a central position in the city’s cultural imagination.⁸⁹ Elite and working-class youth alike started talking about reggae and many began frequenting reggae clubs. The late 1980s were a moment of democratization and acceptance of diversity in Brazilian society; in São Luís they were a moment of discovery, of challenging segregated cultural spaces, and of breaking down boundaries.

⁸⁸ “PM abre Inquérito para Investigar Tumulto no Espaço,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 28, 1989; “Entidades Denunciam Violência,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 30, 1989; “Reggae diz Não à Violência,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, December 1, 1989.

⁸⁹ The new year rang in with the events listed in “O Reveillon da Negadinha,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, December 30, 1989.

4.0 **JAMAICA BRASILEIRA: CONNECTIONS TO JAMAICA AND DEBATES OVER RACE AND CULTURE, 1985-1996**

A different type of virus is going around Maranhão... but its final effect is the same: death. Except in this case, it is the death of a whole culture. Those that survive will have to suffer from this irreversible evil. We need to immediately stake out our position, now, vaccinating the population and treating those already infected. This virus comes from Jamaica and circles our island under the tired name of Reggae.¹

- Nilton Ornelas
O Imparcial, March 23, 1992

This chapter is about transnational connections between Jamaica and Maranhão, which turn out to have been the result, rather than the origin, of reggae's popularity in Maranhão. In Chapter 2 we examined the commercial routes that took Jamaican music to the city of São Luís. As we saw, it wasn't until the late 1980s that the international music popular in São Luís became definitively identified as "reggae," and locals and out-of-town observers increasingly referred to the city as the "Brazilian Jamaica" and "Brazil's Reggae Capital." Intellectuals, members of the lettered elite, cultural practitioners, and black movement activists vigorously debated the significance of the São Luís-Jamaica connection in the following years.

The two main arguments against reggae in the early 1990s were 1) that reggae's non-European origins undermined the image of São Luís's cultural proximity to Athens or France, and 2) that reggae's commercial success squeezed out Maranhão's folkloric and popular art

¹ Nilton Ornelas, "O Vírus Oportunista (ou o Mal do Reggae)," *O Imparcial*, March 23, 1992.

forms. Black movement activists rebutted that Maranhenses, and in particular Afro-Maranhenses, adopted Jamaican music because they identified with it personally, because of shared African cultural heritage between the people of Jamaica and Maranhão. As such, they argued that Jamaican music should be considered part of Maranhense culture. Popular musicians of Maranhão were one group that would ultimately decide if and how to incorporate Jamaican culture into their art. I show that many local musicians decided to adopt elements of reggae and syncretize them with local musical trends, for both aesthetic and financial reasons.

Then, I argue, São Luís established concrete connections with Jamaicans because of the efforts of several entrepreneurs of the reggae industry and because of the support that the “reggae masses” gave to such efforts. I trace how, beginning in 1990, people from São Luís began a direct exchange of goods, information, and visitors with Jamaica. Materials and people from Jamaica became highly coveted in the reggae scene of São Luís, consolidating the transnational connection between the two places and turning imagined linkages into real ones. In the process, by the mid-1990s, they created the real *Jamaica Brasileira*.

4.1 DEBATES OVER JAMAICA BRASILEIRA I: VIEWS FROM THE SOUTHEAST

Who invented the expression *Jamaica Brasileira*? Most people in São Luís believe that it was Fauzi Beydoun, as part of his flamboyant radio announcements that began in 1985. “Look,” explained Beydoun in a 2008 interview, “they say it was I who invented the expression. When I started the FM program, I created a lot of expressions. I don’t recall anyone saying it before I

did.”² Regardless of whether it was Beydoun or someone else who invented the name, it stuck, and soon became a touchstone for ideological debates.

Otávio Rodrigues, the São Paulo-based “reggae doctor,” was extremely impressed with the scene in São Luís during his visit for the Seminar on Reggae in August 1988. Upon his return to the southeast he promptly penned an article that was published in *Trip* magazine’s October 1988 issue along with unprecedented photographs of the São Luís reggae scene under the title “Bumba Meu Reggae.” Wrote Rodrigues:

Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese. Jamaica started out as a Spanish colony until the English claimed it. The two shared a similar history, with fertile soil, ample mineral deposits, slaves for labor, and masters to command and hoard the profits of that labor. They were also equals in how they preserved their respective cultures, mixing the Bible with cowrie shells, African drums with castanets, black with white.

Now, almost 500 years later, Brazil and Jamaica are making contact with each other. Whether by cosmic bridge, red telephone, or witchcraft—somehow, the Jamaican popular music of reggae was transformed into a mass phenomenon in São Luís do Maranhão. Reggae emanates from the corners of old colonial houses, from the suburbs, from bars, from cars in the plaza, from hand-held radios.³

“Cosmic bridge” and “witchcraft” aside, Rodrigues was skeptical about whether São Luís deserved the title of “Brazilian Jamaica” or the “Brazilian Reggae Capital,” as local radio selectors were calling their city on the air. Yes, locals had taken to calling each other with nicknames that advertised their involvement with the reggae scene—Aguinaldo became Guiu Jamaica, Nayfson became Natty Nayfson, Benedito became Biné Roots, Sandro became Dread Sandro. Others, like Jorge Black and Junior Black, adopted nicknames that reminded one of both Jamaica and the “black soul” scene in southeast Brazil.⁴ Yes, there were sporadic signs around

² Freire, “Que Reggae é Esse,” 61.

³ Otávio Rodrigues, “Bumba Meu Reggae,” *Revista Trip* 2, no. 10 (October 1988): 70.

⁴ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 67.

the city of connections to Jamaica: one beachside bar had adopted a Rasta-inspired name—“Huastafare”—and painted in bold letters for all to see. Still, although he pronounced the Jamaica-Maranhão connection, Rodrigues wasn’t convinced of São Luís’s seriousness about reggae. People loved the music but didn’t seem to appreciate the ideas that accompanied reggae subcultures elsewhere, such as pan-Africanism or cultural resistance. And while Huastafare Bar had good tunes, the people running it didn’t seem to know what the name meant. Baffled, Rodrigues suggested that “the capital of Maranhão is really not of this world.”⁵

In the early 1980s, when Brazilians thought of reggae, they likely thought of Bahia. As the decade went on, several vibrant scenes had emerged in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte in the southeast to rival Bahia’s; by the end of the decade, Rio-based Cidade Negra became the first nationally famous reggae act since Gilberto Gil after they were featured in a BBC documentary and signed to CBS/Sony Records. All the while São Luís’s reggae scene had stayed mostly under the radar outside Maranhão. But all this was about to change. Music store owners in the southeast who dealt in reggae music began to recognize Maranhenses. Emigrant Maranhenses organized sound system parties of their own featuring the Jamaican songs that were being played at parties in their home state. And in São Luís, the efforts of journalists and activists to publicize the reggae scene began to take effect, and reports such as the one by Otávio Rodrigues caught the attention of leading film and television producers. By 1989-90 several documentaries and news reports produced in the southeast broadcasted images of São Luís’s reggae scene to national audiences. They also popularized the city’s new nickname, *Jamaica Brasileira*.

⁵ Otávio Rodrigues, “Bumba Meu Reggae,” *Revista Trip* 2, no. 10 (October 1988): 68-77.

In one instance, producer Nelson Hoineff and presenter Roberto Maya of the national television documentary series *Documento Especial: Televisão Verdade* arrived in São Luís in 1990 to film an episode on reggae. The thirty-minute segment, entitled “Maranhão in the Rhythm of Reggae,” began by calling reggae in São Luís a “cultural distortion” and suggesting that for a foreign genre to be so popular there, Maranhão must have been culturally deficient. By the end of the documentary, however, the filmmakers appeared to have adopted a positive view of the scene and accepted the proud claims of Caribbean-ness made by the *regueiros* (people of the reggae scene) they interviewed. “Jamaica is here,” proclaimed the documentary. Also in 1990, Brazil’s most popular news program—the Globo network’s *Jornal Nacional*—mentioned during a report on Jimmy Cliff’s upcoming Brazilian tour that São Luís was the city “considered the national capital of reggae.”⁶

Was it fair to call São Luís the national capital of reggae? How might this designation be measured? Researchers from the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA) undertook both quantitative and qualitative projects to map out the reggae scene. In February 1990, anthropologist Jorrimar Carvalho de Sousa, under the orientation of Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, presented the first ever monograph on reggae in São Luís. Jorrimar’s survey counted thirty-six nightclubs and sixty-three sound systems that primarily and regularly played reggae, most of which had not existed prior to 1985. A newsletter co-published by Jorrimar in 1990 also asserted that the entire state of Maranhão had approximately two hundred dance clubs specializing in reggae.⁷ Also significant: all seven AM and FM radio stations in São Luís were broadcasting reggae-specific programs at a prime-time hour, something no other city in Brazil

⁶ Leonardo Alvares Vidigal, “A Jamaica é Aqui”: Arranjos Audiovisuais de Territórios Musicados” (Ph.D. diss., Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2008), 126-141.

⁷ Jorrimar Carvalho de Sousa, “Reggae Night” (bachelor’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 1990), 9-11; “Onde Ouvir e Dançar,” *O Tambor* 1, no. 2 (June 1990), PCJS.

could claim.⁸ These were remarkable numbers for a small city. (In comparison, Salvador's three reggae radio programs were all "temporarily off the air" in late 1990.) Despite a high turnover of both sound systems and clubs, the numbers supported what observers noticed: the reggae scene of São Luís had expanded, and in a comparison would dwarf contemporary reggae scenes in any other city in the world, with the exception of Kingston.

Yet despite reggae's popularity, there were no concrete linkages between Jamaica and Maranhão before 1990. Over the next few years people in the reggae scene and industry actively constructed those linkages. They did so primarily through the travels of Maranhenses to Jamaica and Jamaicans to Maranhão, and the exchange of material goods, especially Jamaican records. In doing so, they justified the name "Brazilian Jamaica."

4.2 CONNECTION TO JAMAICA I: THE CONCERTS

Jimmy Cliff's tour of Brazil in November and December 1990 created an opportunity for the first big-time reggae concert in São Luís. A production team was assembled, not from within the reggae industry, but made up of local business elites with experience in producing concerts. They booked Cliff to perform the first concert of his tour in the new indoor space at Espaço Cultural in the city center on Friday, November 23rd, 1990. However, the production team made several errors in planning the concert. Although reggae's mass popularity in the island in 1990 was no secret, the organizers greatly underestimated the demand for a live performance by Cliff. The show was organized for elites, by elites. Tickets were sold at the exclusive indoor venue and at

⁸ "Ouça... e Dance: um Serviço para você encontrar o Reggae no Rádio e nas Pistas," in "Especial Reggae," special issue, *Bizz* (São Paulo: Editora Azul), 71-R (1991?), 28.

the Tropical Shopping mall at the cost of Cr\$ 1,500 (cruzeiros).⁹ One ticket to see Jimmy Cliff would have cost a minimum wage earner 18% of his/her monthly salary in November 1990 (tickets, bus fare, and drinks for two would have cost over 40%); making matters worse, most working-class reggae fans earned nowhere near the official national minimum wage.¹⁰ Open public resentment built because of the exorbitant ticket price, also blindsiding the organizers. Radio announcers and other prominent voices, including those of the Center for Black Culture (CCN), lambasted the concert's organizers in the media for ignoring the reggae masses and instead planning "a spectacle to please the tastes of the city's bourgeoisie."¹¹

The organizers also miscalculated the outburst of public emotion at Jimmy Cliff's physical presence in São Luís. Unable to buy tickets to the concert, the reggae masses instead filled the airport on Thursday night, hoping to get a glimpse of their idol. When Jimmy Cliff finally arrived in the early morning hours of Friday, November 23rd, he was greeted by the jubilant masses to the sounds of reggae played by selector Natty Nayfson. Cliff was also presented with a special tunic by reggae dancer Guiu Jamaica on behalf of the CCN. "And finally," claimed one writer, "we (Maranhenses) have made contact with Jamaica, through its most controversial son."¹² Those lucky enough to approach Cliff tried to glean as much information as possible on Jamaica and on reggae. Cliff commented, to the joy of those present, that the warm reception he received in Brazil was unrivaled the world over, except perhaps by Africa.

⁹ The Cruzeiro (Cr\$) had replaced the Novo Cruzeiro (NCr\$) as the Brazilian currency only eight months earlier in the latest attempt by the Fernando Collor administration to control inflation, but the inflation that had rocked Brazil throughout the 1980s showed no signs of abating in 1990 as working-class families continued to struggle to put food on the table.

¹⁰ "Jimmy Cliff Chegando," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 22, 1990. National minimum monthly wage in November 1990 was Cr\$ 8,329.55. Soleis, "Índices, Valores do Salário Mínimo," http://www.soleis.com.br/salario_minimo.htm (accessed December 12, 2011).

¹¹ "Ora, Pílulas," *O Imparcial*, November 24, 1990.

¹² "Que a Jamaica Seja Aqui!" *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 23, 1990.

Although the concert itself was disappointing because of its poor attendance, the concert's organizers found a chance to redeem themselves. Merely hours after the show, on Sunday November 25th, the people of Maranhão voted in Edison Lobão (a close ally of the oligarchic Sarney family) as the new governor of Maranhão in a runoff election.¹³ Lobão's campaign announced that Cliff would perform again at his victory rally alongside other musicians, free to the public, on the following Wednesday. The event drew tens of thousands of attendees (hundreds of thousands according to some reports), many of them *regueiros*. However, the debacle of the Cliff concert the previous week had left a lingering resentment, and many fans of Cliff who had not voted for Lobão stayed away in protest.¹⁴ Meanwhile, leaders of the working-class reggae industry felt undermined by the whole process. They believed that if they had been involved in booking Jimmy Cliff, they could have organized a different type of concert, one meant for the reggae masses and not just elites. It was also a question of pride: they believed that they deserved be at the forefront of developments in the reggae scene in Maranhão.

For four of these leaders of the reggae industry, Cliff's visit was not their first contact with Jamaica. As we saw in Chapter Two, in the 1980s São Luís's reggae industry depended heavily on the purchase of imported Jamaican records via stores in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Then in September 1990, four pioneers, namely Serralheiro, Ferreirinha, Enéas Motoca, and Ras Margalho, decided to go straight to the source of rare and exclusive records: Kingston, Jamaica.

Enéas Motoca was a Maranhense footballer who had played in France and Belgium and who, upon retirement from the field, had found success as an agent exporting talented young

¹³ See section 5.2 for an in-depth discussion of the gubernatorial election of 1990 and how Jimmy Cliff's performance abruptly thrust the reggae scene into state politics.

¹⁴ The announcement for the festival proclaimed "This time the joy of the reggae masses would not be restricted by high-priced tickets." "Jimmy Cliff Volta e Canta Hoje com a Raça Vencedora," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 28, 1990. Also see Gil Maranhão and Clóvis Ferreira, "O Rasta Fica pra Depois," *O Imparcial*, October 17, 1993.

football players from Maranhão to Europe. Motoca was a colorful personality nicknamed “the International” for his globetrotting. During a visit to São Luís in 1984, he saw first-hand the potential of the burgeoning reggae industry, and since then had bought reggae records in Europe and sold them in São Luís, principally to his neighbor Serralheiro, owner of the sound system Voz do Ouro Canarinho.¹⁵ Ras Margalho, a pioneer of the reggae scene in Belém, Pará, was a friend and business partner of Ferreirinha, the owner of the nightclub Espaço Aberto and the sound system Estrela do Som. Ras Margalho and Enéas Motoca had the English language skills and the know-how of international travel, while Serralheiro and Ferreirinha were armed with knowledge of the musical tastes of São Luís’s reggae audiences. To the awe of the reggae masses, these four embarked on a complicated air journey to Kingston where they split into teams of two and spent several weeks buying an unknown number of records, bolstering their collection, and launching the next wave of hit songs in São Luís upon their return.¹⁶

The first Jamaica trip also yielded a pleasant shock when the voyagers, while searching for music, stumbled upon superstar singer Gregory Isaacs. They returned to São Luís with photographs of them with the singer and a special gift from the reggae legend—a hat that Isaacs himself had worn during a concert in England. The chance meeting with Gregory Isaacs, in conjunction with the failure of the Jimmy Cliff concert, opened the door for the intriguing possibility of an Isaacs show in São Luís. The next two voyagers to Jamaica, Dread Sandro (Sandro Abel Gonçalves Borges) and Natty Nayfson (Nayfson Henrique dos Santos), departed São Luís to much fanfare. They arrived in Jamaica on March 13th, 1991, with the primary purpose of buying as many rare reggae records as possible and the secondary purpose of meeting

¹⁵ Paulo Caribe, interview no. 1.

¹⁶ “A Concretização de um Sonho,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 24, 1990; Ferreirinha, interview.

Gregory Isaacs and negotiating a concert in São Luís. They were successful on both counts. Nayfson signed Isaacs to a contract for a concert and paid him half of the contract's value in advance, with the second half promised upon the realization of the concert.¹⁷

The reggae masses of São Luís anxiously awaited the arrival of their biggest idol Gregory Isaacs, the singer whose voice adorned the most hits on the dance floor, the “Pope of Reggae” as he was locally known. The Isaacs concert was the first large-scale production by the entrepreneurs of the much-maligned local reggae industry. Named Artmanha, the production company for the concert included Natty Nayfson and Luzico (co-owner of reggae club Toque de Amor) and had the backing of several sound system owners. Artmanha did an admirable job preparing for the concert. They ensured corporate sponsorship by the Antartica beer company and secured lodging for Gregory Isaacs and his band at the Hotel Praia Mar, another of the event's sponsors. They even convinced the city government to cede the municipal football stadium Nhozinho Santos for the concert on the night of Saturday August 3rd, 1991. Tickets were priced at 5% of the national minimum monthly wage, considerably lower than the ticket price for the Jimmy Cliff concert the year before, and organizers expected a crowd of at least 35,000.¹⁸

Then a series of unfortunate events transpired. First, Varig Airlines botched the mailing of the eleven air tickets to Jamaica, according to the version of the organizers, who then had to buy new tickets on a different airline. Then, Isaacs was barred from entering the United States at the Miami airport, missed his connecting flight, and returned to Jamaica. Artmanha rushed to

¹⁷ “A Concretização de um Sonho,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 24, 1990; Sandro Abel Goncalves Borges (Dread Sandro), interview by author, COHATRAC—São Luís, December 1, 2010; Natty Nayfson, interview.

¹⁸ “Gregory Isaacs: O Papa do Reggae na Jamaica Brasileira,” *O Imparcial*, August 6, 1991; various informants of the reggae scene, interviews with author, 2010. Calculation of the value of the ticket price was based on the Cr\$ 2,000 advanced purchase cost (the ticket cost Cr\$ 3,000 or 7% of the minimum wage on the day of the concert) and the national minimum monthly wage for September 1991 which had climbed to Cr\$ 42,000 thanks to inflation. Soleis, “Índices: Valores do Salário Mínimo,” http://www.soleis.com.br/salario_minimo.htm (accessed December 12, 2011).

commission a private airplane from a company in Belém to fly to Kingston and bring Isaacs and his band to São Luís. But when the plane arrived after midnight on the morning of August 4th—with the audience patiently waiting in the stadium—Isaacs emerged accompanied only by his wife. His band had not embarked from Jamaica with him. When Isaacs finally took to the stage, several hours late, cheers quickly turned to boos at the poor sound of Isaacs singing over his own records.¹⁹

The situation was about to take another bizarre turn. Initial reactions around the city were of disgust, contempt, and mostly anger, captured by commentators on reggae radio programs who lambasted the concert’s organizers and demanded compensation for ticket-holders. Artmanha had overspent their budget by Cr\$ 25-35 million and was determined to make their money back. To placate irate ticket-holders, they organized a concert for Saturday August 10th at the Espaço Cultural venue. This time, local band Tribo de Jah backed Gregory Isaacs and French Guyanese band Universal Youth opened the concert. The result was a mild success, but not nearly enough to recoup the financial losses. Artmanha stalled Isaacs’s departure for as long as they could, and finally, as Isaacs relaxed on the beaches of Ponta d’Areia and prepared to fly to Trinidad & Tobago for his next concert, several of the organizers, along with the Hotel Praia Mar and with the compliance of the police, hatched a plan to hold Isaacs hostage until he performed one more time in São Luís. Isaacs was arrested unceremoniously at the airport under the false pretense of having failed to pay his hotel bill. The police threatened to search his bags for marijuana and one police officer even called him a “maconheiro” in front of the press. Reggae fans in São Luís were shocked; one commentator condemned Isaacs’s arrest as racist, and others

¹⁹ “Jamaicanos Esperam o Ídolo: No Caminho de São Luís, Gregory Isaacs foi Expulso nos E. Unidos,” *O Imparcial*, August 4, 1991.

deplored the unscrupulous actions of the organizers as a poor advertisement for Maranhão. At the police station, Isaacs was given an ultimatum: stay and perform one more concert on the beach of Ponta D'Areia, or go to jail. Isaacs had no choice but to perform. Natty Nayfson of Artmanha defended the actions of the organizers, placing the blame on Isaacs for arriving without his backing band and asserting the organizers' right to recoup the lost money. Once again, what should have been a celebratory occasion left a bad taste in the mouth for everyone involved.²⁰

Despite the scandals, for the most part Artmanha emerged from the Isaacs concert unscathed. "While recognizing a certain amateurism on the part of the producers," argued Otávio Rodrigues, "they did what many people with higher financial capability did not have the courage to do."²¹ São Luís's reggae's entrepreneurs had gained valuable experience. Out of Artmanha, Natty Nayfson, Luzico, and José Eleonildo Soares of the sound system Itamaraty formed a new production company named Itanatty Produções. They proceeded to book Jamaican and British Jamaican reggae artists to perform huge, lucrative concerts in São Luís between 1992 and 1997. Concerts by Dennis Brown, Culture, Joe Gibbs, The Pioneers, Donna Marie, Eric Donaldson, and Stanley Beckford and the Starlights were most remembered by the people of São Luís. After a few years, even Gregory Isaacs swallowed his pride and returned several times to perform.²²

The story of the initial Isaacs concert, meanwhile, became the stuff of local legend. Some people never forgave the organizers for their mistreatment of Isaacs, but most could laugh about it in later years. The tale of how the concert organizers found Isaacs in Jamaica, invested heavily

²⁰ "Massa Regueira Lava a Alma hoje no Espaço Cultural," *O Imparcial*, August 10, 1991; "Gregory é Preso ao Tentar Fugir de São Luís," *O Imparcial*, August 24, 1991; "Gregory Isaacs: o Papa do Reggae na Jamaica Brasileira," *O Imparcial*, August 6, 1991; various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010.

²¹ "Gregory Isaacs: o Papa do Reggae na Jamaica Brasileira," *O Imparcial*, August 6, 1991.

²² Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010; "Chuva de Pedras no Nhozinho Santos," *O Imparcial*, September 2, 1995.

in the concert, were left in the cold by Isaacs's late arrival without his band, faced the anger of the public, and then concocted a plan to blackmail Isaacs into staying longer, somehow became a defining tale for the São Luís reggae scene. Perhaps it was because the story's themes of adventure, perseverance, misfortune, trickery, and redemption seemed to serve as a metaphor for the history of the local reggae scene itself, with its tales of how people obtained records secretly, hid the names of artists and songs, borrowed records and never returned them, stole records outright, and tried to outsmart one another in general.

The connection to Jamaica—however haphazardly—had been established. Now it could be truly explored.

