

# Bezerra da Silva: The Voice of the Other Side

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## ABSTRACT

Samba singer Bezerra da Silva (1927-2005) called himself the *porta-voz* for Rio's voiceless masses. This article considers how and why Bezerra played that role so well, arguing that Bezerra fashioned himself in the image of Zé Pelintra and Exu, Umbanda trickster spirits associated with communication and protection of the subaltern classes. Bezerra projected himself as a singular "ambassador" for Rio's favelas during a crucial period of transition (1970s - early 2000s) on those morros and in the region more broadly. He curated a repertoire of songs composed by residents of those favelas and poor urban outskirts. And through his vocal interpretation, informed by his own life story, Bezerra brought their messages to millions of listeners. Over the course of Bezerra's career, global and local forces including hyperinflation and the effects of neoliberal reforms, corruption, soaring cocaine use and the war on drugs ravaged the lives of the favelas' working poor. As those workers were increasingly scapegoated for Rio's and Brazil's waves of violence, Bezerra's songs asserted that white-collar crime and persistent racism were the principal culprits in the spiraling violence and reminded the city and nation that favela residents were, above all, hard workers and good citizens.

**KEYWORDS:** Bezerra da Silva; samba; Umbanda; Partido alto; Rio de Janeiro; Favelas

## RESUMO

O cantor Bezerra da Silva (1927-2005) se autodenominou o "porta-voz" dos povos marginalizados e "sem voz" do Rio de Janeiro. O presente artigo considera como e porque Bezerra desempenhou tão bem esse papel, propondo que Bezerra criou sua própria imagem na figura do Zé Pelintra e Exu, espíritos *trickster* do panteão da Umbanda que defendem e dão voz aos povos oprimidos. Bezerra se dizia "embaixador" das favelas durante um período crucial de transição nestas, dos anos 70 até o começo dos anos 2000. Como embaixador, em vez de compor suas próprias músicas, Bezerra colecionava músicas de compositores desconhecidos, moradores das favelas e

subúrbios do Rio de Janeiro. E através da sua interpretação -- informada pela sua própria história de vida -- Bezerra levou a voz do morro a milhões de ouvintes por todo o Brasil. Enquanto forças globais e locais como a hiperinflação e os efeitos de reformas neoliberais; corrupção, cocaína e a guerra contra as drogas deixaram os moradores das favelas e subúrbios em situações de vida cada vez mais precárias e violentas, e enquanto estes mesmos moradores foram culpados pela classe média pelas ondas de violência na cidade e no país, Bezerra repetia a mensagem do morro: que a raiz dos estragos estava nos crimes de “colarinho-branco” e o racismo sistêmico, e que os “malandros” do morro eram, antes que tudo, trabalhadores e bons cidadãos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Samba; Partido Alto; favela; Umbanda; violência, Bezerra da Silva; Rio de Janeiro; sambandido

In June 1989, Brazilian samba singer Bezerra da Silva (1927-2005) released his fifteenth studio album, *Se Não Fosse o Samba*. The album quickly sold over 100,000 copies, becoming his ninth to earn gold certification. That month, one of Brazil’s largest daily papers, *O Estado de São Paulo*, ran a feature on Bezerra: “Life lessons with samba and humor, by Bezerra da Silva,” by Maurício Kubrusly.<sup>i</sup> Kubrusly wrote that Bezerra’s work offered an “exuberant window onto a world ravaged by violence and horror,” allowing outsiders from Brazil’s “side of abundance” to “get just a tad closer to understanding that territory where almost everyone in this ill-divided country lives” (Kubrusly).<sup>ii</sup>

Bezerra lived in Rio de Janeiro, where, as Kubrusly suggested, the late 1980s were a time of soaring inequality and polarization between *morros*, or hillside favelas, and *asfalto*, the formal, wealthy city below. The privileged few from what Kubrusly called the “zone of abundance” had little means and often less inclination to understand what life was like for the rest, and favela residents were increasingly scapegoated as carriers of the plague of violence that seemed to engulf Rio from the mid-1980s (McCann, *Hard Times* 11).<sup>iii</sup> Yet this paper argues that Bezerra da Silva bridged that divide like no other

artist.<sup>iv</sup> Bezerra represented a singular mediator between those two worlds, as a closer look at his life and work reveals.