4.3 CONNECTION TO JAMAICA II: VOYAGES, RECORDS, ARTIFACTS

Trips to Jamaica from Maranhão to buy reggae records quickly became more frequent. At least a dozen Maranhenses, possibly two dozen, traveled from São Luís to Jamaica in the early 1990s. They included sound system owners, travelers financed by sound system owners, and entrepreneurs trying to enter the reggae business. Only a select few individuals, however, could afford to make regular trips to Jamaica, or alternatively to Europe, to buy reggae records. Of these, five travelers gained the contacts and the know-how to purchase obscure records and established themselves as the professionals in this newfound trade, a cut above amateur travelers. These five—Dread Sandro, Chico do Reggae, Serralheiro, Natty Nayfson, and Junior Black—became the main sources of new music for reggae sound systems between 1991 and 1993. They combed through collections of old 7-inch records (called *bulachinhas* in São Luís) in Jamaican

houses and record stores, looking for rare music. The rarer the better; if there was only one copy of a potential hit record to be found, then it was guaranteed to be an exclusive record back in São Luís. The travelers were obliged to sell a certain amount of records to the sound system that sponsored their trip, but they usually came back with so many records that they were able to sell some to high-bidding rival sound systems and keep some for themselves.²³

Few sound systems could afford to pay the airfare and expenses of the professional travelers, on top of the high costs of the records themselves. However, the major sound systems, and two in particular, invested so heavily in the early 1990s that the sound system industry became stratified into two tiers: a tier of large, professional sound systems and a tier of smaller home-made sound systems. Leading the former group were Ferreirinha's sound system Estrela do Som and Pinto's (José Eleonildo Soares's) sound system Musical Itamaraty. The five professional travelers who purchased music in Jamaica and Europe also became important powerbrokers in the industry by 1993. They raised the prices of their wares by playing Ferreirinha and Pinto off against each other, exacerbating the concentration of wealth in the industry. Serralheiro, Natty Nayfson, and Junior Black's unique access to exclusive records also elevated their sound system brands to the upper tier of the industry and even allowed the latter two to launch brand new sound systems (named FM Natty Nayfson and Black Power, respectively).²⁴

The travelers functioned as mediators between Jamaica and Maranhão. They provided the linkage between the source of the records and sound systems, determining musical taste as they did so. Their travels also made them important cultural brokers. Their descriptions of Jamaica

²³ Natty Nayfson, interview; Dread Sandro, interview; Ferreirinha, interview; José Ribamar Leite Santos (Junior Black), interview by author, Bairro de Fátima— São Luís, October 20, 2010.

²⁴ Ibid.

and tales of adventure circulated around the reggae scene and allowed ordinary reggae fans to live vicariously through them. The travelers told stories of unscrupulous Jamaican taxi drivers, of Jamaican dancehall queens, of Kingston's shantytown streets, and of dreadlocked Rastas. They brought back photographs of humble shacks with back rooms filled with thousands of collectible records. Each physical trip yielded many material artifacts from Jamaica: cloth, souvenirs, autographs, and other memorabilia. The most valuable cultural products were the records themselves, mostly 7-inch singles but also LPs. Jamaican records began to circulate among the record collectors of São Luís, a category that included several dozen serious collectors and thousands who saw it as a hobby. By the mid-1990s these collectors even began to claim that the sum of their collections possibly outranked that of any other city outside of Jamaica.

The travelers also told stories of each other. They described how they tried to outsmart their rivals by thumbing through records as fast as possible to find hidden gems, and even resorting to taxi chases through Kingston in order to lose rival Maranhense collectors en route to a secret reggae archive. Serralheiro, famous for going to great extents to maintain his records secret and exclusive, was often the subject of these tales. One oft-repeated story described how the owner of a large record store in London unceremoniously kicked out Serralheiro for scratching and ruining duplicate copies of records so that other Maranhenses could not purchase them—as the story went, he used the cap from a bottle of Guaraná Jesus (a soft drink made in Maranhão) to do the deed! These stories brought Jamaica (and to a lesser extent, London, Paris, and Amsterdam) a little closer to Maranhão, because they reminded working-class Maranhenses who heard the stories of their own day-to-day adventures and exploits. Jamaicans, in the

descriptions of the travelers, were quite similar to working class Maranhenses or Brazilians: poor peoples that nevertheless found creative way to circumvent obstacles and enjoy life.²⁵

The so-called age of the *bulachinhas* (7-inch or 45 rpm records), then, roughly spanned the five years (1991-95) when a handful of travelers from São Luís bought rare Jamaican records released between the years of 1973 and 1979.²⁶ These songs were at best minor hits in their day and at worst forgotten recordings, some with dubious sound quality. They included obscure lovers rock covers of international pop hits, early dancehall tracks, and dub remixes. In 1994 the launching of the Brazilian Real at a favorable exchange rate to the dollar allowed sound systems to fund more trips; Junior Black and Dread Sandro recall how they would arrive after one trip, stay only a few days in São Luís, and then travel again. The professional travelers mined both smaller archives and large record stores, led by the mega-store Jet Star in London, until 1996 when they believed they had exhausted the sources of rare 1970s records that Ludovicenses might like (in the opinion of the travelers, at least).²⁷

Where could the reggae industry go for new exclusive records? Several Jamaican contacts that travelers had made abroad would once again provide the answer. During one of his travels, Chico do Reggae met Bill Campbell, a little-known Afro-Jamaican reggae producer based in England. Campbell saw a business opportunity in São Luís and quickly made a trip. Once in São Luís, Ferreirinha commissioned him to record an original CD for approximately R\$ 1,000 per song. From then on, Bill Campbell and his World Sounds studio began to produce one or two CDs per month for sale as exclusives in the São Luís market. Through Bill Campbell, in August 1997 Chico do Reggae also met Keith Williams, better known as Honey Boy Martin or

²⁵ Ferreirinha, interview; Dread Sandro, interview; Seu Antônio, interview; Junior Black, interview; Natty Nayfson, interview.

²⁶ Dread Sandro, interview; Junior Black, interview.

²⁷ Ibid.

Honey Boy, author of several lovers rock hits in the early 1970s in Jamaica. He performed in São Luís to much acclaim a month later; soon he was on a routine spending two weeks recording songs in England and one week in Maranhão selling them. Meanwhile, on one of his travels circa 1995, Junior Black met the legendary Jamaican producer Joe Gibbs who in turn introduced him to Norris Cole a.k.a. Sydney Crooks a.k.a. Luddy Pioneer, leader of the respected Jamaican rocksteady/reggae band The Pioneers. Gibbs and Cole each signed lucrative contracts to perform in São Luís, and upon seeing the scene first hand, together established a record company in Brazil with the very maranhense name Pedra Reggae Music.²⁸ Gibbs and Cole proceeded to sell their music as exclusives to sound system owners, especially to Pinto and Natty Nayfson, and also directly to consumers through their retail stores.²⁹

These partnerships opened the door for a new generation of Jamaican singers to chart (informally) in São Luís. Bill Campbell was a shrewd businessman who noticed certain sound features that Maranhenses liked (booming bass, sharp keyboard chop, etc.) and accordingly he produced the type of reggae that he knew Maranhenses would like. Johnny Orlando, Owen Gray, Donna Marie, Bill's brother Pete Campbell, and Bill himself—none of them famous Jamaican artists, none of them dreadlocked or Rasta—became household names in Maranhão and played regularly to crowds of several thousand. For one concert, Norris Cole brought along with him a young Jamaican artist named Sly Fox. Fox quickly established local connections and soon moved to São Luís to live and work as a musician. Meanwhile, a Guyanese reggae artist named Simon Brown who had performed in several cities in northern Brazil in the late 1990s also ended up in São Luís. Bill Campbell, Norris Cole, Honey Boy, Sly Fox, and Simon Brown all spent

²⁸ *Pedra*, in local jargon, meant a hit song. Literally, it meant rock or stone.

²⁹ Norris Cole, conversation with author, COHATRAC—São Luís, October 4, 2010; Aplonísio Paulo de Sá Filho (Paulo Caribe), conversation with author, João Paulo—São Luís, July 31, 2010; Honey Boy, interview; Junior Black, interview.

extended periods of time in São Luís, found girlfriends, and bought real estate with the aim to move there permanently.³⁰ Moreover, the Jamaicans (and one Guyanese) actively participated in São Luís's reggae industry producing music, organizing shows, and establishing personal relationships. By the late 1990s São Luís's reggae scene was officially transnational: Jamaicans had answered the call.

All the while, cultural organizations in São Luís also furthered the ideology of their city as the Brazilian Jamaica, although their ideas of Jamaica only partially overlapped with the actual Jamaica to which the traveling entrepreneurs had connected. The Center for Black Culture (CCN) chose the themes of reggae and Jamaica for the annual presentation of their carnival bloc Akomabu in 1991. It was a popular move, attracting youth who wore red, gold and green and danced reggae choreographies alongside African-style choreographies. Significantly, they were representing reggae as part of carnival, an institution that had come to define Brazilianness.³¹

Individuals in the reggae scene also began to organize dance groups themselves, starting with the Group Jah Rastafari in 1988 in the Coreia de Cima neighborhood. By September 1992 there were five dance groups in operation: Jah Rastafari, Afro Dance, Raça Reggae, Reggae Marley, and Grupo Odara Dance (all comprised Afro-Maranhense youth, the fifth comprised solely women). With African or Jamaican inspired clothing, the dance groups stated their desire to (according to reporter Gil Maranhão) “engage further with reggae ... to explore the vast archive of Afro-Maranhense culture, and to take on other social issues including the impeach Collor movement or the anti-drug messages.”³²

³⁰ Norris Cole, interview; Paulo Caribe, conversation; Keith Williams a.k.a. Honey Boy Martin (Honey Boy), interview by author, Anil—São Luís, October 27, 2010; Simon Brown, interview by author, Sacavém—São Luís, August 16, 2010.

³¹ Bloco Afro Akomabu, *Reggae: da Jamaica ao Maranhão* (São Luís: Centro da Cultura Negra, 1990).

³² Gil Maranhão, “O Reggae como Pretexto de Diversão,” *O Imparcial*, September 12, 1992.

Meanwhile, those social clubs that had resisted the working classes a decade earlier, including Casino Maranhense and Grêmio Líteo Português, began to open their doors to reggae events in search of elusive revenues in the mid-1990s. Institutions that catered mainly to elite audiences joined the city's reggae wave. The Odylo Costa Filho Center of Creativity, a flagship cultural institute in the city's historic center, hosted a traveling exhibition on Jamaican fashion in mid-1996 featuring flags, clothes, jewelry, hats, and more. By now the colors red, gold, and green were now identifiable as reggae's colors in São Luís. Even though the majority of the reggae masses did not wear the colors, it was becoming more common to dress in red, gold, and green. Wearing the colors in the 1990s still carried a negative stigma in some circles for their association with reggae; unlike stereotypes of the previous decade, however, the colors red, gold, and green were not constructed in terms of race or class. Whether elite, middle-class, working-class, black, or white, anyone could wear the colors.³³

Although the majority of *regueiros*, being poor, could only dream of making a pilgrimage to Jamaica, many of them found ways to dress, speak, act and ultimately self-identity as “Jamaicans (*jamaicanos*).” They identified with their musical heroes at a deep personal level, shown by their outpouring of emotion at the airport and at concerts. Common Maranhenses valued any material connection to Jamaica: a photograph with their idol, a keepsake from Jamaica, an article of clothing, etc. The travels of a few Maranhense businesspersons and the visits of several Jamaican musicians constituted a slim transnational link between Jamaica and Maranhão, but the material exchanges along that link were substantial. Jamaicans, meanwhile, felt a strong bond with Maranhense audiences. Even though they could only communicate with

³³ “Roupas Jamaicanas Vestem o Odylo,” *O Imparcial*, May 10, 1996; “Odylo Expõe Roupas da Terra de Jah,” *O Imparcial*, May 8, 1996.

their fans through broken translations, they were treated like royalty and received gifts during their stay. Jamaican visitors invariably echoed the common refrain of visitors that São Luís reminded them of Kingston, thereby reinforcing the perceived similarities between the two cities. The people of Maranhão now truly felt a connection to Jamaica.

4.4 DEBATES OVER JAMAICA BRASILEIRA II: MUSICAL SYNCRETISMS

The growing reggae scene especially intrigued musicians who played popular music for a living in São Luís. Already by the late 1980s, local musicians were thinking seriously about whether to incorporate reggae into their music. Some were cautious, especially those who believed their art helped to promote non-reggae cultural forms of Maranhão. Demand soon dictated supply, however. By the mid-1990s most local musicians had responded positively to reggae and discovered creative ways to incorporate elements of reggae into their art, thereby syncretizing Jamaica and Maranhão.

In the mid-1980s, the only live reggae acts in São Luís were Fauzi Beydoun and Banda Kartaz, who later joined together as the super-group Tribo de Jah.³⁴ From the start, neither Beydoun nor Banda Kartaz had any ideological resistance to playing reggae, on the contrary they embraced it. Beydoun arrived in Maranhão already grounded in blues, reggae, and other musical styles he had picked up while living in places like São Paulo and Côte D'Ivoire, while the working-class musicians of Banda Kartaz had heard and enjoyed reggae in their youth in São

³⁴ Tribo de Jah's consistency and persistence through the 1990s eventually established them as one of the most influential reggae bands across Brazil. For their national profile they mostly played Jamaican-style reggae but they did attempt to include some Maranhense or Maranhão-influenced songs.

Luis. As we saw in section 3.5, in 1986 Beydoun and Kartaz joined for a concept show entitled “2000 Years” in which they attempted to mix Maranhense musical styles with reggae. Other local musicians also began experimenting with reggae in the late 1980s—several keyboardists, for example, attempted to recreate the keyboard and guitar parts without much success, according to one musician.³⁵ Others, such as bassist Gerson da Conceição and drummer Moisés Mota, began to study the rhythm parts with more success. Afro-Maranhense musicians including Gerson, Moisés, and Tadeu de Obatalá were especially drawn to reggae given their interest in Afro musical forms. The scene was set for experimentation.³⁶

Singers and musicians of the nascent genre called Maranhense Popular Music (MPM), a subset of the Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) genre, also began to investigate reggae music in the late 1980s. By definition, these were artists that mixed local musical influences (mainly Boi) with regional and national styles (bossa nova, forró, Tropicália) and even foreign influences (rock). What about reggae: was it a foreign genre to be incorporated or rejected? Then there was the financial question: given the dominance of reggae in the industry, was it a smart business move to tap into the reggae market? For many MPM artists, after initial skepticism, the answer to the second question was yes. Aesthetically, it also made sense: Celso Borges, who introduced *Reggae Night* at Mirante Radio, argues that alongside Boi, reggae was the major influence on MPM that differentiated it from other contemporary musical trends in Brazil.³⁷

Cesar Nascimento and Beto Pereira, part of a newer generation of musicians looking to innovate the existing MPM canon, were among the first to warm to reggae. Nascimento, a Piauí-born singer-songwriter who had moved to São Luís, joined forces with Pereira, a musician

³⁵ Nato Macedo, conversation.

³⁶ Célia Sampaio, interview; Tadeu de Obatalá, interview by author, Ponta D’Areia—São Luís, May 16, 2010.

³⁷ Celso Borges, preface to *Guerrilhas: Artigos*, by Flávio Reis (São Luis: Pitomba, Vias de Fato, 2011).

generating a buzz in the local scene in 1988, in developing a set called “Reggae Gypsy” (*Reggae Cigano*). Once they played the set around the island in 1989-90 their careers took off. Nascimento and Pereira gave Maranhense popular songs a reggae twist, and Nascimento especially began to compose songs about the reggae scene in São Luís. By late 1990 Pereira embraced Jamaica wholly with a show called “Africa, Brazil, Caribbean” (*Africa, Brasil, Caribe*) that he performed around the island successfully for over a year.³⁸ Joining Pereira and Nascimento were a host of other MPM artists who wrote reggae-influenced songs in the early 1990s: Joãozinho Ribeiro, Maria Tereza, Celso Reis, Alê Muniz, Carlinhos Veloz, and notably, Mano Borges. It appears that by 1991-92, as São Luís was increasingly associated with reggae in the national context, it had become both fashionable and authentic to play reggae-influenced songs. Certain songs, like Beto Pereira and Maria Tereza’s 1991 song “Toque de Amor” that paid homage to the hottest reggae nightclub of the moment (situated at Ponta D’Areia), or Cesar Nascimento’s hit “Maguinha do Sá Viana” that sang of a particular dancehall queen known for her beauty and prowess on the dance floor, became hits in São Luís because they focused on the day-to-day reality of the sound system-led scene. The reggae club Cooperativo de Reggae in the historic center, with its cross-class audience base, became the primary space that invited MPM artists to play their music and incorporate reggae.³⁹

In the early 1990s, bands that played reggae music mostly explored alternative styles to the dominant style played by sound systems. In 1991-92, Banda Reprise, from a forró background, joined Cesar Nascimento in mixing reggae and forró. This fusion soon gained the

³⁸ “Africa, Brasil, Caribe,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, October 19, 1990; “O ex-Rabo de Vaca Beto Pereira canta Africa, Brasil, Caribe,” *O Imparcial*, June 9, 1991; Cesar Nascimento, conversation with author,

³⁹ “Onde Ir: Cooperativo Reggae,” *O Imparcial*, April 15, 1992.

nickname *reggae sanfonado* (accordion reggae).⁴⁰ They were, in part, picking up where reggae-influenced songs like Alceu Valença's "Morena Tropicana," Grupo Karetas' "Vento Norte," and Niceas Drumont's "O Gavião Vadio" had left off a decade earlier.⁴¹ Banda Reprise experimented with a forró form, a focus on the keyboard chop (played and accentuated by the accordion), playful lyrical themes, and bass and drum parts that straddled both reggae and northeastern styles. Reggae sanfonado spawned its own mini-scene by the mid-1990s; although traditional soundsystems and audiences still followed strictly Jamaican music, those Maranhenses who had spent time in the interior or loved forró music were open to the new hybrid style.

A collective of musicians and artists interested in Afro-Brazilian styles under the name of Banda Guetos (Ghetto Band) found another niche in 1993. Singer and percussionist Paulinho de Akomabu and singers Tadeu de Obatalá and Célia Sampaio, who knew each other from CCN events including the Akomabu carnival bloc, joined together with Cândido (a guitarist from Rio de Janeiro) and Saci Teleleu (a dancer who was performing with Beto Pereira) to form Banda Guetos. Like Tribo de Jah, Cesar Nascimento, Beto Pereira, and Banda Reprise, they also experimented with Maranhense popular songs in reggae rhythms, especially João do Vale classics like "Pisa na Fulô" and "Carcará." Guetos maintained an Afrocentric political project, differentiating them from other contemporary reggae bands: their first recordings, "No Babylon" and Celia Sampaio's "Black Power," reflected this project. They also built a following from

⁴⁰ Paulo Caribe, interview by author.

⁴¹ All three songs were released in 1982 by Brazilian performers as fusions of reggae with northeast Brazilian music. Although the songs were successful nationally (and in Maranhão), none of the performers pursued reggae style in future recordings. For more context see section 2.4.

scratch on the Escaderia, a wide staircase in the historic center on the Rua da Giz Street, by playing free open-air shows each Wednesday night that attracted thousands of fans at its peak.⁴²

In a similar vein to Banda Guetos was Mano Bantu, an all-star band formed in 1994 by several of the top musicians of the city—bassist Gerson da Conceição, drummer Moisés da Mota, and guitarist Edson Bastos. The other major reggae band formed around this time was Mystikal Roots. Apart from these half-dozen bands, a host of young middle class youth (some who started by playing in rock bands in the early 1990s) tried to switch over to reggae. Most of them did not meet with much success, however. Reggae audiences had grown accustomed to Jamaican songs and were not much interested in the guitar-heavy rock-reggae bands that were popular elsewhere in Brazil. Instead, inspired by sound systems, several bands went the route of “*pedra viva* (live dance-floor hit)” or “*radiola viva* (live sound system),” i.e. they played covers of sound system hits.⁴³ This strategy was a catch-22: local bands, try as they might, could not equal the musicianship of the Jamaican recordings that audiences loved, or the potency and crispness of the recordings when played on sound systems.

Still, the period of 1991-94 was a period of growth for reggae bands in multiple ways. As the number of reggae festivals and concerts by Jamaican singers rose, the need for top-notch professional bands arose. For example, Banda Reprise earned the opportunity to play alongside Tribo de Jah and Rio de Janeiro’s nationally famous band Cidade Negra in a highly successful festival in Vila Palmeira in September 1992 that also featured a number of major local sound systems plus the sound system Super Trovão Azul from Belém.⁴⁴ Especially after Tribo de Jah’s

⁴² Saci Teleleu, interview; Tadeu de Obatalá, interview by author; Célia Sampaio, interview by author; “Reggae Sai da ‘Guetos’ e invade a Praça,” *O Imparcial*, October 22, 1993.

⁴³ “Levando o Reggae para os Trópicos,” *O Imparcial*, October 13, 1993; “‘Living’ Solta Pedras na Escola Modelo,” *O Imparcial*, July 16, 1994.

⁴⁴ “Festival Transforma Parque da V. Palmeira em ‘Reggaedromo,’” *O Imparcial*, September 4, 1992.

break with the major sound system owners in 1994 (see section 5.4), the industry required competent backing bands. This opened the door for bands like Guetos, Mano Bantu, and Mystikal Roots to find work in the reggae industry. It was not an easy task; a live band was expected to mimic recordings exactly when playing covers (an impossible task) and to demonstrate the flexibility and quality to accompany a Jamaican singer. And while bands did rise to the occasion to play alongside sound systems, they still attempted to create their own separate spaces and audiences.

4.5 DEBATES OVER JAMAICA BRASILEIRA III: BLACK ACTIVISTS VS. THE LETTERED ELITE

The appearance of terms like “Brazilian Jamaica” and “Brazilian reggae capital” in the national media had important repercussions in São Luís. For many in the city, it sparked a process of discovery. Of those who already participated in the scene, many felt a new sense of pride in identifying as a “*regueiro*,” hitherto strictly a negative term. Activists who had been publicly defending the reggae scene felt vindicated. Black intellectuals pushed the envelope, suggesting that reggae was the destiny of Afro-Maranhenses in a quest for positive racial self-identification.

Discussions between members of the Center for Black Culture (CCN), who we learned about in the previous chapter, produced some of the early theories on the significance of reggae for the politics of race in São Luís. From 1987 onwards CCN publicly defended black Maranhenses targeted by police at popular events including reggae events. Activists at CCN were especially enraged by the demonization of nightclubs like Pop Som and Espaço Aberto in

newspapers. They saw the scandals as a twin opportunity: one, to defend reggae and engage its critics in a public discussion about the larger context of race and racial prejudice in São Luís, and two, *conscientizar*, that is, to educate the reggae masses about their Afro-Brazilian roots.

As the CCN activists researched the history of reggae, they suggested that the discrimination faced by the reggae scene in São Luís “was exactly what revolted Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and the mystic Bunny Wailer, in the underground ghettos of Kingston.”⁴⁵ CCN’s intellectuals felt that one way or another reggae had been operating as “a form of liberation [for] the black majority.”⁴⁶ Could this also lead a political identification, spurring them to identify and organize as Afro-Maranhenses? The Center surely hoped so. Following the first Espaço Aberto scandal, they hosted the event “Reflection on Reggae as an Instrument of Black Liberation” on October 24th, 1987. Relying on Fauzi Beydoun for a loose translation, CCN presented their audience with the lyrics of several Jamaican songs of rebellion:

Everyone is crying out for peace
None is crying out for justice
I don’t want no peace
I need equal rights and justice⁴⁷

If you are a big tree
We are a small axe
Ready to cut you down⁴⁸

In their quest, CCN activists decided to bet on the figure of “Bob Marley, the black knight of the apo-calypto” to be “a type of superhero—Reggae-Man—to the city’s [reggae] aficionados, in a musical battle against prejudice.”⁴⁹ The irony was that while Bob Marley was massively popular

⁴⁵ “Reggae: Marginalidade ou Preconceito?” *O Imparcial*, October 28, 1987.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Peter Tosh, “Equal Rights,” in *Equal Rights*, CBS 81937, LP, 1997.

⁴⁸ Bob Marley & The Wailers, “Small Axe,” Upsetter 3921-1, 7” single, 1973.

⁴⁹ “Reggae: Marginalidade ou Preconceito?” *O Imparcial*, October 28, 1987.

worldwide in the 1980s, few of his songs could be heard in local nightclubs.⁵⁰ Strictly in terms of identifying with audiences, CCN would have done well to choose Jimmy Cliff, Gregory Isaacs, or even John Holt as their “Reggae-Man.”

The police invasion of Espaço Aberto in November 1989 gave black movement activists another opportunity to educate the public. One such activist, author Maria Raimunda Araújo, wrote an article titled “From Drumming to Reggae Dances, the Repression Continues” in which she drew parallels between the prohibition of drumming, dancing and singing by free blacks and slaves in Maranhão in 1866, the experiences of black people elsewhere in the African diaspora, and the attack on Espaço Aberto. To illustrate the connections, she quoted Bob Marley:

Everytime I hear the crack of a whip
My blood runs cold
I remember on the slave ship
How they brutalize the very souls⁵¹

For Araújo, dancing to the reggae rhythm was itself an integral part of diasporic black resistance because, in her words, “[reggae has] a rhythm that keeps the body grounded and the spirit on faraway trips.” Reggae’s message of “the black struggle for political liberation on all continents,” according to Araújo, did reach the people of Maranhão, because:

Even those who don’t translate the message literally, understand it, for this message reaches “*regueiros*” of the urban periphery and the rural zone through sonar vibrations that, overcoming linguistic barriers, invade their bodies and souls each time they hear songs, such as those of Bob Marley, that speak about the mental slavery of poor and black people worldwide.⁵²

⁵⁰ While translations of Bob Marley’s lyrics wowed activists, some of his famous songs were too guitar-heavy to dance too, and other songs did not have the simpler form that couples on dance floors preferred. As a result, a large section of the reggae masses held other Jamaican singers, especially Gregory Isaacs and Jimmy Cliff, in higher esteem.

⁵¹ The Wailers, “Slave Driver,” in *Catch A Fire*, Island SW-9329, LP, 1973.

⁵² Maria Raimunda Araújo, “Dos Batuques aos Bailes de Reggae a Repressão Continua,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, December 9, 1989.

Araújo's appeal for Maranhenses to recognize and embrace their blackness was reinforced by her repeated emphasis on another Bob Marley lyric: "none but ourselves can free our mind."⁵³

In early 1990, three activists of the black movement who doubled as researchers and journalists, Cláudio Farias, Jorrimar Carvalho de Sousa, and Ademar Danilo joined to publish the reggae scene's first newsletter, *O Tambor*. *O Tambor* carried histories of reggae, information about the reggae scene, and advertisements for sound systems alongside articles on black culture and black liberation. Although *O Tambor* only lasted two issues, it helped make the ideological argument that São Luís and Jamaica were linked through transnational blackness. Collectively, the research into reggae and Jamaica by black activists and the resulting publications helped bring to fruition a number of cultural events that furthered the material links between Maranhão and Jamaica, the Center for Black Culture's reggae-themed carnival bloc in 1991 being the most visible of these.⁵⁴

By the end of 1990, with the first voyages to Jamaica, it became apparent that the reggae scene was only going to expand, and with it, the idea that São Luís was the *Jamaica Brasileira*. Some residents of the city, including much of the white elite, were appalled. National recognition of their city as the "Brazilian Jamaica," to them, was far worse than the phenomenon of reggae itself. Since the 19th century, the elite of São Luís had attempted to compensate for the economic decline of their class and their region by constructing an image of their city as a cultural stalwart. Throughout the 20th century they had advertised themselves as a people who spoke the most refined Portuguese, wrote poetry to rival ancient Greece, and lived in a city founded by the French. They had also downplayed the African and indigenous cultural heritage of Maranhão for

⁵³ Bob Marley & The Wailers, "Redemption Song," in *Uprising*, Island Records ILPS 9596, LP, 1980.

⁵⁴ *O Tambor* 1, nos. 1-2 (February, June 1990), PCJS; Bloco Afro Akomabu, *Reggae: da Jamaica ao Maranhão* (São Luís: Centro da Cultura Negra, 1990).

most of the 20th century, with some success. Now, the idea of their city as the “Brazilian Jamaica” threatened the image they had so painstakingly constructed.

One tipping point was the February 1991 launch of the nightclub Cooperativo de Reggae in the heart of the historic downtown area of Praia Grande. In the 1980s the city had renovated some of the historic downtown’s 17th century houses and given incentives to local small businesses, in order to attract tourists and provide them a safe cultural space. Cultural events in the heavily policed area of Praia Grande regularly drew middle class and elite patrons and discouraged working class youth. So when Cooperativo de Reggae opened, it unsettled local business owners, who quickly met in a neighboring restaurant to discuss possible strategies to fight the reggae nightclub. Even as the business owners complained about the loud music they simultaneously railed against the type of people that attended the nightclub.⁵⁵ Cláudio Farias wrote a scathing article accusing the Praia Grande business owners of only wanting blacks in their “chic” neighborhood if they were working there.⁵⁶ By entering the cultural spaces of the elite, reggae nightclubs were challenging the racialized and class-based social organization of the city.

Debates raged on publicly in 1991-92 as the lettered elite of São Luís lashed out at what they saw as the “Jamaicanization” of local culture to the detriment of European influences. Ex-city councilman and professor of Portuguese language and literature Ubirajara Rayol led the charge:

At a moment when the media in Maranhão no longer calls our São Luís the “Brazilian Athens” but instead uses the nickname “Brazilian Jamaica,” I urge that such a serious and deplorable offense be repudiated... there are no known accomplishments by Jamaica in the fields of literature, art and science. What is

⁵⁵ “Altura do Som gera Polêmica e Preconceitos na Praia Grande,” *O Imparcial*, April 14, 1991.

⁵⁶ Cláudio Farias, *O Imparcial*, April 19, 1991, quoted in Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 126.

known about Jamaica is the struggles of their people against the English colonizers, who had to repress various rebellions but finally conceded independence to the island... On the other hand, ancient Greece continues to be a point of reference for western culture...⁵⁷

Rayol's high esteem for "the fields of literature, art and science" and casual dismissal of anti-colonial struggles and rebellions might have seemed more suited to the Europhilic age of the 1890s rather than the 1990s. And Rayol ignored the parallel to Maranhão's own history of popular rebellion, led by the Balaiada uprising in the 1830s. Yet these were not oversights, they were conscious choices. Rayol's vision of Maranhão was a whitened one; he did not disparage the black population of Maranhão as much as he rendered them invisible next to the region's elite as his ancestors had done a century earlier. Still, while those ancestors believed in the whitening project, Rayol seemed to know he was fighting a losing battle. He continued:

[In its time,] among cities, the influence of Athens grew and expanded, and she attracted intellectuals from all around... Athens profoundly transformed and developed along with the disciplines of arts, literature, politics, and philosophy... Many centuries later, in São Luís do Maranhão, there was a congregation of poets and intellectuals unprecedented in such a small city... this is why São Luís, quite justifiably, came to be known as the Brazilian Athens, so recognized and celebrated in all of Brazil... however, ignominy has since infected the city, profaning its culture, defiling its literary and artistic past... soon "Canção do Exílio" (Song of Exile), the poem written by a 20-year old Gonçalves Dias with such love for Maranhão, that became a symbol of nationalism, will be forgotten ... and so many other "Athenians" whose creative actions analyzed human life and interpreted Brazilian reality... I protest... against this insult to the memory of Maranhão.⁵⁸

With this passage, Rayol's frame of reference is refocused from the international to the national. And suddenly we see his primary worry: the symbolic place of Maranhão in Brazil. The lettered elite decried the "ignominy" of the "profaning" of the poetic tradition, but the lettered elite was

⁵⁷ Ubirajara Rayol, *O Estado do Maranhão*, April 16, 1991, quoted in Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 127.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

used to decrying this locally. Much worse was the potential change in the way observers from the southeast might perceive São Luís, from seeing the city as the Brazilian Athens to seeing it as the Brazilian Jamaica. Both were imagined constructions, of course, and nobody walking the streets of São Luís would ever confuse it for Athens. Yet the Maranhense elite had been able to maintain this myth in other parts of Brazil until reggae came along. Newspapers in São Paulo and Campinas in the southeast of Brazil even reprinted Rayol's article, suggesting that the debate over São Luís as Athens or Jamaica carried some relevance in those cities.⁵⁹

The Center for Black Culture (CCN), not surprisingly, was diametrically opposed to Rayol's position. Longtime activist Magno Cruz wrote CCN's response in which he emphasized several cultural formations of Maranhão that Rayol ignored:

Reggae, professor Ubirajara, is a form of cultural resistance by black people in the battle with European (Greco-Roman) ethnocentrism. The majority of black Brazilians without access to academic knowledge (writing and reading) developed other forms of expressing their intellectuality, searching out music, dance, song etc.—the things that racists denominate “folklore,” “popular culture” and so on... the cultural identity of reggae is the same as Boi, as tambor-de-crioula, as Divino; the “invasion” of reggae is only dangerous in the minds of those who do not wish to understand it as an intrinsic element of the cultural identity of the people.⁶⁰

Attacking Rayol for downplaying Boi, Tambor de Crioula and Divino was perhaps the easy part. Rayol's elitism was, by 1991, an extreme position in a society that already for two decades demonstrated wide acceptance of those syncretic cultural formations (with their African, indigenous and European elements). If Ubirajara Rayol saw Jamaican reggae as inferior, Nilton Ornelas saw it as something much more dangerous. He wrote to the newspaper *O Imparcial* in 1992:

⁵⁹ Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*, 127.

⁶⁰ Magno Cruz, *O Estado do Maranhão*, April 24, 1991, quoted in Silva, *Da Terra da Primavera*, 128.

A different type of virus is going around Maranhão [] but its final effect is the same: death. Except in this case, it is the death of a whole culture. Those that survive will have to suffer from this irreversible evil. We need to immediately stake out our position, now, vaccinating the population and treating those already infected. This virus comes from Jamaica and circles our island under the tired name of Reggae. Our people were simply forced to enter into that monotonous rhythm they were constantly hearing, without any choice in the matter, contaminating themselves, forgetting what good music was.⁶¹

What spurred Ornelas to describe the infectious reggae rhythm so vehemently? His medical metaphors of viruses and contagions resonated with the language used by some to describe urban changes, especially the numerous landless squatters and sprawling peripheral neighborhoods associated with reggae music.

Ornelas' article, unsurprisingly, elicited indignation from reggae's defenders. The newspaper published a reply by Silvia Black, a sociologist and social worker who identified herself as an activist in the black movement. Silvia Black furthered Magno Cruz's argument:

Maranhão and Jamaica have many similarities... the roots of Afro-America are diverse but the rhythms are related. Black people and Afro-indigenous people identify with these rhythms, even though they may be expressed in different languages—what's important is the musical message.⁶²

What can we make of the claim, made by Magno Cruz and Silvia Black, that reggae was a weapon for black people engaged in a battle against European ethnocentrism? Given reggae's connection to Rasta and pan-Africanist ideologies, this was theoretically possible, and as global reggae scholars have shown, true in many places outside of Maranhão. For Maranhão, however, it was wishful thinking, except with reference to the black movement activists themselves. The

⁶¹ Nilton Ornelas, "O Vírus Oportunista (ou o Mal do Reggae)," *O Imparcial*, March 23, 1992.

⁶² Silvia Black, "O Vírus Oportunista (ou o Mal do Reggae)," *O Imparcial*, April 13, 1992.

reggae masses did not see themselves in a racial war, much less one driven by their beloved dance music.

Magno Cruz's and Silvia Black's other argument, that reggae was "an intrinsic element of the cultural identity of the people," would prove to be a crucial point of debate in the following years. That Maranhenses liked dancing to the reggae rhythm was indisputable: the question was why? Ornelas had expressed distaste at bass-heavy rhythms for purely aesthetic reasons, and in this critique he was not alone; people living near popular nightclubs had been complaining about loud, penetrating sounds for years (as seen in Chapter Three with Pop Som and Espaço Aberto). A hospital near the Nova Geração nightclub in the Itaqui-Bacanga area began complaining in November 1991 that the loud sounds were disturbing its patients;⁶³ similarly, businesses in the city's historic center challenged the nightclub Cooperativo de Reggae on the high decibel levels emanating from the house sound system.⁶⁴ These concerns were real. But among club-goers, the concerns fell on deaf ears. Loud, bass-heavy sounds were not only aesthetically pleasing to reggae audiences, they also represented technology and modernity for much of the working class. Bass-heavy reggae played on high-wattage sound systems was both a loud assertion of ownership over shared urban space and an alternative musical ideal from that promoted by the Europhilic elite.

Maranhenses liked Jamaican music for its aesthetic qualities and for how it made them feel and dance. Still, Ornelas, like others of the Maranhense lettered elite, could not accept it for one main reason: it was not Brazilian. Accordingly, his solution to eradicate the "Jamaican virus" was to force the people of Maranhão to revert to a mixture of regional and national culture:

⁶³ "Barulho Causado por Clubes de Reggae Prejudica Doentes," *O Imparcial*, May 10, 1992.

⁶⁴ "Altura do Som gera Polêmica e Preconceitos na Praia Grande," *O Imparcial*, April 14, 1991.

Do the people actually like it? Even if the response is yes, it is questionable. If places where reggae is played are always full... isn't it because the people so choose? False. "It's the habit that makes the monk," as the old saying goes. It is daily and constant massification that induces, conditions and creates habit. A child born in China will speak Chinese, as will a child born in Holland speak Dutch. If this same child in China or Holland listens only to samba, then samba is all the child will sing. Therefore, bring on the *sambas*, the *bossa novas*, the *baiões*, *forrós* and anything else of our own. Bring on *bumba-boi* and the *tambores* to resuscitate our language and revive our soul. And with regard to titles, let us cease to be Jamaicans. Let us once again be Athens. Athens is worthier of glory.⁶⁵

Ornelas's nationalistic plea to listen to Brazilian music alone was, by 1992, out of touch with the reality of musical life in Maranhão and elsewhere in Brazil. Yet we begin to see some common ground between Ornelas and the black movement of Magno Cruz and Silvia Black. They agreed that the Afro-Maranhense arts of Bumba-meu-Boi and Tambor de Crioula were important cultural traditions (let us ignore, for now, Ornelas's contradictory reference to Athens). In their debate, Ornelas and Black also agreed in their dislike of the commercial strength of the reggae industry. Black complained about the growing power of reggae industry's leaders (a "faceless mafia," in her words) and their failure to empower the reggae masses economically and politically; Ornelas, meanwhile, lamented that a musical scene indigenous to Maranhão could not emulate reggae's commercial successes.⁶⁶

The years 1991 and 1992 represented, perhaps, the peak of anti-reggae sentiment among the lettered elite. But it was becoming clear that resistance was futile. Led by strong commercial profits, reggae had already taken over the city. The argument of certain lettered elites that reggae was an alien culture because Jamaica and Maranhão lacked historical linkages was ideologically motivated, racially freighted, and was being rendered moot as travelers between Maranhão and

⁶⁵ Nilton Ornelas, "O Vírus Oportunista (ou o Mal do Reggae)," *O Imparcial*, March 23, 1992.

⁶⁶ Silvia Black and Nilton Ornelas, "O Vírus Oportunista (ou o Mal do Reggae)," *O Imparcial*, April 13, 1992.

Jamaica developed real linkages. However, financial difficulties faced by institutions and practitioners of local cultural traditions such as Boi and Tambor, in contrast to reggae's commercial success, were equally real. The debate on reggae's place in local society would soon turn in that direction.

4.6 DEBATES OVER JAMAICA BRASILEIRA IV: MARANHENSE CULTURE WARS

In 1993-94, business was excellent for nightclubs and sound systems. Many small businesspersons, especially mobile vendors, also participated in the profitable informal jobs that came with the reggae industry. Other popular music forms like forró were also finding local success. The loudest debate in São Luís now surrounded the question of state government and city government funding. Several influential musicians, practitioners of Boi, and other artists appealed for public funding in order for them to keep up with the reggae industry. People within the reggae industry had a different view. Complaining of continuing discrimination, they believed that *they* deserved assistance from the state and city, or at least to not be persecuted with noise ordinances and silence laws. Over the course of the 1990s, defenders of Maranhense culture heightened their calls for financial protection against reggae's dominance. Ultimately, defenders of the reggae scene would counter their adversaries by claiming that reggae *was* Maranhense culture.

Local musicians had differing opinions on the role of reggae in their city's music scene, but most—whether by choice or by professional necessity—experimented with elements of

reggae. By the mid-1990s many MPM (Maranhense popular music) artists came to depend on Jamaican style in their compositions and even advertised themselves nationally as a product of “Brazil’s Reggae Capital.” Still, many musicians were concerned about a negative impact on other local genres. Beto Pereira was one who steadily maintained independence from the reggae industry. Before the “Reggae Cigano” show with Cesar Nascimento, Pereira had spent a decade playing genres such as samba, xote and forró, notably in the group Rabo de Vaca with Josias Sobrinho. Even at the height of his reggae hit “Toque de Amor” he reiterated that “Maranhense singers need not record in the styles of reggae or Boi in order to sell,” as long as they made good music.⁶⁷ Then in 1994 Maranhense samba superstar Alcione spoke out more strongly against reggae’s dominance of São Luís. Alcione joined poet Ubiratan Souza in the production of a video documentary called *Capital do Boi* (Boi Capital) meant for broadcast on radio and TV. Capital do Boi exalted local Maranhense culture and warned against foreign cultural influences.

The president of the Madre Deus neighborhood’s long standing Boi school, Herbert de Jesus Santos, was perhaps the most outspoken advocate of state financial support for Maranhense culture in order to compete with the reggae industry. Following the production of the Capital do Boi documentary, he finally saw the possibility of significant change via the state ministry of culture:

We have grown weary warning people of how “reggae” is pressuring Maranhense Popular Culture and music. Ubiratan [Souza] and Alcione have played their parts. Now it only remains for us to pray that other singers and composers of our land forge themselves into a formidable battalion to rescue a section of our youth, that conscious media persons valorize good local music, and that certain rascals stop stealing “Capital do Boi” tapes from radio stations. Capital do Boi has been persecuted ever since its creative birth in the recording studio, with the objective of preventing the greater public from hearing and analyzing the poetic

⁶⁷ “O ex-Rabo de Vaca Beto Pereira canta Africa, Brasil, Caribe,” *O Imparcial*, June 9, 1991.

composition that is already the Anthem of Resistance of Maranhense Culture Against Jamaican Oppression.⁶⁸

Santos, an Afro-Maranhense himself, could not be dismissed by as a racist by the CCN. His complaints of reggae's invasion of the spaces previously occupied by Boi were not extreme views. Indeed, even some of reggae's staunchest defenders were shocked to see Boi celebrations in the early 1990s accompanied by reggae sound systems playing at their normal volume (drowning out the live percussion of Boi processions).⁶⁹ But Santos drew battle lines:

The most exalted "jamaicaphiles" already feel angry when folkloric groups (*Bois*, etc.) celebrate the June festivities in sacrosanct fairgrounds, places where they should not be [but are] bombarded with reggae songs/stones ("*pedras*"). The agents of reggae do not even return to us those ingenuous souls that are not in their rightful place...⁷⁰

Santos cut a contradictory figure in São Luís's cultural politics. As an outspoken leader for Bumba-meu-Boi he positioned himself in defense of Afro-Maranhense culture and in alignment with some of the preminent musicological voices in Brazil.⁷¹ Yet as the leader of a traditional Boi school in the Maranhense capital, he preferred to align himself with the elite of the city and against the majority of the city's Afro-Maranhenses. He represented a certain cultural elite of the neighborhood of Madre Deus—not an economically rich neighborhood, but a traditional one nonetheless with a reputation of housing bohemians of the middle class and working class. In similar fashion to Nilton Ornelas, he answered reggae with a nationalistic and anti-technology appeal against foreign culture:

⁶⁸ Herbert de Jesus Santos, "Reggae 'Pressiona' Cultura do MA," *O Imparcial*, August 13, 1994.

⁶⁹ Célia Sampaio, interview.

⁷⁰ Herbert de Jesus Santos, "Os Tambores de São Luis Reagem," *O Imparcial*, August 13, 1994. The "ingenuous souls" he writes about in this context appear to be the youth who participated in Bumba-meu-Boi schools and ceremonies but then migrated to the reggae festivities, many of whom likely did not return with the same frequency to the Boi schools, i.e. "their rightful place."

⁷¹ See section 1.2.

When music played on the radio is 70% foreign music, and when TV encourages the propagation of alien culture, whether we like it or not, our own culture is broken, transformed, destroyed. It is evident that the goal of this technological and cultural dependency is economic subordination and the emptying of our riches, including our intelligence. The merchants want us to consume goods from abroad, because then the profits will automatically go abroad as well. There is a close relationship between cultural submission and the economy. In the worst case scenario, one can have a meltdown, suggesting the influence of hallucinogens, or the influence of an unscrupulous person who leaves weaker ones around him in a frenzy. That's when they begin "tripping" (*viajando*) by yacht in the Sea of the Caribs, "sailing" among the Caribbean islands, "landing" by hang-glider in a place called Jamaica, all because they want to imagine that all of that exists in Maranhão.⁷²

Santos's metaphors of hallucinogens simultaneously indicted the sound technology of sound systems and the working class culture of nightclubs with its reference to mind-altering drugs. What's ironic is that the tambores he defended relied on repetitive, hypnotic beats to captivate their audiences, just as reggae did. Such aesthetic critiques of reggae did not resonate with the general population anyway; the majority of the population who enjoyed Bumba-meu-Boi or tambor de crioula were also fans of reggae and did not see a contradiction in a *Boi* procession immediately followed by a sound system party.

Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA) anthropologist Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva provided a counter argument to Santos. Having completed his book on reggae and black identity in the mid-1990s, he participated in local debates over culture. Silva arrived at the opposite conclusion, that reggae and Boi were not diametrically opposed but part and parcel of the same popular scene. He theorized that Maranhenses were "syncretizing [reggae] positively in a relationship of reciprocity with regional cultural roots." From his 2007 book:

An example of this new [reciprocity] is the black community of Damásio, a so-called "contemporary *quilombo*" [maroon colony] of descendants of slaves in

⁷² Herbert de Jesus Santos, "Os Tambores de São Luis Reagem," *O Imparcial*, August 13, 1994.

Maranhão, that organized a group of reggae dancers in order to reinforce the community history of resistance. In other rural black villages such as Frechal, Santa Rosa, Itamatatúia etc. reggae is a constant presence in parties, together with other musical rhythms such as merengue, forró, bolero, tambor-de-crioula, dança do coco, etc. Even participants of bumba-meu-boi groups recognize the importance or significance of reggae as a component of Maranhão's cultural identity, as we see in their song lyrics.⁷³

Silva further developed his argument by contrasting reggae and Bahian axé music, an Afro-based popular music style that over time had become commercialized across Brazil. Santos and others of the Madre Deus cultural scene had strongly criticized axé music as, like reggae, a cultural invasion that blocked local manifestations, especially after 1995 when axé descended upon São Luís annually in the form of Marafolia, an off-season imitation of the Bahian carnival geared mostly towards the elite and middle class. Silva agreed with Santos on the negative effects of Marafolia. But he suggested that reggae had a longer history in Maranhão, was more accepted by the majority of urban and rural Maranhenses, and could be expected to be heard at any popular gathering, unlike Bahian axé music that, despite being Brazilian, was more of an outside imposition in the view of Maranhenses.⁷⁴ Silva's position, shared by many in the Center for Black Culture (CCN), signaled a 180-degree turn since the mid-1980s when many in CCN saw Afro-Bahian music as the cultural ideal and reggae as a foreign invading genre.

Appeals against reggae by cultural leaders (although not economic elites) such as Herbert de Jesus Santos of Madre Deus's school of Bumba-meu-Boi came at a time when older local cultural institutions were suffering financially. Policy makers agreed that something needed to be done to prop up cultural organizations. In August 1994, state official Antônio José Muniz lamented that "alien cultures"—reggae in particular—were replacing local cultural traditions.

⁷³ Silva, *Ritmos da Identidade*, 192.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-87.

“We are not against reggae,” argued Muniz, “but we believe that our own culture, our values and our roots must be preserved. We do not want elements of our cultural heritage to end up in the graveyard.”⁷⁵ State officials agreed in principle to support pillars of local culture: Bumba-meu-Boi, tambor de crioula, festa junina, divino, poetry collectives, music schools, and carnival. And eventually, under Roseana Sarney who assumed the office of governor at the start of 1995, many of these promises received some state government support.⁷⁶

Still, the reggae industry did not feel any negative affects. As the city’s biggest cultural phenomenon, the reggae scene sustained numerous ancillary enterprises including radio stations and event venues such as samba schools (in the off-season) and social club ballrooms. Sound systems even rejuvenated lagging folk celebrations by attracting a larger audience in anticipation of the sound system music to follow. Reggae also lent itself to a vibrant support economy, providing employment to porters to transport sound systems, electricians to work on glitches, security guards, and mobile vendors selling drinks and food. Except for travel expenses and the cost of purchasing records in Jamaica and Europe, São Luís’s reggae industry was investing its profits locally. The success of the reggae industry prompted several businesspersons to contemplate investments in a possible reggae-based tourism sector. Reggae had become vital to the economic and cultural fabric of the city, especially for sectors of the working class. And with Jamaica now constantly present both in the imagination and in the reality of everyday life in São Luís, ultimately most of the city’s population accepted the denomination of *Brazilian Jamaica*.