Bezerra could well claim to be the “voice of the other side,” as Kubrusly wrote, because he did not compose his sambas. Rather, Bezerra proclaimed himself ambassador for the favelas, acting as “*porta-voz*” – spokesperson -- for their scores of unknown composers, whose songs he recorded (Sedano 19). As Bezerra put it in the 2006 documentary *Onde a Coruja Dorme*, which portrays the singer and his composers, “The morro has no voice. Since the morro doesn’t have the right to defend itself, only to listen -- thug, scoundrel, crook -- what do the authors from the morro do? He [sic] says singing what he’d like to say speaking, and I’m his spokesperson” (Derraik and Neto).<sup>v</sup>

The composers Bezerra recorded represented the working poor, who have long made up the vast majority of favela residents. These “illustrious unknowns,” as Bezerra called them, included day laborers, garbage collectors, mailmen and bus-fare collectors; firefighters, street vendors and all manner of repairmen (Stycer).<sup>vi</sup> In his capacity as ambassador, Bezerra gave these composers all the credit for his success, as songs such as “*Compositores de Verdade*” (True Composers) make clear: “The reason for my success/ Has nothing to do with me or my skill/ It’s that I record for a bunch of pagodeiros [sambistas]/ Who are true composers” (Silva, “*Compositores de Verdade*”).<sup>vii</sup>

Over the course of his career, from the late 1970s through the early 2000s, Bezerra recorded twenty-eight albums with 270 original songs, 254 of which he registered -- with record companies and the copyright collection agency ECAD -- to unknown composers.<sup>viii</sup> He earned eleven gold records (100,000 sold); three platinum (250,000 sold), and one double-platinum (500,000 sold) (Sedano 53-55). Those sales did not translate into income for his composers, however. Indeed, Bezerra consistently criticized record labels and ECAD for dirty dealings, publicly branding ECAD “a gang of thieves”

for the small sums they paid composers for smash hits – one manifestation of the larger societal ills that Bezerra's sambas denounced (Styker).<sup>ix</sup>

As drug trafficking networks took hold of Rio's favelas by the late 1980s, Bezerra's composers' lyrics increasingly addressed that reality. In turn, many were censored, and by the late '80s the press had taken to calling Bezerra's style *sambandido* -- gangsta samba. Bezerra rejected the label, saying: "They call me a singer for bandits just because I record songs for poor people" (qtd. in Styker).<sup>x</sup> He said his style was partido-alto -- a sub-genre of samba closely tied to Rio's morros and distant suburbs, discussed in greater detail below -- and that the "sambandido" label was just another weapon of the conservative media (Sedano 185-187). With his 1992 samba "*Partideiro Sem Nó na Garganta*," by Franco Teixeira, Adelzonilton, and Nilo Dias, Bezerra popularized that argument in song: "They say I'm a *malandro* (rogue)/ that I sing for criminals, and that I'm even an insurgent/ Just because I sing the reality / Of a hungry and marginalized people/ The truth is I'm a chronicler / Of the day-to-day of my suffering people / They say I'm lowdown / Because I tell the truth like no one has before" (Silva, "Partideiro sem nó na garganta").<sup>xi</sup>

Part of that day-to-day reality was a lack of livable-wage work. More broadly it was a story of weak rights all around. Residents of Rio's favelas have always been "rights poor," as historian Brodwyn Fischer has shown. Over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, they have dealt with racial discrimination and blanket stigmatization; the predations of crooked politicians and opportunists of all stripes; and extrajudicial police brutality. Protections have been hard to come by: state police forces and much of the public have often treated favelas as a "no-man's land," where policing can and should take an approach dramatically different from that of the *asfalto* (Perlman 174).

Meanwhile, most favela residents have sought to eke out an honest living, and embraced humor as a way of dealing with hardships. In the late twentieth century, as policymakers fumbled to respond to crises in the favelas, Bezerra's collaborators -- the ones experiencing the shocks of the '80s and '90s with the greatest force -- chronicled those crises with remarkable clarity and comedy. Because of his skill in packaging and delivering their message, Bezerra emerged as a culture hero who bridged the divide between favela and *asfalto* like no other figure at that time or since.