⁷⁵ “A Cultura do Povo na Mesa de Discussão,” *O Imparcial*, August 16, 1994.

⁷⁶ See section 5.3.

4.7 THE LIMITS OF JAMAICA BRASILEIRA I: THE RASTAS

To fully appreciate the connections between Brazil and Jamaica, we must also look at the limits of those connections. Perhaps the single largest omission from Jamaican reggae culture after it was re-codified in Maranhão was the lack of Rastas and Rastafari beliefs.

The CCN carnival bloc Akomabu in February 1991, featuring *regueiros* dressed in the colors red, green and gold dancing the local reggae style, was overall a success. CCN decided to designate one wing of the carnival bloc that year as the dreadlock column, and accordingly some participants braided their hair to play the part. The turnout for the dreadlock column was disappointing compared to other columns, according to one participant, highlighting what CCN activists saw as the major problem with reggae in São Luís: that the majority of *regueiros* loved to dance to reggae music but failed to engage with the political messages of the music. Still, a handful of Maranhenses appeared in the dreadlock column that year calling themselves Rastas and manifesting their spirituality publicly. Who were these Rastas?⁷⁷

Horace Campbell, in his book “Rasta and Resistance,” writes that roots reggae arose as the vehicle for Rastafari spirituality.⁷⁸ Yet when reggae emerged into the public eye under that name in São Luís in the late 1980s, there were almost no dreadlocked individuals in the scene, unlike any other reggae sub-culture worldwide. On January 1st, 1991, four individuals from CCN interested in the Rasta ideology and lifestyle founded the Rasta Reggae Study and Outreach Group or GEDRAR (*Grupo de Estudo e Divulgação Rasta Reggae*). GEDRAR’s meetings, which featured as many as 15-20 people at times, brought together discussions of personal issues (spirituality, diet, lifestyle) with discussions of political issues in the reggae scene (inequality,

⁷⁷ Herbert Reis (Ras Herbert), interview by author, Centro Histórico— São Luís, October 15, 2010.

⁷⁸ Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance*.

violence, ideology). This, the only Rasta group of the “Brazilian Jamaica,” had its ups and downs and its triumphs and failures. Significantly, they brought a fresh perspective as they analyzed the reggae scene. Although GEDRAR was allied to CCN and the black movement, their spiritual connection to reggae gave them slightly different views and critiques of the scene and industry.

Ras Herbert Reis recounted the history of GEDRAR to me and shared a number of the organization’s past communications with other Rasta groups and individuals across Brazil. Inspired by a presentation on Garveyism and Rastafari by a visiting speaker Hermógenes Almeida in 1990, several Maranhenses had begun to investigate Rasta spirituality. Four of them, José de Jesus Campos, Francisco Carlos Pereira, Herbert Reis, and Ivo Fonseca founded GEDRAR following a meeting in Campos’s house in the neighborhood of Monte Castelo. From an undated recruitment flyer:

GEDRAR
Rasta Reggae Study and Outreach Group
“A positive movement for *regueiros!*”⁷⁹

We know there are people and groups out there concerned and sensitive about the reggae movement who want to raise consciousness and politicize *regueiros* regarding the positive cultural message of the reggae movement. GEDRAR is also concerned about these issues. As we search for greater harmony within the community of *regueiros*, we hereby invite you to participate in a meeting on the reggae movement and to share our common knowledge and positive vibrations through reggae music and Rastafari faith.

GEDRAR sponsored events such as documentary showings, lectures, and discussions, always with the goal of encouraging members of the reggae scene to think politically and socially about reggae, and not just to enjoy the music for pleasure. One issue they debated in detail was the crucial problem of violence and reggae: they asked why Maranhense youth would resort to

⁷⁹ GEDRAR, *Rasta Reggae Study and Outreach Group* (São Luís: GEDRAR,?), PCRHR.

violence while they were enjoying music in a nightclub. Their finding was that society failed to give due respect to poor Afro-Maranhense youth, and any perceived slight at a nightclub—easy to come by when drinks, potential lovers, and friends were in close quarters—might elicit a violent response in an attempt to win some respect. Their solution, which they pressed sound system owners on, was to provide an atmosphere of safety and respect within nightclubs rather than tough security that would only serve to heighten tensions and irritate unappreciated youth in attendance. Ras Herbert Reis was proud of GEDRAR's achievements, principally the meetings with sound system owners that resulted in them moving towards sparing the rod, which Reis argues was an important component of the reggae industry's gradual move from informal to formal sector.⁸⁰

In 1997 the members of GEDRAR joined together under the name Cultural Rastafari Brotherhood (*Irmandade Cultural Rastafari*) to produce a newsletter, *Voz do Gueto*, and also corresponded with other Brazilian Rastas who joined for a conference in Rio de Janeiro. Membership, which at its highest was no more than twenty individuals, waned in the late 1990s and the group went into hiatus until Ras Herbert resuscitated the newsletter a decade later. Despite their self-identified successes, GEDRAR wasn't able to build a community of people living a Rasta lifestyle. Ras Herbert wondered if the core members hadn't gone too far and scared away potential members by observing a strict Ital diet and insisting on wearing hair in dreadlocks. However, he also argued that the underlying reason for GEDRAR's failure to galvanize the reggae masses lay with the reggae masses themselves. Although members of the reggae scene loved the music, only a tiny minority was interested in participating in an

⁸⁰ Ras Herbert, interview.

oppositional socio-political organization. GEDRAR's movement of black solidarity and spirituality, despite its efforts at bringing people together in the nightclub, stayed small.⁸¹

4.8 THE LIMITS OF JAMAICA BRASILEIRA II: URBAN GROWTH AND SEGREGATION

CCN, GEDRAR and other groups, even as they strove to fuse blackness and reggae within one political ideology, hoped that reggae would catch on with white Maranhenses. Meanwhile, sound system owners, as Ferreirinha's statements from the 1988 conference suggest, were eager to de-racialize reggae to reduce discrimination and build audiences. And working-class audiences in nightclubs in the city's peripheries did not turn away youth from the middle class or elite, but nor did they welcome them with open arms—a natural response, since peripheral and elite youth rarely shared cultural spaces.⁸² With the rise in reggae's popularity from 1990 to 1996, there was a tendency for middle-class and elite youth to find themselves alongside working-class youth, socializing and dancing together. To a certain extent, reggae acted as a centripetal force, creating cultural spaces for cross-class, cross-racial interactions and bringing different groups of people together, thereby promoting racial understanding. This trajectory of the reggae scene coincided with messages of racial equality found within the music itself.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*.

At the same time, however, the city's changing social geography acted as a centrifugal force, pulling people apart. The corridor from Centro to Anil between the two rivers had already been overcrowded with peripheral neighborhoods by the 1970s, and traditional elite neighborhoods like Monte Castelo, Centro, Anil and São Francisco found themselves side-by-side with squatter areas in the 1970s and 1980s, heightening elite fears (as we saw in section 3.1). Meanwhile, areas south of the Bacanga River and areas to east of the city in the municipalities of Paço do Lumiar and São José de Ribamar housed waves of poor immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s. By the late 1980s, elites started to move northwards to the corridor between Ponta D'Areia and Olho D'Agua. This northern coastal stretch quickly became prime real estate thanks to beaches and seclusion from the urban center. Apartment buildings rose in the neighborhoods of Renascença, Calhau, and Vinhais, facilitating a wave of elite flight and white flight. Further east lay the planned areas of COHAMA, COHAB, and COHATRAC, which became middle-class neighborhoods for those looking to buy a house away from the crowded peripheries but who could not afford a place in Calhau. Taken together, these housing developments and newly settled areas re-segregated the population of São Luís by class in the 1990s, coinciding with the peak of the reggae scene. (See Figure 6)

Elite youth were more likely to attend nightclubs and reggae events in the historic center or near the beach, areas considered safe for elites. Circa 1990, elite youth frequented nightclubs like Espaço Aberto and Coqueiro, two bars in the area of the Retorno de São Francisco. While Espaço Aberto was beginning to draw a cross-class audience, Bar do Coqueiro (situated towards the beach) was seen as a more predominantly elite hangout. The launch of nightclub Cooperativo de Reggae in 1991 in the historic center gave elite and middle-class youth another option (as discussed in section 4.5), and as the historic center grew, in 1993, reggae band Banda Guetos

began a weekly Wednesday event on the central stone staircase, both called the *Escadaria*, that drew youth from all socio-economic levels (as discussed in section 4.4). Reggae entrepreneur Tony Baldéz also relocated his establishment *Roots Bar* to the historic center in 1995. Every other reggae nightclub in every other neighborhood drew youth from the periphery and was identified as such. The beach in Ponta D'Areia, a beach frequented by the working class, had a series of large open spaces for reggae soundsystems to play to working class audiences (led by the club Toque de Amor that joined Espaço Aberto as the premier reggae club of the city circa 1991-92).

By the mid-1990s, every nightclub or popular cultural space was in practice segregated into one of two groups—elite or working class. There was, however, one important exception: the nightclub Espaço Aberto. As seen in section 3.6, Espaço Aberto's public even before the events of November 1989 had included middle class patrons. After November 1989, Espaço Aberto captured the imagination of youth of all classes as an exciting and rebellious place to revel on Friday nights. The nightclub was located just a couple of blocks down the hill from the São Francisco circle and easily accessible by bus. This too helped to attract a city-wide audience that increasingly in the 1990s included residents of all types of neighborhoods—elite, middle-class, and working-class. Most importantly, the club's local audience base was itself cross-class. Elite and middle class youth from São Francisco and Renascença rubbed shoulders with working class and slum youth of adjacent Ilhina in Espaço Aberto. Ironically, it was the proximity of elite and peripheral neighborhoods that had threatened Espaço Aberto's survival in 1987-89.

Now, for the same reason, it made the nightclub uniquely attractive to reggae fans of all economic backgrounds.⁸⁴

Maintaining this mix was not without contradictions. Espaço Aberto's owner Ferreirinha attempted several measures to attract elite youth. In late 1991 or early 1992 he contracted a private security company to replace their predecessors, a group of heavy-handed guards who had relied on corporal punishment, in the hopes that more elite youth would feel less intimidated. Through his radio program and other media outlets he argued that Espaço Aberto provided a safe atmosphere. Several of my informants who frequented Espaço Aberto from 1993 to 1996 do recall a relative level of safety inside and just outside the club. With Espaço Aberto's rising fame as the city's premier reggae club, sons and daughters of the city's elite and even the younger Sarney generation frequented the club. Jimmy Cliff himself paid a surprise visit to Espaço Aberto during his stay in São Luís in November 1990.⁸⁵

When Ferreirinha and his resident selector Walterlino entered into conflict in January 1992, the sound system Estrela do Som needed a new selector. At this time a young man named Antônio José Pinheiro worked behind the scenes, mounting and connecting the electronic hardware of the sound system. Antônio José had worked as a selector in a nearby club so Ferreirinha decided to give him a chance to play records for Estrela do Som. Antônio José's taste in music was different from the mainstream; along with radio personality Tony Tavares, he was one of the few selectors in São Luís enjoyed upbeat, dancehall-influenced tunes, and he found a way to incorporate them into his sequence on the dance floor. He also enjoyed roots and lovers rock songs that other deejays considered too fast for the slow dancing that had come to

⁸⁴ Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, interview; Tarcisio Selektah, interview.

⁸⁵ Silvinho Pop, conversation; Ferreirinha, interview.

predominate the reggae scene over the previous decade. His competitors generally played songs without talking or interfering, but Antônio José dared to rap into his microphone (known as toasting or chatting in Jamaica) and dance around his console. Some in the reggae scene later labeled him the “U-Roy of Maranhão,” after the originator of the Jamaican toasting style that inspired the rise of genres such as dancehall in Jamaica and hip-hop in the United States. Most agree today that Antônio José created a more dynamic alternative to the role of the selector (or *discotecário* in Maranhão)—that of the deejay.⁸⁶

As Espaço Aberto attracted people of different classes and races, it was the figure of the deejay Antônio José that seemed to bring people together, put them at ease and relieve their worries. Everyone who was a part of the reggae scene in the mid-1990s remembers Antônio José’s contagious cheerfulness and constant playfulness. Moreover, he was devastating at the audio controls, winning five deejay competitions in a row (1992-96) at the helm of Estrela do Som’s vaunted primary sound system, Estrela 1. At the height of his popularity, it was common to see elite, middle class, and even foreign youth enjoying his musical sequence on the floor of Espaço Aberto.

Still, upon entering Espaço Aberto, dancers often had to negotiate where they chose to stand or dance, based on a spatialized hierarchy that was linked in part to race. Espaço Aberto in the mid-1990s was divided into three sections. The first section upon entrance was a wide, descending staircase, second was the lower pit area where the sound system was placed, and third was the outdoor area towards the back with a centrally placed cashew tree. Those that

⁸⁶ “Dono do Espaço Aberto agride mais uma vez o discotecário e é chamado por delegado,” *O Imparcial*, February 28, 1992; Egidio Pacheco, “Morte de ‘Lobo’ deixa reggae de luto,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Dj era Estimado pelos Regueiros,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Desastre Mata Fera da Estrela do Som,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 18, 1996; “Muita Emoção no Enterro de Antônio José,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996; Marcos Vinicius, “A Viagem do Lobo,” *Só Reggae* column, *Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996; Marcos Vinicius (narrator), documentary produced on the anniversary of Antonio Jose’s death, DVD, date unknown.

frequented the club remembered how elite youth would often hang out on the staircase, close to the entrance/exit, until youth from the lower area ascended the staircase to request a dance. The lower area was also segregated, as the home crowd (youth from nearby Ilhinha) occupied the space near the sound system and youth from other peripheral neighborhoods were grouped slightly further away. Clashes between rivals from different neighborhoods had been common in Espaço Aberto, but Antônio José's presence—at least according to the memory of *regueiros*—changed that. The deejay's ability to call elite youth down to mingle with peripheral youth of all different regions created an open-minded party atmosphere in the lower areas of the club and reduced the probability of violence.⁸⁷

Then in September 1996, as described in the first pages of this dissertation, Antônio José lost his life in a tragic car accident after a four-night marathon at the controls of Estrela 1. Antônio José's wake at Espaço Aberto united rival sound system owners and attracted tens of thousands of reggae fans, prompting radio personality Luis Fernando to declare on his show that “if someone were to one day write the history of reggae in São Luís, they would surely have to divide it into two distinct parts: one before DJ Antônio José Pinheiro and one after him.”⁸⁸ As that statement was true about his life's achievements, it would also prophetically be true about his death's consequences. The embodiment of cross-class and cross-racial collaboration had been lost. Espaço Aberto fell into a temporary rut and many reggae fans of all classes and races stopped participating in the scene after the death of their favorite deejay.⁸⁹ Espaço Aberto's fortunes continued to spiral downwards in the late 1990s. Several violent incidents in and around

⁸⁷ Ricardo Arqueólogo, conversation with author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, October 19, 2010.

⁸⁸ Egídio Pacheco, “Morte de ‘Lobo’ Deixa Reggae de Luto,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Dj era Estimado pelos Regueiros,” *O Imparcial*, September 18, 1996; “Desastre Mata Fera da Estrela do Som,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 18, 1996; “Muita Emoção no Enterro de Antônio José,” *Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996; Marcos Vinícius, “A Viagem do Lobo,” *Só Reggae, Jornal Pequeno*, September 19, 1996.

⁸⁹ Sandra Ferreira, interview.

the club coupled with noise complaints and repeat violations of the Silence Laws forced the club to close temporarily. Espaço Aberto was renovated and reopened as a mostly closed space with a roof by the end of the 1990s. By then, the sound system Estrela do Som was profiting much more from playing at events around the city, and the club Espaço Aberto lost its crowds.

Elite youth, meanwhile, left Espaço Aberto and began to frequent new hip spaces such as the loosely structured Bar do Nelson on the elite tourist beach of Litôranea.⁹⁰ Reggae sound systems and reggae bands were also experiencing a major divergence; sound systems maintained their clout with the working class masses while bands played mostly to elite and middle class audiences. Moreover, new cultural extravaganzas geared mainly towards the elite and middle classes of the northern beach areas were in the works. None was bigger than Marafolia, featuring carnival-style bands from Bahia and modeled after off-season carnival parties in other cities of Brazil. The project won the support of Roseana Sarney's state administration and major corporate sponsors and debuted in 1995. Elite fans of reggae that preferred to avoid the reggae masses could enjoy sound systems and other reggae-influenced genres at Marafolia without venturing outside their comfort zone.⁹¹ By the late 1990s, the cultural spaces of elites and working classes were once again segregated.

The reggae scene had undergone a remarkable transformation from isolation in working-class peripheral neighborhoods in the mid-1980s to become a city-wide, cross-class phenomenon by the mid-1990s. Yet reggae could not conquer the extreme structural inequalities of class and race in São Luís. These inequalities persisted in the 1990s thanks in large part to the booming housing market in new neighborhoods with clear class profiles. As the city expanded northwards

⁹⁰ Nelson Luis Mattos de Melo, interview by author, Calhau—São Luís, August 3, 2010.

⁹¹ "Show: Águia Pousa em SL sem Medo de ser Feliz," *O Imparcial*, July 26, 1995.

into high-priced real estate areas near the beach and westwards into middle-class suburbs, elite youth began to develop alternative cultural scenes. Espaço Aberto was more than the exception to the rule; its heyday was truly a moment of hope, that the reggae scene might overcome the class divide. Deejay Antônio José's death in September 1996 marked the end of this era of hope. Reggae had promoted the unity of white and black, poor and rich, but could not solve the socio-economic divisions between them. After 1996 *Jamaica Brasileira* would develop as two separate sub-scenes: one for the elite and one for the working class.⁹²

⁹² The mid-1990s were also the beginning of a rift between an older and a newer generation of reggae fans within the working class itself, so *Jamaica Brasileira* was really developing as three separate sub-scenes. These divisions were clearly visible only a decade later, though. See section 5.6 as well as Freire, "Que Reggae é Esse?"

5.0 “SERIOUS REGGAE BUSINESS”: POLITICIANS AND MUSIC UNDER DEMOCRACY, 1990-2010

The *massa regueira* and the general population of Maranhão awoke on the morning of Monday, October 2nd, 2006 to a new reality. That morning they discovered the identities of their congressional representatives for the next four years. Alongside some well-known names re-elected for the umpteenth time were a few surprises, including José Eleonildo Soares. Soares was a diminutive man; his short stature (under five feet) had earned him the name of “Pinto” (baby chicken). His office in the city council derived from the humble sound system Musical Itamaraty that he had inherited from his father in the 1980s and had built into a leader in the reggae scene and industry in the 1990s, in addition to his shrewd negotiation skills. Still, on that October morning, Soares surpassed all expectations. The two-term city councilman from São Luís had received a shocking 90,000 votes, including the most votes for any candidate for federal congress in the city of São Luís. “Pinto” would now go to Brasília as a federal congressman from Maranhão, becoming reggae’s first political figure elected to national office.

How do we interpret Soares’s rise from small business owner to federal congressman? More broadly, how do we explain and evaluate reggae’s relevance in the sphere of electoral politics? The central question of this chapter is how the reggae industry and reggae scene became important political players in the post-dictatorship period in the city of São Luís and in the state

of Maranhão. Who were the reggae politicians, what were their platforms and strategies and how did they perform once in office? Did political representation for the reggae masses improve their socio-economic conditions? How did the reggae politicians relate to their constituencies—through mechanisms of participation, mechanisms of patronage, or some combination of the two? Has the reggae scene’s electoral success translated to any tangible political, social or economic gains for the working classes of São Luís?

I argue that in the 1980s, despite being “underground” and in the informal sector, the reggae scene participated significantly in local political patronage networks. In the early 1990s, reggae’s popularity and connections with media made it a political player. As the industry moved from the informal to the formal sector, the place of reggae became a central question in debates on entertainment and tourism policy in state and city governments. Ademar Danilo, a prominent figure in the reggae scene, ran successfully for city council in 1992. Danilo’s respectable showing in a 1994 attempt to join the federal congress appeared to suggest that a reggae voting bloc was taking form. Others in the reggae scene, especially those linked to radio, ran for political office. However, competition between sound systems, the industry’s financial independence, and popular distrust of politicians kept the potential “reggae vote” divided in the 1990s. Despite these limitations, I argue that at several key moments, certain sectors of the reggae scene joined together to assert citizenship and exercise their political will in the 1990s.

By the turn of the century, Jose Eleonildo Soares a.k.a. Pinto da Itamaraty had built a business empire and decided to try his hand in politics. Buoyed by his election to the city council in 2000, Soares built a formidable political machine and inspired other sound system owners to emulate his model. Although Soares and others were elected based on their ability to represent a popular cultural scene, it was a representation based on consumerism rather than a connection of

ideas. Soares and other sound system owners used their sound system brands to gain political capital around the city and, even more effectively, in municipalities in the state's interior. Sound system events served both to build alliances with small-town mayors and to connect directly with voters. Simultaneously, rivalries and alliances within the reggae scene translated into political rivalries and alliances. In essence, Soares's business model benefited his political aspirations, and his political alliances in turn benefited his sound system brand. In return, voters/audiences received cultural goods but no political participation nor socio-economic gain. This model was not limited to reggae in Maranhão; in the 2000s, sound system owners in the *electrobrega* scene in Pará and the *baile funk* scene in Rio de Janeiro were elected to office using similar campaign mechanisms, suggesting a new trend in Brazil.

Although reggae is known worldwide for its revolutionary messages, these messages for the most part did not translate into political transformation in São Luís. As we have seen, these messages were not prominent in the experience of reggae's most devoted fans here (CCN efforts notwithstanding). So we should not be surprised that revolutionary or revindicationist ideologies were largely absent from these politicians' platforms or policies once in office. Nevertheless, many in the city's reggae scene hoped that reggae's oppositional political potential would be channeled into policies that aided the working-class majority, of which the *massa regueira* was one highly visible part. Yet reggae candidates never agreed upon any contract with their audience/voting base, nor did they make promises to improve that base's economic or social condition. I argue that once in office, reggae's politicians—especially after 2000—behaved like traditional political elites of Maranhão. Most relied on patronage, organizing free or inexpensive reggae concerts and sound system parties in addition to offering direct financial gifts in the months leading up to elections. This clientelism echoed practices long identified with Brazilian

populism, without any of the substantive policy-level shifts that some populist moments have seen. Certain groups (selectors, bands, sound systems), especially by the mid-2000s, criticized the politics of the larger soundsystems and formulated different relationships with their audiences. Some of these groups continue to hope to realize reggae's potential for a transformative, participatory political culture. However, the bulk of the reggae scene at the time of writing remains co-opted into a financially lucrative system of political patronage led by sound systems and their owners.

5.1 THE TOP-DOWN POLITICAL TRADITION IN MARANHÃO

Reggae burst onto the political arena of Maranhão in November of 1990 at a crucial moment: the contentious gubernatorial election that narrowly maintained the oligarchy of José Sarney, his family, and his allies. Maranhão's politics at the turn of the 20th century stood as the most extreme example of the oligarchic tradition in Brazil. Observers to the south often ridiculed Sarney as a vestige of an archaic past at odds with the country's new democratic direction. Yet Sarney, at the time of writing, remains the most powerful member of the Brazilian Senate. How was this political empire built? What kind of political playing field was the reggae scene entering? This section looks at the formation of politics in the city of São Luís and the state of Maranhão within the broader national contexts of dictatorship and subsequent transition to democracy. Despite several important moments when grassroots movements made an impact, especially in the city of São Luís, the dominant trend in Maranhão's post-war politics remained top-down control.