### **BEZERRA DA SILVA AS A BRAZILIAN CULTURE HERO: THE MALANDRO, ZÉ PELINTRA, AND EXU**

As Bezerra sang in "*Partideiro sem nó na garganta*," quoted above, his public figure was closely associated with the archetypical *malandro*, a character with rough parallels in the *milonguero* of Buenos Aires, the Cuban *negro curro*, or the "rascal" in the early twentieth-century United States. The word is usually translated as rogue or scoundrel in English texts, and that is how much of Brazil's elite saw Bezerra and the people he spoke for. But the meaning of *malandro* goes deeper, and is key to understanding Bezerra's work.

The *malandro* is the central anti-hero in the history of samba and Brazilian popular culture more broadly. In the twentieth century, the character came to represent, for many, what Martha Abreu has called the "symbolic antithesis of the disciplined worker and the well-behaved citizen: idle, disrespectful of the law and of good habits" (Abreu 279). Or as Carlos Sandroni has put it, the *malandro* "works as little as possible, and subsists by running numbers, the women who keep him, and the scams he pulls on chumps" (Sandroni 158).

But as Sandroni himself goes on to point out, *malandragem*, "more than an objective position, is an imagined construct" (170), allowing for a more forgiving interpretation: A *malandro*, for many who might have identified with the character, was

someone who managed to get by without conforming to the unjust societal strictures imposed by the ruling class. In the twentieth century, the malandro, in its multiplicity of meanings, came to represent something of a culture hero for the masses. As Bryan McCann has shown, by the early 1930s, when samba as we know it coalesced as a genre, the malandro became a stock samba figure, “usually represented as an Afro-Brazilian man in stylish attire, most frequently a white linen suit and panama hat” (Hello, Hello 53).<sup>xii</sup> Bezerra updated that attire to suit the 70s, preferring berets to panama hats; but he stuck with the white linen pants and squeaky white shoes, obviously styling himself in the malandro image.

Around the time the figure of the malandro was gaining currency as a culture hero, the syncretic religion Umbanda emerged as a powerful force in Rio de Janeiro. Umbanda took shape as a mixture of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous traditions with the “whiter” traditions of Portuguese Catholicism and Spiritism, a nineteenth-century import from France that involves seances with mediums channeling spirits (Hertzman 51; Hale). The religion emphasized the “ideal of providing spiritual and material forms of charity,” and transcending race and class divides (Brown 220-221). Umbanda worship revolves largely around “spirit-guides” -- the spirits of humans who once lived on earth. And by mid-century, Umbanda practitioners had incorporated the malandro into their pantheon through the spirit of Zé Pelintra, a figure linked to the Yòrubá-descended trickster deity Exu.

Exu, much like Pelintra, is associated with communication, transcendence, and protecting marginalized populations. In the Candomblé tradition, Exu is not a supreme deity, but rather a messenger spirit -- a diplomat between the world of the Orixás and man. He has a facility with language and speaks the language of both mortals and Orixás (Valente 128; Bastide 23). As Maria Somerlate Barbosa has explained, Exu acts as “guardian of the crossroads,” existing “on the margins, ...in liminal spaces” -- including

the informal urban interstices inhabited by malandros.<sup>xiii</sup> Like a malandro, Exu can act for both good or evil, representing an ambiguous figure that's hard to pin down: "His irreverent trickster character is one of his contradictory features," Barbosa writes, "because he also helps all those good people who respect him" (155-159). He lives on society's moral boundaries, probing what's prohibited and stretching the bounds of what's permitted.