During the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945), Getúlio Vargas' chosen appointee from the treasury, Paulo Ramos, governed the state of Maranhão. In 1946 Vitorino Freire, a bureaucrat with close ties to Vargas, was elected to the federal congress and the following year successfully ran for the senate. Freire quickly built a network of political cronies by appointing them to administrative posts and simultaneously expanded his influence in Brasilia and within the PSD (Social Democratic Party). Freire's grip on power was characteristic of an era in Brazilian politics (1945-1964) when "governors and regional party politicians ... linked local patronage machines to party-electoral organizations," which in turn linked to Vargas's corporatism on a national level.¹ To make matters worse, while most state capitals elected their own mayors, São Luís's mayor was an appointee from the governor's office. The farcical gubernatorial elections of 1950 that implanted Freire's candidate unopposed provoked a popular urban rebellion in São Luís known as the Strike of 1951, forcing Freire to call in troops of military police from other states. Although Freire and his allies would maintain political control until the mid-1960s, a new generation of opposition leaders had emerged in São Luís. São Luís even gained the nickname *ilha rebelde*, or the rebel island.²

By the early 1960s Maranhão was increasingly the scene of organizing by farmers and workers in a variety of groups including the Peasant Leagues and rural labor syndicates. During two decades under Vitorino Freire, the western region of Imperatriz grew along with federal highway projects while the central region of Médio Mearim benefited from growth in the *babaçu* palm oil and rice sectors; the rest of Maranhão's rural economy, however, was stagnant. São

¹ Kurt von Mettenheim, *The Brazilian Voter: Mass Politics in Democratic Transition 1974-1986* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 71.

² Among these leaders were communist organizer Maria Aragão, journalist José Ribamar Bogéa and state congressman Neiva Moreira. Bogéa and Moreira operated the oppositionist newspapers *Jornal Pequeno* and *Jornal do Povo* respectively. See Benedito B. Buzar, *O Vitorinismo: Lutas Políticas no Maranhão de 1945 a 1965* (São Luís: LITHOGRAF—Indústria Gráfica e Editora Ltda., 1998).

Luís' textile factories were forced to close and the state's maritime trade had plummeted leaving much of what was left in the control of contrabandists.³ Maranhão's economic stagnation had left the state's social indicators among the lowest in the nation. Economic and social upheaval was not limited to Maranhão, however. President João Goulart faced pressure from multiple sectors of society when, in March 1964, military generals capitalized on that turmoil with a coup d'état followed by a purge of leftist politicians across the country.⁴

Despite the curtailing of the democratic process at the federal level, it appeared as though politics in São Luís, ironically, might become more democratic. At the city level, congressman Eptácio Cafeteira succeeded in amending the constitution so that the people of São Luís could elect their own mayor (the election was carried out in 1965 and won by the popular Cafeteira himself). In Brasilia congressman José Sarney, a Freire protégé who had switched to the opposition UDN (National Democratic Union), gained the support of president Castelo Branco. And at the state level, disagreements over the succession of power had splintered the PSD in Maranhão and weakened Vitorino Freire's control. The 1965 gubernatorial election pitted Sarney's coalition of opposition parties with the promise of a "New Maranhão" (*Novo Maranhão*) against two rival factions of the PSD (Senator Freire's and Governor Newton Bello's). Sarney won and assumed office in front of a huge crowd at the Dom Pedro Plaza in the center of São Luís.⁵

³ Joan Botelho, *Conhecendo e Debatendo a História do Maranhão* (São Luís: Forte Gráfica, 2007), 186-87, 225-26; Barros Ribeiro Júnior, *Formação do Espaço Urbano de SLZ: 1612-1991*, 2nd ed. (São Luís: FUNC, 2001), 76-83; Melo, *História do Maranhão*, 155-58.

⁴ Botelho, *Conhecendo e Debatendo*; Melo, *História do Maranhão*.

⁵ Buzar, *O Vitorinismo*, 487-499; Luis Carlos Barreto and Zelito Viana, *Maranhão 66*, directed by Glauber Rocha (Rio de Janeiro: Mapa Filmes, 1966), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0JJPFruhAA> (accessed May 1, 2010); Wagner Cabral da Costa, *Sob o Signo da Morte: o Poder Oligárquico de Vitorino a Sarney* (São Luis: Edufma, 2006); "Sarney Sacode a Ilha pela TV," *Jornal Pequeno*, July 27, 1965.

Despite a series of unpopular reforms in the late 1960s, Sarney constructed a formidable political empire. First and foremost, he maintained extremely good relationships with the top generals in Brasilia and participated in the national leadership of the ruling party, ARENA. Second, he appointed a bevy of civic and judicial bureaucrats to create a pervasive, loyal statewide network of administrators, as Vitorino Freire had done before him. Third, he eliminated much of his competition by aiding the dictatorship in their purge of rival politicians (such as Cid Carvalho and Renato Archer) and leftist leaders (such as Manoel da Conceição and Neiva Moreira). Fourth, he acquired media companies and built a personal propaganda machine.⁶ Sarney moved to Brasilia as a senator in 1971, making way for the state administrations of governors Pedro Neiva Santana (1971-75), Nunes Freire (1975-79), and João Castelo (1979-82), all chosen by the electoral college in Brasilia, and Luis Rocha (1983-86), elected by the public. These four administrations oscillated between tacit support and strong allegiance to Sarney but never openly challenged his political hegemony, except when Castelo broke with him in 1982 just before leaving office.⁷ Moreover they all furthered Sarney's and the dictatorship's agenda of large infrastructure projects and development led by foreign and out-of-state investment. (See Figure 7 and Table 1)

⁶ Costa, *Sob o Signo da Morte*.

⁷ Maria Virginia Moreira Guilhon, "Sarneyismo no Maranhão: os Primórdios de uma Oligarquia," *Revista de Políticas Públicas* 11, no. 1 (2007): 12-17; Pedrosa, *A Questão Agrária no Maranhão*, 17-20.

Table 1. Political Office Holders of Maranhão, 1960-2007⁸

Year ^a	Mayor of São Luís	Governor of Maranhão	Senators		
1960	Costa Rodrigues	José de Mattos Carvalho ^b	Vitorino Freire ^c	Sebastião Archer ^d	Eugênio Barros ^e
1961		Newton Bello ^f			
1962					
1963					
1964			Vitorino Freire	Sebastião Archer	
1965					
1966	Epitácio Cafeteira ^g	José Sarney ^h	José Sarney	Alexandre Costa	Clodomir Millet
1967		Antonio Dino			
1968	Vicente Fialho ⁱ				
1969					
1970		Pedro Neiva Santana			
1971	Roberto Macieira		José Sarney	Alexandre Costa	Henrique de La Rocque
1972					
1973					
1974					
1975	Bayma Junior				
1976					
1977	Ivar Saldanha	Nunes Freire			
1978	Lia Varella				
1979	Mauro Fecury ^j		José Sarney		
1980		João Castelo			Luis Fernando

⁸ Sources include Melo, *História do Maranhão*; Buzar, *O Vitorinismo*; Guilhon, “Sarneísmo no Maranhão”; Câmara de Deputados, “Conheça os Deputados,” <http://www2.camara.leg.br/deputados/pesquisa> (accessed July 25, 2012); Senado Federal, “Legislaturas Anteriores,” <http://www.senado.gov.br/senadores/periodos/legisAnt.shtm> (accessed July 25, 2012).

^a Years do not necessarily correspond exactly to calendar years; months were rounded up or down.

^b Governor from 1957 to 1960, a turbulent period in which his government was paralyzed for half the time. Mattos Carvalho benefited from electoral fraud perpetrated by Vitorino Freire and was subject to legal challenges, including by vice-governor Alexandre Costa who had broken with Vitorino.

^c Senator from 1947 to 1970.

^d Senator from 1955 to 1970.

^e Senator from 1959 to 1966.

^f Newton Bello was allied to Vitorino Freire but broke with Freire in order to run for governor in 1960. Bello also broke with the PDS and looked for alliances elsewhere including UDN. This created fissures in the PDS that culminated in Sarney taking power from Archer (Freire’s group) and Bello (supported by Ivar Saldanha and other federal congressmen) in the 1965 election.

^g Elected by direct vote (although voting was for a minority of the population). Institutional Act no. 3 curtailing the direct vote for governors and mayors of capitals was promulgated soon after.

^h Elected by direct vote (although voting was for a minority of the population). Institutional Act no. 3 curtailing the direct vote for governors and mayors of capitals was promulgated soon after.

ⁱ Fialho was indicated for the post of mayor by Sarney, not elected.

^j Fecury was indicated for the post of mayor twice.

1981	?				Freire
1982	?	Ivar Saldanha		Alexandre Costa ^k	
1983					
1984	Mauro Fecury		Américo de Souza		João Castelo
1985		Luiz Rocha ^l	Bello Parga		
1986	Gardênia Gonçalves				
1987		Epitácio Cafeteira			
1988		João Alberto	Edison Lobão	Alexandre Costa	
1989	Jackson Lago				
1990					
1991		Edison Lobão	Magno Bacelar		
1992					
1993		Ribamar Fiquene		Bello Parga	Epitácio Cafeteira
1994	Conceição Andrade ^m				
1995		Roseana Sarney		Alexandre Costa	
1996			Edison Lobão	Bello Parga	
1997	Jackson Lago				
1998					
1999		Roseana Sarney			João Alberto
2000					
2001	Jackson Lago				
2002	Tadeu Palácio	Zé Reinaldo			
2003					
2004		Zé Reinaldo ⁿ			
2005			Edison Lobão	Roseana Sarney	
2006	Tadeu Palácio				
2007		Jackson Lago	Lobão Filho	Mauro Fecury	Epitácio Cafeteira ^o

^k A “bionic senator” which means that he was appointed to this mandate (his second), not elected.

^l First governor to be elected (not appointed) since the dictatorship.

^m With the PT in the 1980s; during her 1992 campaign (against João Castelo) she was allied with governor Edison Lobão (and Sarney) in 1992; she broke with Roseana Sarney for the 1994 gubernatorial campaign, instead supporting the candidacy of Epitácio Cafeteria. Also switched parties a bunch of times: from PT to PDT in 1993/4, from PDT to PSB in 2003. Still, she was allied with Jackson Lago from 1994 to 2009, but in 2009 she broke with Lago and joined Roseana Sarney’s coup government. Expelled by the PSB as a result, she then joined Sarney’s PMDB.

ⁿ Reinaldo was vice-governor under Roseana Sarney. When Roseana finished her term limit of two consecutive terms, Reinaldo was elected governor with her support. He then broke with her in May 2004.

^o Each time his name appears, Cafeteria was allied with a different group.

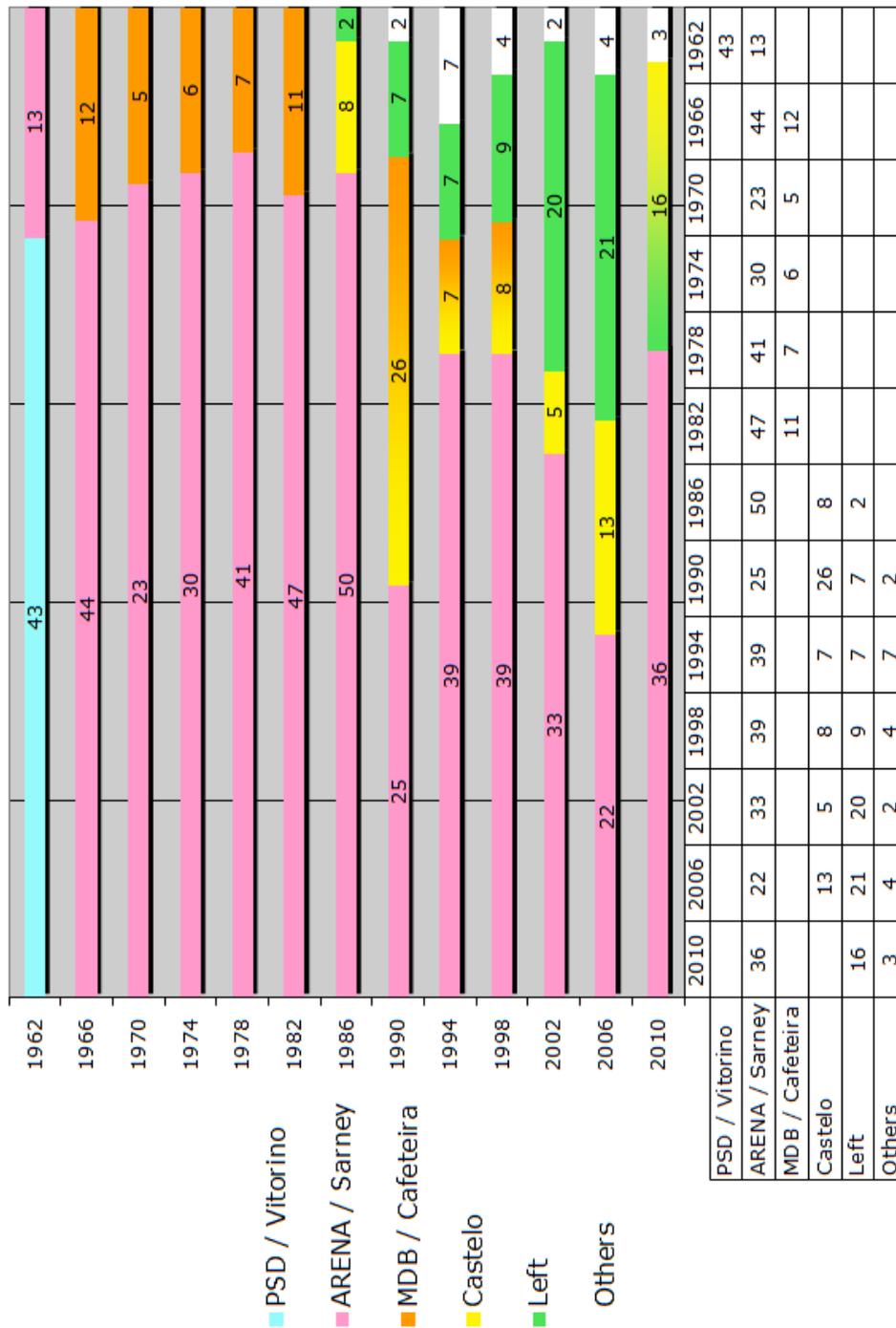


Figure 7. Elected Congresspersons in Maranhão (both Federal and State), 1962-2010⁹

⁹ Costa, *Sob o Signo da Morte*; Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, “Eleições Anteriores,” <http://www.tse.jus.br/eleicoes/eleicoes-antieriores> (accessed July 25, 2012); Tribunal Regional Eleitoral do Maranhão, “Eleições Anteriores,” <http://www.tre-ma.jus.br/eleicoes/eleicoes-antieriores> (accessed July 25, 2012); Buzar, *O Vitorinismo*; Meireles,

São Luís's reputation as the rebel island was severely tested by the twin oppressive weights of Sarney's political empire and the military dictatorship. Few leaders stood against Sarney in the 1970s, among them Freitas Diniz and the aforementioned Eptácio Cafeteira, both of the opposition MDB (Democratic Movement of Brazil). On the other end of the spectrum, conservative João Castelo built his own rival political machine in opposition to Sarney, winning election to the Senate in 1982. Yet Sarney's allies also had their pockets of support in the capital, such as Edison Lobão and his patronage of the neighborhood of Liberdade. Sarney adapted his political ideologies based on the changing political climate and one such maneuver led to Sarney's candidacy for vice-president and subsequent ascension to the presidency of the republic in May 1985. Sarney's power even led long-term adversary Cafeteira to switch sides to ensure his own election as governor of Maranhão a few months later. Still, large sectors of the city of São Luís resisted Sarney. In late 1985 São Luís voted in João Castelo's wife Gardênia Gonçalves into office as mayor, despite the Sarney camp's attempts to use the city council's influence against her.¹⁰ (See Figure 7 and Table 1)

Sarney's shrewd maneuvers in Brasília aside, the 1980s were a decade of democratic opening in Maranhão as in the rest of Brazil. People from all socio-economic sectors participated in social movements and exercised their voices as citizens, many for the first time in their lives.¹¹ By the early 1980s Maranhão's economy was transformed; under Projeto Carajás, the

História do Maranhão. Note: Castelo and the PDT were aligned in 2010; Castelo and Cafeteira were aligned in the 1990, 1994, and 1998 elections; Cafeteira and Sarney were aligned in 1986, 2006, and 2010.

¹⁰ "Demitidos Tocam Fogo na Prefeitura," *Jornal Pequeno*, January 9, 1986; "Sarney pode enviar Tropas Federais a SL," *Jornal Pequeno*, January 11, 1986.

¹¹ Ana Maria Doimo, *A Vez e a Voz do Popular: Movimentos Sociais e Participação Política no Brasil pós-70* (Rio de Janeiro: ANPOCS / Relume Dumará, 1995).

multinational Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD) mined the interior region of Carajás for manganese, iron, and copper ore while under Projeto ALUMAR foreign corporations Billington Metals and ALCOA exploited Maranhão's rich aluminum mines. The ores and minerals were then transported to São Luís via the newly built railway line Ferro Carajás, processed in the industrial zone in the southwest part of the island, and shipped from the Itaqui port, which had opened in 1974 but saw heavy traffic only in the 1980s.¹² Simultaneously, political organizing for labor rights and urban land rights became important features of São Luís politics.

After the decree of partial political liberalization in 1978, a new slate of leftist parties and leaders had re-emerged and built bases of support among working-class populations and neighborhoods in São Luís. They represented a range of philosophical platforms, from traditional ideologies such as communism (PC do B), trade union-led socialism (PTB), and democratic socialism (PDT) to the worker-led new-leftist Workers Party (PT).¹³ The PDT (Democratic Labor Party), especially, built strong relationships with urban community leaders, notably with presidents of resident's associations (including several who turned their association spaces into nightclubs to play reggae and other international music on the weekends). Meanwhile the Workers Party galvanized support from sections of the city's working class as well as from university students and professors.¹⁴ By the late 1980s, São Luís (as much of Brazil) was poised for a leftward turn and in 1988 the city chose leftist Jackson Lago of the PDT as mayor. The

¹² Trovão, "Transformações Sociais e Econômicas."

¹³ Names such as Haroldo Saboia, Ananias Neto, Aldionor Salgado, and Jackson Lago. See Zulene Muniz Barbosa, "As Temporalidades da Política no Maranhão," *Lutas Sociais* (São Paulo: PUCSP) 1 (2003): 19-25.

¹⁴ In the 1980s, the PT was split between the university group, who advocated a fresh organizational structure through the formation of base camps (*Núcleos de Base*) and the group led by politicians (led by congressman Freitas Diniz) who advocated more traditional means of organization. The Workers Party in São Luís also faced a challenge to find viable candidates who could bridge the gap between the world of middle-class university students and professors centered at UFMA (Federal University of Maranhão), and the world of the working-class majority of the city. See Arleth Santos Borges, *PT Maranhão 1980-1992: Origens, Organização e Governos Municipais* (São Luís: EDUFMA, 2008).

same year, the PT also managed to elect two of their candidates, longtime activist Domingos Dutra and union leader Kleber Gomes, to the posts of state congressman and city councilman respectively.¹⁵ And while the PDT's Leonel Brizola and the PT's Lula bitterly fought a close first round in the 1989 election for president, keeping the left divided nationally, in Maranhão the PT and PDT decided to join forces.

Three major forces emerged in the fight for the governor's office in 1990: the united left (under the candidacy of Conceição Andrade), Sarney's camp (behind Edison Lobão), and the coalition of João Castelo, who also counted on the support of the outgoing governor and senator-elect Eptácio Cafeteira. It was a particularly acrimonious political moment. First, the election was partly a referendum on Sarney's rule. Sarney's personal popularity was at a new low after his troubled presidency, forcing him to run for office in the Amazonian state of Amapá instead of risk losing in Maranhão. Second, the working classes of Maranhão were still facing high inflation, wage freezes, and the overall poverty of the lost economic decade of the 1980s, another strike against Sarney and his administration. Third was the issue of rising violence. Alongside urban violence in São Luís, land disputes in the interior of the state had resulted in clashes between landless rural workers/activists and armed representatives of landowners. Political conflict between the state government and the municipal government of Imperatriz (led by Davi Alves Silva) soon descended into open violence. By early 1990 Davi Alves's gunmen and Maranhão acting governor João Alberto's military forces (under the infamous *Operação Tigre*) were killing each other in the open. Davi Alves supported João Castelo for governor, while João Alberto supported Sarney's candidate Edison Lobão. Stakes were truly high.¹⁶

¹⁵ Borges, *PT Maranhão*.

¹⁶ Also see section 3.6.

Accordingly, the campaigns for governor fought each other bitterly to reach the second (runoff) round. Castelo placed first in the preliminary round of voting and Lobão came in second. The disappointed left parties now had to support the lesser of two evils in the second round: the candidate of Sarney's oligarchy or the right-wing candidate backed by the perpetrators of rural violence. They chose to back Lobão.¹⁷ Sarney and Lobão used their media companies (TV, radio and newspaper) to characterize Castelo as a violent monster allied to lawless gunmen, even suggesting that the election was a choice "between good and evil."¹⁸ Castelo's campaign argued that Sarney's rule was an oligarchy, to which Sarney's camp dared to respond by claiming the title of "Oligarch of Liberty."¹⁹ Ultimately, after a heated November of campaigning, Lobão defeated Castelo narrowly.

In the midst of the above campaigns, as Maranhenses were electing their next governor in 1990, reggae unexpectedly entered the political scene.

5.2 REGGAE AND POPULISM I: THE EARLY CAMPAIGNS, 1990-94

Once Castelo and Lobão set up a runoff second round of voting, each showed their muscle via dizzyingly huge political rallies (*comícios*) where they paraded their political allies. These *comícios* included live music concerts by cultural icons. The Sunday before the runoff election, Lobão amassed a formidable lineup of musicians for a day-long "Winning Force" music festival and political rally on the beach, featuring Beto Pereira, Gerude, Josias Sobrinho, Ângela &

¹⁷ Borges, *PT Maranhao*, 230-31.

¹⁸ "Dia 25," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 10, 1990.

¹⁹ Gilberto Menezes, "O Oligarca da Liberdade," *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 11, 1990.

Omar, Tutuca, Marco Duailibe, César Nascimento, and others—the cream of the local crop of musicians. Meanwhile, Jimmy Cliff performed in the new indoor space at Espaço Cultural in the city center of São Luís, on Friday, November 23rd, just two days before the runoff election. The city’s bourgeoisie united for the Cliff concert on Friday night, but by Sunday they were divided once again by the bitterly fought gubernatorial election.²⁰

Edison Lobão’s victory hinged on an excellent showing in rural districts and the interior of the state; he had lost the city of São Luís to João Castelo by a wide margin. With a dose of triumphalism and an equal dose of populist paternalism, Lobão’s campaign announced “Winning Force 2,” another all-day music festival, free to the public, to commemorate his victory on Wednesday, November 28th. And this time, Jimmy Cliff would sing. It was supposed to be a win-win situation: the event promoters who had contracted Cliff could recoup their high investment, and Lobão and the Sarneys could endear themselves to the skeptical voters of the capital.²¹ The festival did draw tens of thousands of reggae fans. However, the debacle of the previous Cliff concert cast a long shadow. Numerous fans of Cliff who disliked Lobão stayed away from the Wednesday festival. Other fans attended but (according to one report) received Cliff with a shower of sand and rocks. In retrospect, perhaps it was not the best political move.²²

As seen in section 4.2, the shortcomings of the Jimmy Cliff concert spurred members of the reggae industry to plan their own concerts, beginning with Gregory Isaacs the following year. Likewise, many in the reggae scene disliked the appropriation of Jimmy Cliff by a mainstream elite political campaign. Among them were the activists who had participated in the culture wars over reggae for the previous three years, including Ademar Danilo—journalist, reggae radio

²⁰ “Super Show Raça Vencedora,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 18, 1990. I have translated *Raça Vencedora* as “Winning Force.”

²¹ “Jimmy Cliff Volta e Canta Hoje com a Raça Vencedora,” *O Estado do Maranhão*, November 28, 1990.

²² Gil Maranhão and Clovis Ferreira, “O Rasta Fica pra Depois,” *O Imparcial*, October 17, 1993.

selector, and student activist from his days at the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA). Danilo was a well-known and respected figure in reggae circles. In 1992, Danilo joined a large slate of hopefuls in declaring his candidacy for city council of São Luís.

Danilo's candidacy was potentially a way for the reggae scene and industry to put an insider into city politics, as opposed to relying on the patronage of an outsider. And sectors of the reggae scene responded positively. Sound systems, including the largest ones, supported his candidacy by lending their equipment for campaigns around the city. The Center for Black Culture (CCN) and black movement activists also threw their support behind Danilo, who had worked closely with the Center in the campaign to decriminalize reggae in the public eye.²³ He was already a spokesperson for the reggae scene, defending its interest as the organizer of the Commission of Appreciators of Reggae in 1992.²⁴ In the absence of financial clout, Danilo relied primarily on his reggae radio program on Difusora FM, *Conexão Caribe*, to appeal for votes. Danilo was not the only radio personality on the particularly populated 1992 ballot (indeed, radio jockeys had been running for political office in São Luís for years without success). He was also joined on the ballot by singers from other popular genres, such as lambada crooner Beto Douglas,²⁵ but these candidates lacked Danilo's multifaceted portfolio and high visibility with audiences.

Danilo entered the electoral fray in 1992 as a candidate of the Workers Party (PT). His own political philosophy and past political actions aligned with the PT's strong focus on participatory democracy. The PT in São Luís was struggling to find viable candidates who could bridge the gap between the world of middle-class university students and professors and the

²³ See section 3.5.

²⁴ "Barulho Causado por Clubes de Reggae Prejudica Doentes," *O Imparcial*, May 10, 1992.

²⁵ "Lambadeiro Entra na Política e Confia nos Votos das Fãs para se Eleger," *O Imparcial*, May 13, 1992.

world of the working-class majority of the city. Moreover the PT had decided to forego a coalition and go it alone in the election for city council, making it even more difficult to elect candidates under the rules of proportional representation. The PT's mayoral candidate Harold Sabóia received nearly 10% of the votes in a surprisingly good showing in the race for mayor of São Luís, but the party's candidates for city council, lacking an established voting base to depend on, struggled.²⁶ There was one exception—Ademar Danilo. Danilo tried to fashion a broad leftist platform, reaching out to a variety of organizations including labor groups and the environmental group Ama Vida. But his trump card remained his connections to the reggae scene.²⁷

When the dust settled after the vote on October 3rd, 1992, Ademar Danilo had received 1,336 votes, sixteenth overall. The vote tally was the highest for any Workers Party candidate that year and enough to be elected to city council.²⁸ The tally indicated that the reggae scene had not voted en masse for Danilo, or he would have received many more votes. However this did not stop Danilo from being seen as the reggae scene's first elected official. In the days following the election, Danilo took pains to dispel rumors about his candidacy. "Although I am a *regueiro* and a Bob Marley fan," he declared, "my mandate is not based on a platform to build a statue [of Bob Marley in São Luís]. These rumors are nothing but slander by someone trying to confuse [the public]."²⁹

Once in the city council, Danilo quickly involved himself in a variety of political projects on behalf of working people. In an interview with me in October 2010, he suggested that his

²⁶ Borges, *PT Maranhão*, 99-137, 223-36. Reggae sound system owner Riba Macedo's brother, Jokson Macedo, was also a candidate on the PT ticket: Jokson Macedo, interview.

²⁷ "Pique Local," *O Imparcial*, September 26, 1992.

²⁸ According to the rules of proportional representation, Workers Party candidates had garnered enough votes to elect one person to the city council, and that was Danilo. "Conhecidos os Vereadores Eleitos," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 15, 1992; "Votação de Todos os Candidatos de São Luís," *O Imparcial*, October 16, 1992.

²⁹ "Danilo Mostra Propostas," *O Imparcial*, October 20, 1992; "Pique Local," *O Imparcial*, October 3, 1992; "Pique Local," *O Imparcial*, October 10, 1992.

most important contribution as a city councilman had been to fight for housing rights on behalf of landless and homeless Ludovicenses.³⁰ To this end he established new links with groups of residents around the city fighting for land titles and basic amenities such as sanitation and roads. Danilo's political star rose during his first two years in office. This success prompted him to run for federal congress in 1994 in a campaign where he once again relied on advertising via reggae industry media and get-out-the-vote efforts by social activists. This time, the masses responded. Danilo received 9,047 votes, nearly a seven-fold increase. It was not nearly enough to be elected (he placed 35th, with 18 seats up for grabs).³¹ Yet if nothing else, it was a sign of reggae's political potential.

How might we characterize Danilo's politics? He chose to fight for the working class and therefore indirectly fight for the reggae scene, since the vast majority of reggae fans were still poor residents of the periphery. In this respect his ideology coincided with like-minded groups associated with the reggae scene such as the Center for Black Culture (CCN), the Society for the Defense of Human Rights in Maranhão (SDMHH), and the Rasta Reggae Study and Outreach Group (GEDRAR). Danilo's linkages with neighborhood associations were not unlike the linkages that several "old left" politicians made with residents unions in the 1980s.³² Danilo's project was also part of a "new left" nationwide democratic wave that brought together social movements and participatory politics. At the same time, within the context of the history of reggae in São Luís, Danilo's project emerged directly from the mobilization in the late 1980s to defend reggae from its detractors among the elite and the police.

³⁰ Ademar Danilo, interview.

³¹ "Resultado das Eleições Sai esta Manhã," *O Imparcial*, October 14, 1994.

³² As seen in section 3.3, union presidents like Zé Baldez maintained their after-hours nightclubs open by negotiating with local politicians.

Yet city councilman Danilo was not nearly reggae's most radical political figure in the mid-1990s. That was Luís Gonzaga Ferreira, better known as Luizão. Luizão was the selector at *Pop Som* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and as such he was responsible for making Pop Som the city's premier popular nightclub for international music as well as for launching many Jamaican hits. After a dispute with Pop Som's owner Zé Baldez he left the music business and eventually became the right-hand man of city councilman Jairzinho, an ardent social warrior on behalf of the urban poor. Luizão followed in Jairzinho's footsteps, leading numerous land occupations in the periphery of São Luís in the early 1990s. Although his previous fame as a selector may have won him some admirers among the working class, he was sufficiently removed from the music scene that his politics were not linked to the reggae wave of the 1990s. Luizão, a large muscular man who refused to back down from confrontation, was a people's hero to some and a notorious criminal to others. He led squatters in land occupations until 1995 when he was murdered in the neighborhood that today bears his name: Vila Luizão.³³

5.3 REGGAE AND POPULISM II: THE COMPETITION FOR RESOURCES, 1993-1997

Reggae's rise coincided with a lean period for other cultural organizations and institutes in the city, many of whom had experienced rising costs and declining revenues during the lost decade of the 1980s. This contributed to the cultural debates we saw in Chapter Four. These debates

³³ "Luizão tenta Chacinar Pessoas no Coletivo," *O Imparcial*, October 26, 1994; "'Luizão' Nega ter Atirado contra Coletivo," *O Imparcial*, October 27, 1994.

played out in the political arena in the mid-1990s as cultural groups jostled for position to receive state funds.

The state and city governments, meanwhile, hoped to refashion cultural festivals in the renovated city center to attract more tourists and bring in more revenue. After several years of discussion in the early 1990s, the state decided to move towards an open three-day extravaganza called “Street Carnival” rather than the more private and divided Carnival celebrations of before. Prestigious samba schools such as Flor do Samba and Turma do Quinto that had enjoyed political patronage for decades ended up unhappy that both their importance in the celebration and their revenue had decreased.³⁴ Bumba-meu-Boi schools hoped to be part of the new vision for tourism; in 1992, for example, no fewer than eighty-seven schools of Boi had applied for state assistance for their performances. The state ministry of culture was able to give them materials and supplies to help with making costumes, but most schools were disappointed to find that little money was available to reimburse the artists.³⁵

Meanwhile, the state’s cultural and tourism agencies attempted to take advantage of reggae’s tourist potential, especially given reggae’s perceived exoticism in other parts of Brazil. In 1993, they joined forces for an ambitious proposal: the “Ilha Reggae Festival,” later renamed “São Luís Reggae Festival.” The festival promised “50 hours of reggae music” including major international names including Bunny Wailer, Max Romeo, and Inner Circle, as well as Brazilian reggae sensations Cidade Negra, Edson Gomes, and Skank. The state-controlled tourism agency Maratur spearheaded the proposal, securing a grant from the Federal Savings Bank and gaining promises of financial support from two ministries: Industry, and Commerce & Infrastructure.

³⁴ Walseliny de Jesus Rodrigues Santos, “A Intervenção Estatal no Carnaval de São Luís nas Décadas de 70 a 90,” (bachelor’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 2010), 31-37.

³⁵ “Bois ganham Enfeites e pouca Grana,” *O Imparcial*, May 27, 1992.

Maratur's proposal did include cross-promotion of Bumba-meu-Boi, but only four Boi were organizations scheduled to participate. Maratur hired a promotion company to advertise the festival in Brazil and abroad, in conjunction with other festivals in the city such as the Festival of Local Delicacies of Maranhão and the Second Maranhão Open Tennis tournament.³⁶ The festival proved too ambitious, however. The organizers postponed the event several times, from July 1993 to November 1993 to January 1994, alleging a range of problems from scheduling conflicts to the heavy rain. The festival was finally cancelled when it became clear that the state ministries would not risk a heavy financial commitment, especially as the four-year term of the administration began to wind down.³⁷

The state's Ministry of Culture had been especially conspicuous in its absence from the project. The reason, as State Secretary for Culture Luis Phelipe Andrès lamented, was the lack of finances. The sorry state of affairs worsened when the state government cut off funding to the Ministry of Culture altogether in early 1994. This led to a Carnival below expectations and an equally subdued season of São João and Bumba-meu-Boi festivities in June and July; it also forced the suspension in the renovation of cultural institutes in the city center, notably two theaters and a music school.³⁸ Members of the negatively affected cultural institutions, led by Herbert de Jesus Santos of the Madre Deus Boi association, now ramped up their rhetoric against reggae (see section 4.6). During the designated Maranhense Popular Culture Week in August

³⁶ "São Luís Realiza o I Festival de Reggae do Brasil," *Jornal de Turismo* (supplement of *O Imparcial*), September 16-22, 1993; "Definida Programação do Festival de Reggae," *O Imparcial*, October 19, 1993.

³⁷ Gil Maranhão and Clóvis Ferreira, "O Rasta Fica pra Depois," *O Imparcial*, October 17, 1993; "Maratur Define na Terça Nova Data do Festival de Reggae," *O Imparcial*, January 7, 1994; "Festival de Reggae não tem Data Oficial," *O Imparcial*, February 6, 1994.

³⁸ "Penúria," *O Imparcial*, August 10, 1994.

1994, state officials joined cultural practitioners in calling for a coordinated plan to fund cultural events in order to protect them against reggae's popularity.³⁹

The experiment of the “São Luís Reggae Festival” was significant because it suggested a shift in state government policy toward the embrace of reggae and its tourist potential. However, appeals by Boi schools and other groups positioning themselves as defenders of Maranhense folklore in the middle of the election campaign season forced a rethinking of this strategy, at least at the state level. Gubernatorial candidates, including the eventual winner Roseana Sarney, promised to support Maranhense culture. Still, the first mega-cultural event of Roseana's tenure, in 1995, pleased neither side of the reggae-Boi cultural debate: this event was the Marafolia festival featuring Bahian axé bands. Marafolia was aimed at elites and middle-class revelers, and not coincidentally was sponsored heavily by the Mirante Group, one of the Sarney family's businesses. With time, however, the state, controlled by Roseana and her allies continuously since 1994 (except for the four-year period between 2004 and 2008), invested more and more into popular festivals like São João. Significantly, the state also started to build valuable relationships of patronage by transferring funds directly to the cultural organizations and their participants.⁴⁰

To most of reggae's entrepreneurs and audiences, the failure of the “São Luís Reggae Festival” didn't matter. After all, the reggae industry was turning a fabulous profit from their regular weekend events. Neither did it need assistance from the state to organize festivals; by 1994 businesspersons of the industry already counted on ample experience in bringing over Jamaican artists, steady sponsorship from beer companies, good advertising networks, and

³⁹ “A Cultura do Povo na Mesa de Discussão,” *O Imparcial*, August 16, 1994.

⁴⁰ Maria de Fátima da Costa Gonçalves, *A Invenção de uma Rainha de Espada: Reatualizações e Embarços na Dinâmica Política do Maranhão Dinástico* (São Luís, EDUFMA, 2008); Silva, *Ritmos da Identidade*.

guarantees of sizeable audiences. By the end of the decade the municipal government of São Luís would pick up where the state government had left off, trying to benefit from the tourist potential of reggae. Overall, the interest of government officials in sponsoring reggae festivals was a potentially valuable asset to reggae's more ambitious entrepreneurs, as long as the entrepreneurs were able to make the right commercial and political alliances. And over the course of the 1990s, the person that did so most effectively was José Eleonildo Soares (Pinto da Itamaraty).

5.4 CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY I: THE RISE OF PINTO DA ITAMARATY

The reggae scene was potentially a huge prize for any politician who could successfully appeal to its participants. Following Ademar Danilo's example, several media personalities from within the reggae scene decided to run for city council in 1996. With access to mass media (radio and TV) and name recognition among the reggae masses, electoral success seemed likely. Things had changed in the reggae scene, however. Although people in the scene often referred to a "reggae community," the heavy competition between sound systems and nightclubs had created more internal divisions than ever before. Any representative wishing to win votes from among reggae audiences would have to transcend these divisions, and it proved difficult in the 1990s.

The first change in the reggae industry was a structural one. A select group of sound systems came to dominate the industry in the mid-1990s. Once sound system owners Soares and Ferreirinha began paying exorbitant amounts for access to imported records and media outlets, the playing field in reggae's major leagues became limited to only the most competitive brands.

The sound system owners who could compete either traveled to buy records in Jamaica and Europe themselves (Junior Black, Natty Nayfson) or could afford to finance the travelers (Soares and Ferreirinha) (see section 4.3). The formula of success for sound systems in the early 1990s was to reduce the size of the console and instead focus on overall potency and heavy bass and treble sounds, while also making the major financial investment required to own a radio show for advertisement and to buy Jamaican music. Junior Black's Black Power sound system in 1993-94 and Antonio's Diamante Negro sound system in 1995 fulfilled these two criteria, thereby joining Estrela do Som, Itamaraty, and FM Natty Nayfson at the top of the pecking order.⁴¹ By mid-decade each of these sound systems counted legions of supporters organized under the rubric of fan associations, similar to the organized fan associations affiliated with football clubs. The biggest rivalry was between the fans of Estrela do Som and Itamaraty.

Other sound system owners, especially those from the older generation of electrical engineers including Serralheiro and Carne Seca, failed to update their sound system technology to keep up with the larger brands. By 1995-96 there was a substantial drop-off between the top five sound systems and the rest in terms of quality, revenue, and audience. Smaller sound systems might command a local neighborhood following or earn their bread playing in the interior. They could not compete in the capital, however, where costs of technology, new music, and advertising on the radio were extremely inflated. In retrospect, a successful electoral campaign in the mid-1990s would have required strong financial commitment and promotion from a major sound system.

⁴¹ Various informants, interviews by author, São Luís, 2010. Previously, in the 1980s, the soundsystems Menina Veneno (belonging to Eloy), Águia do Som (Zé Roxinho), Asa Branca (Valtinho), Sonzão do Carne Seca / Trovão Azul (Carne Seca), Voz do Ouro Canarinho (Serralheiro), Rainha do Som / Musical Itamaraty (Pinto) and Estrela do Som (Ferreirinha) were considered a considerable cut above the rest, having built their brand over the years. Even by the end of the 1980s, the former four were struggling to keep up with the investments of the latter three. See Sousa, "Reggae Night"; Wellington Rabelo, interview.

Meanwhile, as the balance of power in the industry changed, it also shifted away from nightclubs, bands, and radio selectors. Some members of the scene spoke out in protest. Veteran sound system owner Riba Macedo, for example, unhappy at the cutthroat competition, moved to Rosário in the interior in protest.⁴² Ideological divisions that were simmering since the 1988 seminar on reggae between activists and businesspersons start to boil over, and many of the former began to criticize the latter for focusing exclusively on profits to the detriment of the social welfare of the reggae masses. Perhaps the strongest critique of the profit-driven mindset of sound systems was provided by the song “Magnatas E Regueiros” written by Fauzi Beydoun and released on Tribo de Jah’s second LP *Roots Reggae* released in early 1994⁴³:

<i>Magnatas e regueiros</i>	Magnates and reggae people
<i>Na jamaica brasileira</i>	In the Brazilian Jamaica
<i>Os regueiros gostam de reggae</i>	<i>Regueiros</i> love reggae
<i>Os magnatas gostam de dinheiro</i>	But magnates love money
<i>Não fazem nada pelo reggae</i>	They do nothing for reggae
<i>Nada fazem pelos regueiros</i>	They do nothing for the people
<i>Pensam que a vida é uma festa</i>	They think life is but a dancehall party
<i>Para lucrar o ano inteiro</i>	To make profits all year long
<i>Muitos se dizem de bem</i>	Many of them claim to do good
<i>Se dizem regueiros sem interesse</i>	Claim to be <i>regueiros</i> free of vested interest
<i>No fundo são desordeiros</i>	But deep down they are troublemakers
<i>Lobos vestidos em pele de cordeiro</i>	Wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing
<i>Movidos pela grana</i>	Driven by money
<i>Pela inveja e pela ganância</i>	By envy and by greed
<i>Não conhecem a mensagem</i>	They don’t understand the message
<i>Princípios de paz e tolerância</i>	Nor the principles of peace and tolerance
<i>Muita gente humilde e honesta</i>	Many honest and humble people
<i>Ama o reggae vive no gueto</i>	Love reggae and live in the ghetto
<i>Paga pra ir a uma festa</i>	They pay to enter the dancehall
<i>Mas não recebe o devido respeito</i>	But do not receive their due respect
<i>São tratados como bichos</i>	They are treated like animals
<i>Pra policia são todos suspeitos</i>	To the police they are all suspects

⁴² Riba Macedo, interview; Silva, *Da Terra das Primaveras*.

⁴³ Tribo de Jah, “Magnatas e Regueiros,” in *Roots Reggae*, JAH-94, 1994.

*Vítimas do descaso
Da exploração e do preconceito*

Victims of neglect
Of exploitation and prejudice

*O reggae não é isso,
Não é guerra, futricas ou maquinação
É música de paz
De amor e união*

Reggae music is none of that
It does not fight, scheme, or machinate
Reggae is the music of peace
Of love and of unity

Despite Tribo de Jah's call for love and unity, the song had the opposite effect. Sound system owners took umbrage to the lyrics and decided to boycott Tribo de Jah. The rift between the scene's major sound systems and major band forced others to take sides, and divisions within the reggae scene were exacerbated.⁴⁴

At the same time, despite bitter competition on dance floors and radio waves, sound system owners, nightclub owners, and other entrepreneurs met regularly every weekend to trade musical records and make business deals. Sound system owners realized the benefits of staying united, at least when negotiating with city and state officials. The owner of sound system Itamaraty, José Eleonildo Soares, was instrumental in organizing fellow sound system owners into a formal association and then representing that association in negotiations. When two reggae fans died in a stampede at a poorly organized reggae event at Club Girafão in September 1993, Soares joined city councilman Ademar Danilo in negotiations with the authorities. Ultimately they persuaded the city not to penalize the reggae industry but instead to aid it in making events safe for the public.⁴⁵ Then, following the passage of "Silence Laws" aiming to regulate nightclubs, Soares negotiated policies on noise levels and security in a landmark March 1996 meeting with the state minister of justice and public security (Jair Xexéo), the state environmental ministry's top environment quality monitor (Teresinha de Jesus Carvalho), and

⁴⁴ Tribo De Jah, "Magnatas E Regueiros," *Roots Reggae*, 1994.

⁴⁵ "Ventura Interdita Girafão de Reggae," *Jornal Pequeno*, September 11, 1993.

the representative from the civil police (Raimundo Brandão).⁴⁶ The responses to the tragedy at Club Girafão and to the Silence Laws showed the importance of good relationships and open avenues of dialogue between the reggae industry and the city.

Increasingly, Soares was the man representing the reggae industry in these dialogues. Still, Soares considered himself first and foremost a businessman who used politics only when necessary to protect his industry and further its interests. The sound system he had inherited from his father, Musical Itamaraty, became a major industry player circa 1991. For the next five years Soares invested freely in technology, records, and advertising, in an attempt to keep pace with Estrela do Som and its beloved DJ Antônio José. As partner of the production company Itanatty along with Nayfson Henrique dos Santos (Natty Nayfson), Soares was also jointly responsible for organizing the largest concerts and festivals on the island. Soares's commercial successes and low public profile contrasted with the high visibility and outgoing personalities of the aspiring "reggae politicians" of the mid-1990s, who were all star radio jockeys with a constant public presence.

At the height of the competitive climate of 1996, three leading names in reggae radio ran for city council: first-time candidates Luis Fernando and Carlão Brasileiro and re-election candidate Ademar Danilo. Carlão Brasileiro was a deejay at the university radio station, while Luis Fernando ran the Ilha Reggae TV and radio programs on the leading station Difusora. Together, they were among the most wanted radio deejays of the industry (alongside Carlos Nina and Marcos Vinícius). Yet the shift in power towards sound systems had diminished the star power of the radio deejays. Plus, divisions in the scene were reflected in the bitter, personal

⁴⁶ "Secretário Jair Xexéo Promete Maior Segurança nos Clubes de Reggae," *Massa Regueira: O Jornal do Reggae* 1, no.1 (1996), PCD.

campaigns run by Fernando and Danilo—voters were turned off by what appeared to be more of a personal popularity contest between the two radio announcers than an election for public office. Despite Danilo’s record in policymaking, the reggae masses felt that Danilo had distanced himself from the scene and rejected his candidacy. Carlão Brasileiro counted on support from university students but couldn’t translate that support into votes. Luis Fernando counted on the heaviest media blitz of all, but it still wasn’t enough to get elected. Media and star power apparently could not overcome a lack of organized support from sound systems, and a weary public was not willing to trust the political pretenders lacking an innovative message.⁴⁷

Reggae had become so ubiquitous around the island that other, established politicians wondered how to tap into the “reggae vote.” Reggae jingles became standard during political campaigns in the mid-1990s, but that was it. Reggae audiences were instantly suspicious of politicians who ventured into their favorite venues around election time. Moreover, the reggae industry was so profitable, unlike other popular cultural manifestations, that it did not need patronage from state government insiders and could afford to remain politically independent in the 1990s. Then in the late 1990s, Soares began planning his candidacy for city council. His role as the representative of sound system owners had already connected him to important state agencies. Now, to launch a political career, he had to solve the problem of a divided industry. His solution, ultimately, was to use his formidable business model to dominate the competition, making his sound system Itamaraty the premier organization in the reggae industry. Thus, Soares’s political rise went hand-in-hand with his economic success.

⁴⁷ “Votação Final de Todos os Candidatos a Vereador,” *Jornal Pequeno*, October 6, 1996; Marcos Vinícius, “Atirando Pedras,” Só Reggae Column, *Jornal Pequeno*, October 10, 1996; Tarcisio Selektah, interview.

Firstly, Soares's business model was based on a commitment to professionalism. He managed to build a reputation of reliability, something lacking in an industry that had long been operating in the informal sector unregulated by business or labor laws. Most sound system owners often withheld pay from their employees or fired them without proper cause. They were also notorious for canceling existing contracts with nightclubs, even at the last minute, if a more lucrative alternative appeared. The competition between sound systems from 1993 to 1996 only increased their tendency of failing to honor professional commitments. Soares, however, led initiatives to formalize labor contracts and also invariably kept his word with nightclubs. He was the first sound system owner to sign an employee's work card (*carteira de trabalho*), necessary for formal employment: that employee was superstar DJ Carlinhos Tijolada in 1996. Such steps brought the reggae industry away from the informal sector and more in line with a formal legal industry, raising Soares's profile in the process.⁴⁸

Secondly, Soares's business model netted his sound system the best personnel team in the industry. From 1996 to 1999, Soares convinced the industry's top professionals to work with him on both the musical and business sides of his organization. Many of these—radio DJ Marcos Vinícius, producer Leandro Ramos, business manager Luzico—had previously worked with Ferreirinha at the sound system Estrela do Som. Soares offered them competitive salaries and job security, and each ended up staying with Soares for over a decade. The personnel team of Itamaraty, nicknamed “the Caravan of Success,” experienced a new wave of success with audiences. Meanwhile, the death of DJ Antônio José in September 1996 temporarily left Itamaraty's rival Estrela do Som in a state of weakness. Ferreirinha quickly contracted highly

⁴⁸ Tarcisio Selektah, interview; Carlinhos Tijolada, interview by author, Bairro de Fátima—São Luís, October 4, 2010; Marcos Vinícius, “Atirando Pedras,” *Só Reggae Column, Jornal Pequeno*, October 10, 1996.

touted DJ Mr. Brown from Itamaraty to replace Antônio José. However, Estrela do Som's stage presence never completely recovered from the loss of their superstar DJ. And Itamaraty's "caravan of success" muscled on under the able controls of DJ Carlinhos Tijolada.⁴⁹

Thirdly, Soares used his sound system Itamaraty to wield economic control over new consumer markets, especially in the rapidly growing neighborhoods outside the city limits. Soares had long depended on loyal relationships with nightclubs in the absence of a house venue. Estrela do Som's advantage over other sound systems since the late 1980s had been its extremely popular house venue, Espaço Aberto. To counter Espaço Aberto's dominance, Soares entered into contracts with upcoming venues around the island, claiming for Itamaraty the exclusive rights to play reggae music there. In return, Soares often helped those venues with infrastructure and advertising. If a venue attempted to invite another sound system, however, Itamaraty would cancel the contract and blacklist the venue, as was allegedly the case with venue Choperia Marujo in the late 1990s. Another tactic used by Soares (and others) in the late 1990s was to strategically pre-empt another sound system event by renting an adjacent venue to draw audience away. Several of Itamaraty's competitors suggested that Soares's aggressive business practices were directly responsible for their sound systems losing profit; Diamante Negro, for example, burst onto the scene in the mid-1990s with arguably the best sound technology around, but was run aground by Itamaraty's aggressive business model. Using both carrot and stick, then, Itamaraty ultimately exerted control over nightclubs and simultaneously blocked competing sound systems from entering new geographical markets.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sandra Ferreira, interview; Marcos Vinicius, interview by author, Sá Viana—São Luís, October 25, 2010; Tarcisio Seletah, interview.

⁵⁰ Seu Antônio, interview.

Itamaraty's successful control of new venues contrasted with Espaço Aberto's continued struggles with the law. Incidents of violence in the vicinity of the nightclub continued. When complaints over noise levels forced Espaço Aberto to close for remodeling, the break in events at the locale had a negative effect on audience numbers.⁵¹ As Espaço Aberto's fortunes dipped, so did Estrela do Som's. The other contender to the reggae industry's throne, FM Natty Nayfson, featured a most remarkable figure in Nayfson Henrique dos Santos who worked as owner, DJ, radio personality, sound technician, traveling merchant, builder of sound systems, and everything else. Yet FM Natty Nayfson's strength was also its weakness: it lacked the broad organization of Itamaraty and left Nayfson himself with too much to do. "The sound system Itamaraty reigns absolute among the reggae masses," proclaimed one journalist in November 1997, "and its presence is required at any reggae event worth its salt."⁵² The annual reggae awards "Standouts of Reggae" (*Destaques do Reggae*) presented by Tony Tavares awarded FM Natty Nayfson the title of "champion sound system" in 1998 but reserved a higher honor for the sound system Itamaraty: that of "super champion." Soares once again won the title of "entrepreneur of the year" and his right-hand man Luzico took home the award for best event promoter.⁵³ Thus by the end of the decade Itamaraty had established itself as the city's most popular sound system brand.

In 2000 Soares launched his candidacy for city council. He avoided joining a party with strong local presence or big names, instead choosing the ticket of the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB). This suggested early on that his electoral strategy would rely not on a clear ideological project but on the popularity of his sound system. The last cog in the campaign machinery was the television program Itamarashow, launched in 2000 in conjunction with producer Leandro

⁵¹ Sandra Ferreira, interview.

⁵² "Unireggae tem 56 Inscritos," *O Imparcial*, November 4, 1997.

⁵³ "Destaques do Reggae em 98," *O Estado do Maranhão*, January 9, 1999.

Ramos to replace Luis Fernando's old Ilha Reggae program. Itamarashow mostly advertised sound system events but also doubled as a vehicle to raise Soares's public profile and reach voters. Rather than use his real name, Soares campaigned as "Pinto da Itamaraty" to maximize the visibility of his sound system's name. Soares finished ninth among all candidates, receiving 4,991 votes. This tally was more than the 2,858 votes that Luis Fernando and Ademar Danilo had combined for in their failed bids in 1996, but substantially fewer than Danilo's 9,047 votes in his failed 1994 bid for federal congress.⁵⁴ Still, it was enough to get Soares elected to city council. The reggae scene now had a new personality in city government.

5.5 REGGAE AND POPULISM III: THE CONSOLIDATION OF PINTO

Once in office Soares maintained his low profile, behind-the-scenes strategy. He fixed his prime focus on the question of security, pushing for neighborhood security watches and working closely with the city's police departments. In 2002 he convinced the city council to proclaim September 5th as "municipal reggae day" to coincide with the annual weeklong celebration of the founding of São Luís (as legend goes, on September 8th, 1612).⁵⁵ He also built lasting alliances in the city council, none greater than with businessman Alberto Franco. Franco quickly moved to the state legislature where he sponsored a similar bill there declaring reggae part of Maranhão's cultural heritage, which passed in November 2004. Although mainly symbolic, Soares's and

⁵⁴ "Votação Final de Todos os Candidatos a Vereador," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 6, 1996; "Resultado das Eleições Sai esta Manhã," *O Imparcial*, October 14, 1994; "Votação de Todos os Candidatos a Vereador na Cidade de São Luís," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 3, 2000.

⁵⁵ See Maria de Lourdes Lauande Lacroix, *A Fundação Francesa de São Luís e seus Mitos*, 3rd ed. (São Luís: UEMA, 2008 [2001]) for the myth of the French foundation of São Luís.

Franco's efforts did not go unnoticed by the reggae masses. In 2010, many of my informants described the city and the state's recognition of reggae positively and proudly.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the sound system-led reggae industry had expanded to the newer peripheries in São Luís and to the adjacent municipalities of Paço do Lumiar and São José de Ribamar, just as it had proliferated throughout the interior of the state and especially in the *baixada maranhense*. The new generation of youth that attended reggae events saw a media-driven, thriving local industry, and some of those seemed willing to accept sound system owners as their representatives or spokespersons. They enjoyed the large-scale reggae events that sound system owners began to subsidize or sometimes even offer for free, especially around election time. These youth were the new reggae masses.⁵⁷ Simultaneously, mayors and aspiring mayors of municipalities near São Luís and in the *baixada maranhense* started to hire sound systems to play in their cities to endear themselves to their constituents. In a sense, Soares's business model of building links with nightclubs was now being adapted to build alliances with politicians in cities in the interiors. It was a win-win for leaders in both fields as the lines between business and politics were blurred.

With the successful business/political model now working for both Soares and Franco, it appeared that the reggae scene's votes could sustain a larger presence in the city council. Soares constructed an electoral alliance with rival sound system owner Ferreirinha of Estrela do Som for the 2004 city council elections. They attempted to mobilize the organized fan groups of both

⁵⁶ Marcus Ramúsyo de Almeida Brasil, "O Reggae no Maranhão e a Trama Política da 'Música-Imagem'" (paper presented at the XXXIII Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências de Comunicação (INTERCOM), Caxias do Sul-RS, Brazil, September 2-6, 2010).

⁵⁷ As many of the reggae faithful grew older and stopped going to events for various reasons, new generations of younger reggae fans carried the scene with the constant presence at events. It appears that the generation of the 2000s faced and made very different political choices faced than in previous decades. More research could illuminate this question. Also see Freire, "Que Reggae é Esse."

sound systems to get out the vote for both candidates, a strategy that was unthinkable five years earlier. Indeed, in October 2004, Soares was re-elected to city council as the highest vote getter with an unprecedented 10,758 votes while Ferreirinha's bid was also successful, with the more modest vote total of 3,903.⁵⁸ Following Soares's electoral success in São Luís, his campaign did the math and turned its eyes to tens of thousands more potential votes outside the city in the nearby municipalities and in the *baixada maranhense*.

So Soares and his team quickly began to plan for the statewide election of 2006. They boldly skipped over the state congress, setting their sights firmly on the federal congress. Soares's campaign knew that to get to Brasilia they would need many more votes than the nearly 11,000 he had received in 2004 for city council. For this they had to develop an outreach strategy in the interior of Maranhão, especially in the *baixada maranhense* and in those municipalities approximately within 200 kilometers from São Luís. The 200 km radius was significant, because it coincided with the approximate reach of the radio waves from FM stations of São Luís that broadcasted reggae programs (see Figure 8).⁵⁹ Soares already had the first component of the campaign, his radio and television programs, in place. The second component was to be a series of large concerts, called *showmícios*, a compound of "show" and *comício* (political rally). This strategy was threatened when the Superior Electoral Tribunal in Brasilia decided to ban *showmícios* across Brazil for the 2006 election cycle.⁶⁰ Soares was able to circumvent the ban on *showmícios*, however, since any musician performing with his sound system could be claimed as

⁵⁸ "Campeão de Votos, Pinto diz que População Reconheceu Trabalho," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 5, 2004; "Votação de Todos os Candidatos," *Jornal Pequeno*, October 5, 2004; Brasil, "O Reggae no Maranhão."

⁵⁹ Ferreirinha, interview; Paulo Caribe, interview.

⁶⁰ JusBrasil, "Músicos entram na Justiça contra Proibição de 'Showmício,'" <http://justilex.jusbrasil.com.br/noticias/12492/musicos-entram-na-justica-contra-proibicao-de-showmicio> (accessed July 5 2006).

part of his business venture but not his political venture. Once again, he relied on his sound system to go where other electoral candidates could not.

By the mid-2000s it became clear that masses of youth around the state were receptive to both reggae events and political campaigns by their organizers. Alberto Franco joined Soares and his sound system Itamaraty as they criss-crossed the state appealing to young voters. On a separate ticket, Cléber Verde, a politician with no historical involvement with the reggae masses, sponsored large concerts and appeared on stage alongside reggae celebrities including legendary singer of The Pioneers, Norris Cole. Both Franco and Verde were elected as congressmen in 2006 on the strength of the reggae vote. The most spectacular performance, however, belonged to Soares. Soares's relentless sound system tours across the state, generous gifts and perks for his audiences, and constant advertising on radio and television had translated into over 90,000 votes and a seat in the federal congress in Brasilia.⁶¹

Soares's strategy had worked as planned. He received over 41,000 votes from the municipality of São Luís and another 9,000 votes from around the island, but the remaining 40,000 votes came from outside the island of São Luís.⁶² All forty of the municipalities where he received at least 4% of the vote fell within the 200 km radius of the FM waves (see Figure 9).⁶³ Of the forty municipalities, those of the *baixada* to the west of the island were areas with a

⁶¹ Norris Cole, interview.

⁶² The research for this dissertation did not include any quantitative or qualitative data on actual voting practices or profiles of individual voters. I am assuming here that many of the votes for Pinto, if not most, were from participants of the reggae scene. However, this may not be true. Further research is needed.

⁶³ Elections to federal congress and state congresses in Brazil follow the rules of proportional representation. Each voter chooses one candidate for each (federal and state congress). Once votes have been tallied, each coalition of parties is awarded a number of seats based on their vote total, and those seats are usually occupied by the corresponding top vote getters within each coalition. In this way, a candidate who receives an especially large number of votes will end up helping other candidates in her/his coalition of parties by indirectly giving them votes, while candidates with lower vote totals could benefit from being in a coalition with a high vote getter. In the case of Soares in 2006, he indirectly gave votes to others in his coalition.

strong tradition of reggae and other Caribbean music. Others had more recent linkages (in the 1990s and 2000s) to the São Luís reggae industry, including to the sound system Itamaraty.

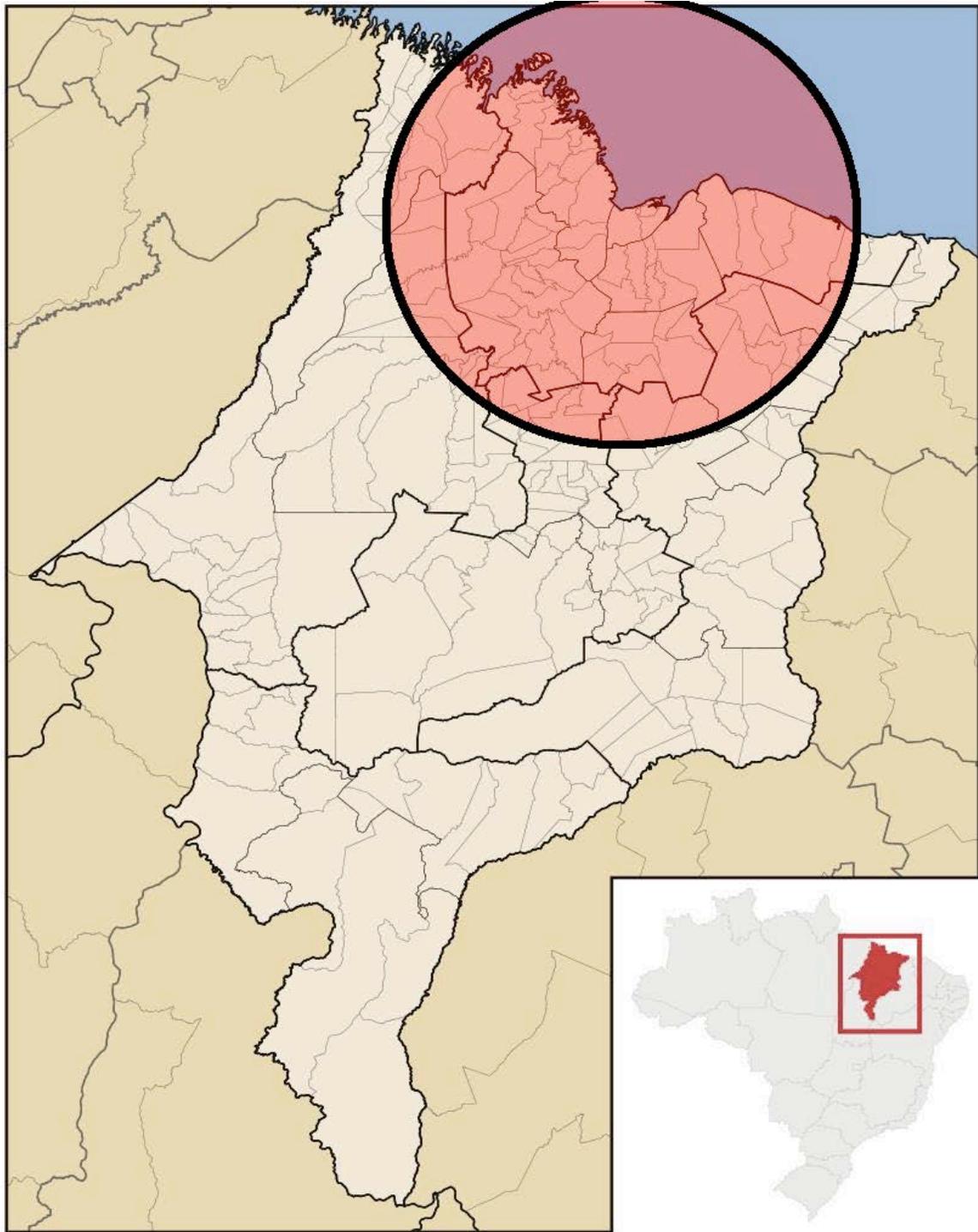


Figure 8. 200 km Radius Area around São Luís—Approximate Reach of FM Radio Waves

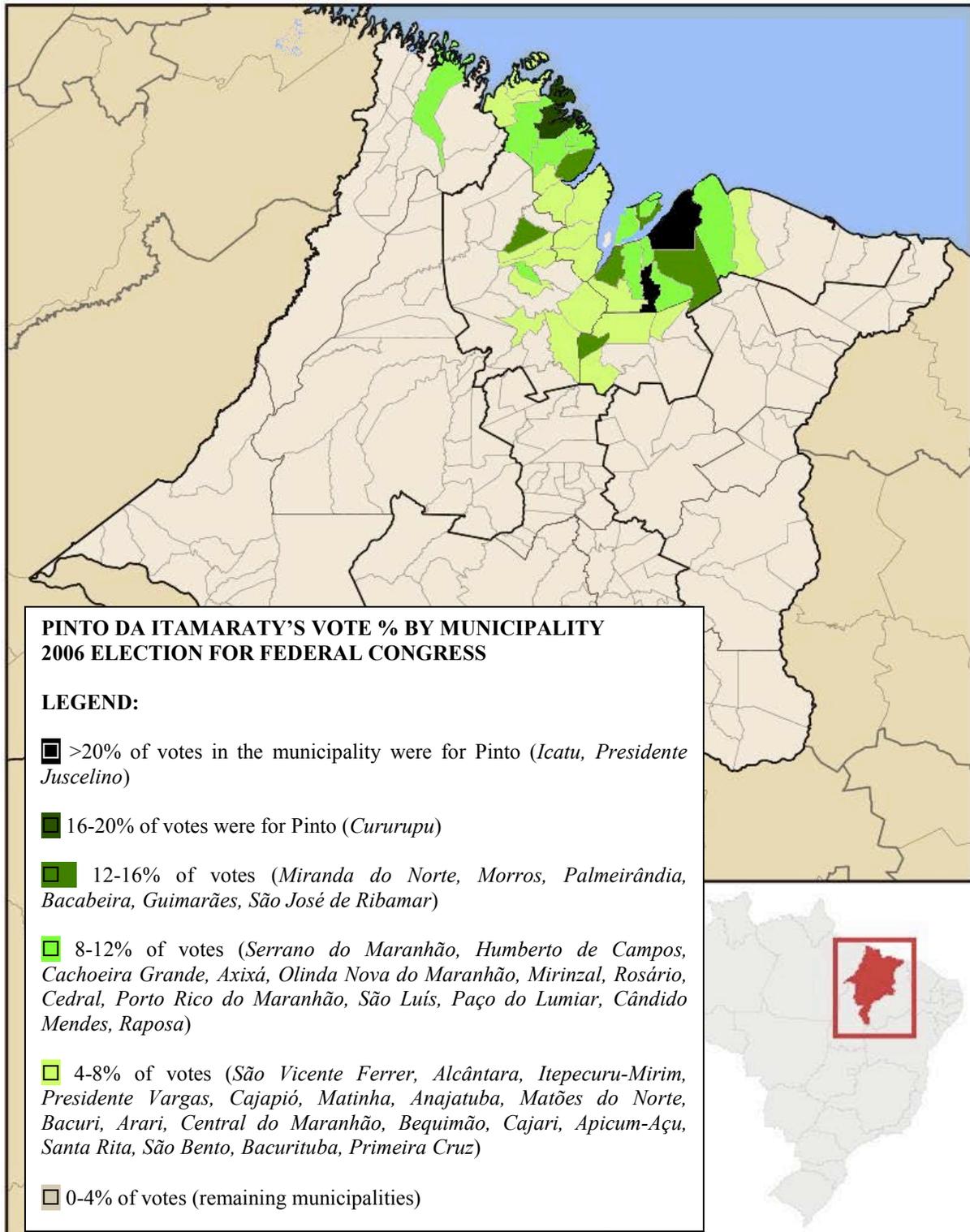


Figure 9. Pinto da Itamaraty's Vote % by Municipality (2006 election to Federal Congress)

Then in early January 2007, the Electoral Public Prosecutor's Office of Maranhão (MPE/MA), an independent body uniting federal and state prosecutors, dropped a bombshell. They began proceedings to vacate the mandate of Pinto da Itamaraty, charging him with "abuse of economic power" during his electoral campaign. Explained regional electoral attorney Juraci Guimarães Júnior:

[Sound systems were rented out] for events in various locations in diverse municipalities either for a token fee or absolutely free. The events were invariably accompanied by massive visual electoral propaganda in the form of posters. Above all, Pinto da Itamaraty's campaign jingle set to the rhythm of reggae played [at these events], capturing the fancy of the public.⁶⁴

At issue were two sides of the same problematic coin. First, did Soares violate electoral law by using his sound system for campaign purposes? Second, did Soares violate electoral law by using his campaign apparatus for financial benefit, i.e. to gain profits for his sound system?

The public prosecutor soon realized that it would be nearly impossible to prove any wrongdoing. At the time of his announcement, attorney Guimarães Júnior cited two particular sound system events that allegedly violated electoral law, both in municipalities not far from São Luís. The first, held in Axixá in August 2006, fell under suspicion because of the candidate Soares's physical presence. The second, a benefit event for pensioners and retirees held in Alcântara in September 2006, fell under suspicion after one of the event's organizers admitted that the sound system Itamaraty had been rented to them at no cost.⁶⁵ However, Soares could argue that as proprietor of the sound system his presence at the event in Axixá was normal business practice, just as he might argue that the benefit event in Alcântara was a routine act of

⁶⁴ Ministério Público Federal: Procuradoria Geral da República, "MPE/MA Pedu a Cassação do Mandato de Pinto da Itamaraty," http://noticias.pgr.mpf.gov.br/noticias/noticias-do-site/copy_of_eleitoral/mpe-ma-pede-a-cassacao-do-mandato-de-pinto-da-itamaraty (accessed March 8, 2012).

⁶⁵ "Ministério Público pede Cassação do Deputado Pinto da Itamaraty," *Jornal Pequeno*, January 4, 2007, online edition.

charity by a socially responsible company. *Showmícios* may have been outlawed but sound systems events were not, and a sound system campaign event was in practice no different from a regular sound system party. Although electoral prosecutors sensed they were being duped, there was nothing they could do legally. So they dropped the charges and Pinto da Itamaraty became reggae's first federal congressman.

Soares consciously chose not to identify himself with any political ideology. His choices in parties, first the PTB (Brazilian Labor Party) in 2000 and then the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democratic Party) in 2006, seemed to be based less on ideological concerns and more on practical concerns of which party might give his campaign the greatest boost. He also attempted to avoid the overarching debate of Maranhense politics, namely Sarney: at first, he neither aligned himself with Sarneyism nor against it. (Still, Soares couldn't avoid the issue completely.⁶⁶) Building alliances proved to be crucial to Soares's political career, from Alberto Franco in the city council to João Castelo in the PSDB. Soares increasingly became more involved within the PSDB, twice coordinating the campaign for the election of João Castelo as mayor, in 2008 (successfully) and in 2012 (unsuccessfully). Also, as federal congressman, Soares strengthened his alliances with mayors who had supported him by rewarding their municipalities with funds from federal projects.

Soares's alliances within his party, with small-town mayors, and in Brasilia ended up placing strain on an older alliance, however: the one with Ferreirinha of Estrela do Som. The pact between Ferreirinha and Soares had worked initially, and they served on the city council together from 2004 to 2006. Ferreirinha promised to back Soares's bid for federal congress in

⁶⁶ Soares's massive victory in 2006 on the PSDB ticket coincided with electoral losses suffered by the Sarney camp and its PMDB ticket. People in the reggae scene whispered that the Sarney camp's frustration with the election results may have contributed to the electoral public prosecutor's decision to investigate Soares.

2006 in return for Soares's support for Ferreirinha's own re-election bid in 2008. This strategy worked in theory but in practice fell flat, mainly because the sound systems themselves remained keen musical and commercial rivals. Reggae audiences in both the capital and the interior were culturally invested in sound system rivalries and for the most part divided their loyalties between Soares (Itamaraty) and Ferreirinha (Estrela do Som). In 2008 Ferrerinha faced an increase in pressure from Estrela do Som's own organized fan group who had always disliked the alliance with Itamaraty. Alleging that Soares was refusing to support his political bid, Ferrerinha broke the fragile political alliance between the two.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, several other leading sound system owners decided to enter politics following in Soares's footsteps. In 2008, in addition to Ferreirinha, Natty Nayfson (owner of FM Natty Nayfson), Luis Black Power (the new owner of Black Power), Biné Tonelada (a businessman that worked with sound systems), and several others ran for city council in 2008. Surprisingly, none were elected. The new slate of "reggae candidates" had kept their political ideologies vague, not much different from Soares's own twin message of tough-on-crime seriousness coupled with the cultural celebration of reggae, sound systems, cheap alcohol, and monetary gifts. The failure of the "reggae candidates" of 2008 suggests that Soares's political model was not easily replicable; to succeed, it required the backing of a mass-based sound system, a multi-faceted marketing sector, a strong network of political alliances, and the right candidate. In 2010 Soares once again showed the strength of his organization and the power of his particular model of political/cultural linkages by winning re-election to federal congress. His vote total had fallen by over 10,000 votes from four years earlier, causing some worry, but Soares continued to build his political empire in and around the island. Soares even prepared his

⁶⁷ Ferreirinha, interview by author.

son Joseildo Silva Soares (“Pintinho Itamaraty”) for an electoral run in 2012 that was aborted due to party politics.⁶⁸

Soares’s political success at the helm of a successful sound system was paralleled by other political careers in Brazil, specifically in the states of Pará and Rio de Janeiro. Like Maranhão, these regions have a strong history of cultivating sound systems. Carlos Santos, who we heard about in Chapter Two as a source of Caribbean records in the 1970s, built a music empire as the owner of a music corporation and also as a radio personality. He used his influence to become vice-governor of Pará and was even the acting governor for a few months in 1994. Since then, the tecnobrega scene has propelled music businessmen to congress. Meanwhile, in Rio de Janeiro, the baile funk scene has also involved itself in local politics. Not coincidentally, like the reggae scene in São Luís, baile funk and tecnobrega are driven by sound systems and depend on large populations of recently migrated urban youth as their audiences. Also, all three scenes are strongly working-class scenes that have faced discrimination and repression in their respective cities.⁶⁹ Surely, one could hope that the election of candidates deeply involved in these music scenes would bring substantive improvement of the conditions underlying such marginalization. So far, though, this has not happened.

In the 2000s Brazilian politics underwent several reformulations. Populist politicians with roots in cultural organizations, especially, emerged across the country. One such successful new breed of politician has been the sound system owner. What characterizes the politics of a sound

⁶⁸ “‘Faltou Lealdade,’ diz Pinto Itamaraty sobre Derrota de Castelo no 2º Turno,” *O Imparcial*, November 4, 2012, online edition; Luís Pablo, “Após muita Confusão, Pintinho retira Candidatura a Vereador de São Luís,” July 20, 2012, Luís Pablo, <http://www.luispablo.com.br/eleicoes-2012/2012/07/apos-muita-confusao-pintinho-retira-candidatura-a-vereador-de-sao-luis/> (accessed January 12, 2013).

⁶⁹ Hermano Vianna, “Technobrega, Forró, Lambadão: The Parallel Music of Brazil,” in *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, ed. Avelar and Dunn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 240-249; Luciana Miranda Costa, “Os Encontros e Desencontros do Rádio e da Política em Belém” (paper presented at the 24th Congresso Brasileiro da Comunicação (INTERCOM), Campo Grande, Brazil, September 2001).

system owner? As businesspersons at the forefront of hierarchical media and cultural industries, sound system owners have perhaps unsurprisingly adopted mostly conservative policies. Soares, for example, has made security the central theme of his political career and has secured increased funding for police departments in Brazil. Regardless of ideology, however, sound system owners require some connection with their working class constituents to be successful. I argue that sound system owners have carefully cultivated relationships of patronage with their audiences using a commodified cultural good as the main instrument of that patronage. These relationships have shaped policy agendas only in a very restricted and non-participatory way.

5.6 CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY II: LIBERATIONIST POLITICAL PROJECTS?

During his early tenure in city council, it appeared that Soares might utilize his problem solving skills and his experience with the reggae industry to improve the social welfare of his constituents. Yet by the time he was a federal congressman, it was clear that he was more interested in building a political machine to go with his business empire, rather than in changing any status quo. Meanwhile, several new trends in the reggae scene and industry emerged as possible alternatives to the dominant sound system-led model. To varying degrees these trends have also encompassed alternative political projects. I argue that while these trends have not been strong enough to elect representatives to political office or to affect policy, they have changed the social organization of cultural practice in São Luís—something that could have political repercussions in the future. They have also impacted *regueiros* personally in significant

ways. This section explores those projects in conjunction to examining the challenges and countercurrents to the dominant sound system-led reggae scene and industry from 1996 to 2010.

The first challenge to the rising dominance of sound systems came from entrepreneurs who broke “exclusivity” and openly made reggae music available directly to the consumer. Frequent travelers who did not own sound systems, like Jofran and Chico do Reggae, and Jamaican producers like Bill Campbell, Joe Gibbs, and Norris Cole all pushed the retail model in the mid-1990s. Also in the mid-1990s, tech-savvy Maranhenses figured out how to download Jamaican music for free without leaving their neighborhoods, and even sold digital copies of songs to sound systems. But would the commercial liberation of reggae music bring *regueiros* closer to the music’s liberationist messages? In 1996 Jofran positioned himself as a crusader on behalf of the masses, announcing publicly that his new mega-store Music Play would end the tyranny of sound systems over the reggae scene. Leading figures in the industry railed against Jofran publicly; then, when Jofran returned from a spending spree in Europe with thousands of records, customs authorities confiscated Jofran’s merchandise and closed down his store for failure to pay import duties. Nevertheless, illegally reproduced and marketed CDs were freely available in the local informal economy by the turn of the decade. The increased availability of music may have facilitated the spread of reggae recordings, but it is unclear if it had any impact on how Maranhenses understood or reconfigured the meanings of the music.⁷⁰

The second challenge to the sound system-led scene came from local reggae musicians. From about 1996 to 2003, sound systems were playing songs produced by Jamaicans (in Jamaica or England) especially for the São Luís market. Local studios WM Studio (engineered by

⁷⁰ Norris Cole, interview; Claudio Designer, interview by author, Anil and Areinha—São Luís, August 11, 2010; unnamed informants, interviews with author.

Wellington) and Hot Star studio (engineered by Henrique, also known as Rick Murvin) began to produce reggae by imitating Bill Campbell's style of using mostly keyboards, synthesizers, and samples, instead of live instruments. Once they learned the right sound techniques, the studios easily undersold the Jamaican producers and in two quick years, by 2005, sound systems had shifted almost completely to buying music from local Maranhense reggae producers.⁷¹ Reggae audiences now mostly heard the voices of Maranhense singers at sound system events, as the industry-leading Hot Star studio producer Henrique cut tracks with new star singers Dub Brown, Ronnie Green, Leny Simpson, Peter Toty, Jamaican ex-pat Sly Fox, Guyanese Simon Brown, and others. What would they sing about? From the start of their careers, their success depended on the ability to channel Jamaican lovers rock style and sing in English (with a Jamaican accent, of course). Their lyrics spoke about various things but by far the most popular theme was romance and love. This corresponded not only to what sound systems preferred but also to how many Maranhenses viewed reggae: as romantic dance music. Singing in English about romantic themes has not led these singers to adopt an oppositional political stance so far.⁷²

Live bands were more creative with political themes and conscious lyrics. One can classify this trend as more original, or one can note that it followed trends long characteristic of reggae scenes in Bahia and Rio, and departed from the characteristics that had made Maranhão so unique within the world of reggae. As seen in section 4.4, bands in the 1990s like Guetos and Mystikal Roots produced original music with lyrics about liberation, especially black liberation. Still, bands were wary of following Tribo de Jah's example of criticizing sound systems as representatives of Babylon and tricksters of the people, as in the song "Magnatas E Regueiros."

⁷¹ Henrique (Rick Murvin), interview by author, Anil—São Luís, October 27, 2010; Cláudio Designer, interview by author.

⁷² Simon Brown, interview; Mr. Lobato (Dub Brown), interview by author, Anil—São Luís, August 11, 2010; Ronnie Green, interview by author, Anil—São Luís, August 11, 2010; Rick Murvin, interview by author.

In the early 2000s, the leading bands like Legenda and Capital Roots made their money backing international singers in major concerts sponsored by sound systems, but remained frustrated at public disinterest in their original music; sound system owners only wanted to promote music that fit on their audio systems. By 2006, however, a slew of new reggae bands emerged with conscious lyrics inspired by Bob Marley and the Wailers that spoke of rebellion and liberation. These bands played in the parallel middle-class and elite scene, mostly in spaces near the beach, at the universities, and in the city center. They sang mostly in Portuguese, and often did take an oppositional stance. By the end of the decade of the 2000s, however, the lines between sound system singers and non-sound system singers were becoming blurred. Songs with Rastafarian themes began to reappear on stages at major sound system events, thanks to a new wave of singers like Fabiana Roots and Dub Brown.⁷³ Reggae in Maranhão was becoming more diversified, as it had been in the early- and mid-1990s.

The third challenge to sound systems was based on aesthetics. As sound systems moved first towards electronically produced reggae and then towards local non-Jamaican singers, they felt a backlash from the scene. Several old-timers began to form groups of record collectors, in order to promote the Jamaican reggae from the 1970s they loved rather than the newer styles of reggae that they called “electronic reggae” or even worse, “*robозinho*” (robot reggae) or “*bate-lata*” (banging on tin cans). Circa 2006, groups of record collectors organized themselves in formal associations, meeting often in various neighborhoods to play old-time Jamaican reggae music on vinyl records rather than on the industry’s preferred media (minidisc). These selectors found willing partners in owners of “reggae bars,” smaller musical establishments that were

⁷³ Tadeu de Obatalá, interview; Banda Legenda (George, João Paulo, Edson Bastos), interview by author, Calhau—São Luís, August 3, 2010; Hilton Quintanilha, interview by author; Rosalia Zahi, interview by author, Centro Histórico—São Luís, August 8, 2010; Fabiana Roots, interview by author, Anil—São Luís, June 11, 2010; Dub Brown, interview.

appearing circa 2000. By the late 2000s, as a result of the vinyl comeback, many *regueiros* chose to listen to “teams of vinyl” (usually two selectors and a small sound system) at bars around the city rather than to attend the larger events of major sound systems. Audiences reacted positively to the alternate scene; most older *regueiros* and many younger ones deemed the vintage songs more authentically Jamaican. Also, the smaller bars strongly cultivated reggae-based visual art, hiring painters to create murals with Jamaican and Rasta themes. These developments appeared to rejuvenate the connection to Jamaica.⁷⁴

These trends added up to a challenge to Soares’s political model as well as to his sound system business. Well before he joined the city council, Soares learned how to walk a tightrope between the informal, working-class cultural world on the one hand and the world of formal, elite-driven business and politics on the other hand. As his electoral career developed and he had to run campaigns, he walked a similar tightrope. He sought to convince the general public and political class that he was a serious candidate and not just a “reggae candidate.” Simultaneously, he needed to convince his voting base—young working-class reggae fans—that he was still one of them and not an outsider from the political elite. This was perhaps the crucial dilemma driving how Soares created his political image. It explains why he might have made security a central part of his platform, because it might suggest to skeptical outsiders afraid of the working class reggae culture that he, Soares, was not a criminal but a law-abiding businessperson. The emergence of alternative trends in the São Luís reggae scene circa 2006, just as Soares was elected to federal congress, strengthened skepticism among *regueiros* as to Soares’s political

⁷⁴ Freire, “Que *Reggae* é Esse”; José Eleonildo Soares, interview by Tarcisio Ferreira a.k.a. Selektah, “Entrevista: Pinto Itamaraty,” *Jornal Itaqui-Bacanga*, Reggae em Notícia column, November 8-14, 2009, PCTSF; Biné Roots, interview; Henrique Chaves, interview by author, Camboa—São Luís, November 4, 2010; Carlos Benedito Rodrigues da Silva, “Registros Iconográficos do Reggae no Maranhão” (paper presented at VI Simpósio Internacional do Centro de Estudos do Caribe no Brasil (CECAB), São Luís, Brazil, November 3-6, 2010).

ambitions versus commitment to his constituents. In his re-election campaign in 2010, Soares had to revisit this question, repeatedly announcing to his audiences at sound system events that he was, indeed, a *regueiro* just like them.

The major sound system owners, despite their growing control of the industry, only faced a moderate level of criticism from the reggae masses in the 1990s and 2000s. *Regueiros* were generally happy with the low prices of entry into reggae shows, the numerous nightclubs, and the vibrant scene that continued to expand. The main critics of sound systems by the late 2000s were groups of record collectors, several live bands, and members of the black movement, who still wished to see more engagement with liberationist messages of reggae and Rastafari. These critiques did have an impact on the scene, especially after 2006. Although there has been no real challenge yet to the political model that Soares had built, alternative political projects are quite possible in the future as the reggae scene continues to undergo changes.

5.7 CONCLUSION: PATRONAGE, POPULISM, AND THE MUSIC INDUSTRY IN BRAZIL

After one particularly large reggae event, a middle-aged woman was seen approaching José Leonildo Soares, a.k.a. Pinto da Itamaraty. “Pinto!” she admonished the sound system owner and political candidate, “Ferreirinha gave my son a t-shirt, but you didn’t give us anything! I’m not voting for you.” Soares quickly asked: “How many children do you have?” “Five,”

responded the woman. Soares turned to his aide, who fetched some merchandise and handed it to the woman. “Here you are,” Soares offered, “five t-shirts.”⁷⁵

The preceding story was recounted during the 2010 electoral campaign season. Whether true or not, it illustrates the simplicity of the relationships between modern political patrons and their voting base. In re-democratized Brazil, countless t-shirts and other material gifts have accompanied political campaigns. Many poor people participate in the process of receiving gifts as an economic tactic; there is a good chance that the woman from the story, for example, cast her secret ballot for neither Pinto nor Ferreirinha. Such actions might give common people a sense of empowerment of having taken advantage of a rich political candidate. Still, by participating in the system of patronage they legitimize it and ultimately aid in its continuation.

The political history of Maranhão, dominated for the past half-century by Sarney, his family, and his allies, casts a long shadow on any potential local liberationist political projects. Sarneyism has eschewed ideology for opportunism and has undermined public organizing by favoring alliances with large corporations and with officials in positions of power. Opposition to Sarney in the capital city remained strong in the 1990s and 2000s, and the election of Ademar Danilo suggested that the reggae scene might be involved in a rising leftist political wave based on participation. With the entrance of Soares and other sound system owners into electoral politics, however, reggae’s main political contributions in the 2000s appear to be neither liberationist nor oppositional. Soares has run his political machine like his business, in a top-down fashion. It is significant, however, that tens of thousands of Maranhenses, many of them poor youth, have mobilized to participate in a musical-political scene. This suggests that reggae

⁷⁵ Unnamed member of the reggae scene, interview by author, São Luís, 2010.

sound systems have been important vehicles for enabling citizenship in Maranhão, as have sound systems in Pará and Rio de Janeiro.

Widening our gaze to other cultural arenas in Brazil, it appears that cultural institutions are becoming more important in forming and sustaining politicians. While radio personalities have long been connected to political office in Brazil (São Luís was no exception, as we have seen), things have now changed. Two decades of democracy and consumerism have created massive economies based around music, dance, television, internet, and sport, giving cultural icons the means to compete at state- and national-level elections. World Cup-winning football players Romário and Bebeto are now congressmen on the strength of their sport-based platforms, while the political satire of professional clown Tiririca propelled him to Brasilia with a record-breaking vote total.

Sound system owners and music businesspersons appear to be some of the more conservative and rightist of Brazilian culture politicians so far, while singers who enter into Brazilian politics appear to swing leftwards. Three famed singers who ran for election in 2010, namely Agnaldo Timotéo, Frank Aguiar, and Netinho de Paula, all ran on the ticket of the Workers Party,⁷⁶ which after a decade in power has admittedly become more institutionalized and centrist. Singers are suddenly reaching the top of Latin American central governments: Gilberto Gil's tenure as minister for culture in Brazil (in the administration of Lula da Silva), salsa heavyweight Ruben Blades's tenure as minister for tourism in Panamá, and compas superstar Michel Martelly's rise to the presidency of Haiti are all cases in point. It remains to be seen if such political representation will also affect the day-to-day and local political engagement

⁷⁶ Pedro Alexandre Sanches, "Vozes em Busca de Votos," *Billboard Brasil*, July 2010.

of musical audiences. Encouragingly, one scholar has argued that Gil's five-year stint in office achieved just that.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Frederick Moehn, "We Live Daily in Two Countries': Audiotopias of Postdictatorship Brazil," in *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship*, ed. Idelber Avelar and Christopher Dunn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 109-130.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The hot and rainy summer of 2010 in the city of São Luís was an eventful one. The football World Cup taking place in South Africa had people glued to television sets. The festivities of São João and Bumba-meu-Boi were especially extravagant, thanks in part to a state administration that had decided to spend an unprecedented R\$ 20 million on the seasonal celebrations with one eye on attracting tourists and another eye on the coming gubernatorial election campaign. And the reggae scene was abuzz with the news that Jamaican superstar singer Max Romeo had accepted an invitation to perform in the city's annual flagship reggae festival, *Cidade do Reggae*. This year's edition promised sound systems, local bands, and two other Jamaican singers in Eric Donaldson and Sly Fox, but it was Max Romeo that the reggae masses were waiting for.

In the weeks preceding the festival, selectors in reggae nightclubs primed their audiences by playing some of the city's favorite Max Romeo hits: "Chase The Devil," "Tacko," and "Tribute To Martin Luther King." On one of those summer evenings I found myself at Point Celso Cliff in one of reggae's stronghold neighborhoods for over three decades, Bairro de Fátima. The owner, Celso, known as "Cliff" after his idol Jimmy Cliff, had opened his establishment several years earlier when the broader reggae scene moved away from older Jamaican music and toward locally produced reggae. On this particular night he was holding

down a heavy sequence of old-school songs and had the capacity crowd dancing, sweating, and spending money on ice-cold beer. Suddenly, as we heard the opening bars of another Max Romeo song (unmistakably produced in Lee Perry's Black Ark studios), someone nearby turned toward me with a smile and a twinkle in the eye, and reminisced: "So many romantic moments when I was young, dancing to this song..." Meanwhile, Max Romeo's voice wafted through the air with decidedly non-romantic, confrontational lyrics: "Fire fe the Vatican, Blood fe the Pope man, Revelations say, So the prophets say..."

The wider working-class reggae scene is mostly free of Rastafarian influences, even cultural ones. Club-goers wore all white clothing for many years, eventually switching to the everyday fashion of coastal northeast Brazil (t-shirts, caps, and Bermuda shorts or jeans for men, tops and shorts or informal dresses for women), and while the pan-African colors red, green, and gold are now identified as belonging to reggae, to many locals they still hold primary meaning as the colors of the local football team Sampaio Corrêa. Dreadlocked hair is not common either. The voices of reggae singers are beloved, but reggae lyrics are unintelligible. So when Max Romeo sang about fire and brimstone and judgment against the Vatican, most Maranhenses—many of them practicing Catholics—heard romance.

This is just one example of how the commercial, technological, social, and cultural routes that Jamaican popular culture took on its way to audiences in Maranhão interacted with local realities to create a quirky scene. In some ways the experience of reggae in Maranhão is unique, but in other ways it is an experience that many towns and cities across Latin America (and elsewhere in the world) had in the late 20th century. The numerous cultural pathways created by vast global commercial structures had created a situation whereby a rhythm such as reggae could

take root and flower in unexpected ways in a place like Maranhão. Which brings us back to the central question: why reggae?

First, I found that in the 1950s and 1960s before reggae was even invented, people in São Luís and the surrounding state of Maranhão had listened and danced to Caribbean music such as merengue, cumbia, bolero, compas, guaracha, and calypso. I suggest that this cultural bridge to the Caribbean was then sustained mainly by common people on dance floors who constantly looked for both similarities and innovations within various rhythms, including reggae.

Second, the routes that Jamaican music took to São Luís were quite surprising. The people I interviewed and the musical records themselves suggest that not only did Jamaican music not arrive as “reggae,” it did not even arrive as a coherent genre of music. Rather it came through Brazilian affiliates of global music corporations in the 1970s, much of it in the midst of international pop, rock, and disco music. Taken together, I believe that these two findings undermine the importance that we give to national and regional boundaries in understanding how music is appreciated and consumed by audiences.

Third, my research suggests that in São Luís, in addition to people on dance floors, the architects of the reggae scene were working-class entrepreneurs, many of them electrical and sound engineers who developed audio machines known as sound systems, by following very similar processes to those in Jamaica itself.

Fourth, I argue that ideas of pan-Africanism and black liberation were not that important in the adoption of reggae music, until the late 1980s when middle-class black intellectuals, especially, began debating questions of race and inequality in São Luís and whether São Luís should be linked to Jamaica. I found that intellectual debates aside, the reggae masses of São

Luís did in that same era establish concrete material links with Jamaica, thanks to the travels of several local entrepreneurs to Jamaica and several Jamaican musicians to São Luís.

Fifth, I found that reggae faced a period of serious discrimination in the 1980s, because of its association with poor, mostly black migrant youth who were criminalized for their association with urban violence and drug use and persecuted by the military dictatorship's police and other sectors of society. I argue that the reggae scene only became socially accepted thanks to the efforts of several of its members to negotiate and campaign in the public sphere.

And sixth, I argue that several individuals were elected to local political office and then to national political office as “reggae politicians,” with most of those votes likely coming from reggae audiences. However, I find that ultimately the most successful of these politicians did not enact policies that might transform the socio-economic situation of the majority poor “reggae masses.” Rather they operated as traditional politicians using their political clout to benefit their business, and vice versa.

Before racial politics, electoral politics, and commercial empires, however, came the selectors and the dancers along with the music that united them. There must have been magic on the dance floor. For stripped of these large-scale economic structures, constructed ideologies, and imagined communities, we are left with nothing but sound frequencies and people in their socio-economic contexts. Maranhenses freed themselves from ideologies, “-isms and schisms” as Rastas might say, and proceeded to listen to the music. And they danced.

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 Mr. Ricardo Arqueólogo, Centro Histórico—São Luís, October 19, 2010
 Mr. Ruy Pinto, Madre Deus—São Luís, August 31, 2010
 Mr. Silvinho Pop, Areinha— São Luís, November 23, 2010

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7.2.1 Archives

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AP	Arquivo Público (State Archive)	São Luís
JP	Jornal Pequeno Newspaper Offices	São Luís

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PCAPS	Personal Collection of Mr. Aplonísio Paulo de Sá Filho (Paulo Caribe)	São Luís
PCD	Personal Collection of Ms. Raimunda Nonata Almeida Santos (Didica)	São Luís
PCF	Personal Collection of Mr. Luis Fernando Santos Costa Ferreira (Ferreirinha)	São Luís
PCIS	Personal Collection of Mr. Isaías Oliveira Costa	São Luís
PCJS	Personal Collection of Mr. Jorrimar Carvalho de Souza	São Luís
PCJM	Personal Collection of Mr. Jesus Marques (Jesa Marques)	São Luís
PCK	Personal Collection of Ms. Katia	São Luís
PCLDV	Personal Collection of Mr. Leopoldo Dúlcio Vaz	São Luís
PCM	Personal Collection of Mr. Messias Cutrim Veloso	São Luís
PCNC	Personal Collection of Mr. Norris Cole (Sydney Crooks a.k.a Luddy Pioneer)	São Luís
PCNN	Personal Collection of Mr. Nayfson Henrique dos Santos (Natty Nayfson)	São Luís
PCP	Personal Collection of Mr. Paulinho	São Luís
PCRHR	Personal Collection of Mr. Ras Herbert Reis	São Luís
PCRM	Personal Collection of Mr. José Ribamar da Conceição Macedo (Riba Macedo)	Rosário
PCSA	Personal Collection of Mr. Sandro Abel Gonçalves (Dread Sandro)	São Luís

PCTFS	Personal Collection of Mr. Tarcisio Jose de Melo Ferreira (Tarcisio Selektah) São Luís
PCTW	Personal Collection of Mr. Thed Wilson São Luís
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1981 Jan-Sep	1982 Jan-Jun, Oct-Dec		1983 Apr-Jun	
1984 Jul-Oct	1985 Apr-Jun, Oct-Dec		1986 Jan-Mar, Oct-Dec	
1987 Jan-Oct	1988 Jul-Dec	1989 Oct-Dec	1990 Jan-Jun	
1991 Apr-Jun, Aug	1992 Oct	1993 Sep	1994 Jul, Oct	
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2006 Oct	2008 Sep			

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1986 Jul-Nov	1987 Jul-Nov		1988 Aug	
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