Many spirits in the Umbanda pantheon represent different incarnations of Exu, but in Umbanda *terreiros* (centers of worship) of Rio de Janeiro the best-known Exu is Zé Pelintra. Pelintra took form in Umbanda iconography as a black figure dressed in the traditional white malandro suit, with red tie and kerchief, evoking the black and red colors linked to Exu. He is Umbanda's patron spirit of bar rooms and the bohemian underworld. Like Exu, he dupes oppressors, but dedicates himself to protecting the subaltern classes; he is fluent in their slang, which he deploys as a form of resistance. Zé Pelintra the man is said to have migrated by foot to Rio de Janeiro from Recife, Pernambuco -- Bezerra's hometown -- where he had been living on *Rua da Amargura*, suffering from a woman's scorn. The spirit indeed appears to have first appeared in Pernambuco, in the Afro-Brazilian religion *catimbó*. When he arrived in Rio de Janeiro alongside a flood of mid-twentieth-century migrants, he melded with the figure of the malandro, and eventually came to represent an entire pantheon of spirits known as the "good malandros" (Simas).

Bezerra represented a culture hero in the mold of Zé Pelintra and, in turn, Exu, in his professed dedication to communication and attention to language, his transcendence of isolated spaces and milieus within the city and country, and his dedication to protecting the poor and defying Brazil's ruling class in irreverent trickster fashion. Bezerra practiced Umbanda, and appears to have consciously and successfully projected himself in the image of those heroes. His life story prepared him well to play that role. To better understand how Bezerra came to represent a singular mouthpiece

for the masses, it is necessary to understand his biography, the biography of his collaborators, and the story of Rio's favelas in the mid to late twentieth century. The following section weaves those three strands together, casting new light on the morro/asfalto dynamic during this period, which continues to offer important lessons for understanding Rio and Brazil today.

## **BEZERRA'S RISE TO AMBASSADOR FOR MARGINALIZED MASSES**

In many ways, Bezerra's life story is the story of Rio's favelas in the second half of the twentieth century. Bezerra was born in Recife, Pernambuco, in February 1927, but, like many of Brazil's poor, he never knew his exact date of birth. As he told his biographer, Letícia Vianna, in the late 1990s, "That's when the whole mess began."<sup>xiv</sup> Bezerra was raised by his mother, a migrant to Recife from Pernambuco's arid interior. Bezerra's father, who worked with the Merchant Marines, abandoned the family before Bezerra was born, moving to Rio de Janeiro. Sometime in the mid 1940s, Bezerra too stowed away on a ship bound for Rio, in search of economic opportunity and his father (Vianna 19-20).

In typical trickster fashion, Bezerra played up the uncertainty surrounding his background. He told at least one journalist that he had been "born twice": He had really been born on March 9, 1936, he said, but a certificate he'd acquired as a teen said February 23, 1927, so he stuck to the document, "'cause it would cost a lot to fix it" (qtd. in Stycer).<sup>xv</sup> He embellished stories of his boyhood with magical-realist touches, saying, for instance, that his family was so poor that he resorted to eating any creatures he could find, including poisonous ones: "But then I asked for God's forgiveness and it was fine" (qtd. in Vianna 17-18).<sup>xvi</sup> When he spoke of his migration to Rio, Bezerra varied the type of ship he had stowed away on -- a sugar ship, a cement ship -- and sometimes said he had come by foot (Vianna 20). With his fantastical and shapeshifting story about



his birth and background, Bezerra lent mythical overtones to his provenance, evoking the story of Zé Pelintra himself.

Bezerra joined a mid-century mass exodus from Brazil's impoverished northeast to southeastern cities, especially Rio and São Paulo, which were quickly industrializing. Between 1920 and 1960, Rio's industrial enterprises increased from 1,541 to 5,328, and construction and service-sector opportunities grew as well (Fischer 62-63). Rio's population nearly tripled in that same period, from just over one million to just over three million, in large part because of the influx of migrants.<sup>xvii</sup> That migration continued through the rest of the twentieth century, even as Rio deindustrialized and work grew scarce, and represented what McCann has called "one of the fundamental trends in the social, political, and economic upheaval that reshaped Brazil" in the second half of the century (Hello, Hello 97).

When Bezerra arrived, Rio was emerging from the populist dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930-45). Vargas built his reputation as the "father of the poor," promising to uplift the nation's dispossessed. Yet leaders of Vargas's regime made clear that, for them, "some Brazilians were much more politically, economically, and culturally prepared for equality than others," as Fischer puts it, and offered guarantees only to those citizens that fit the regime's imagined ideal citizen: namely, married men who lived and worked in the urban formal sector (B. Fischer 116-117). The regime undertook a quick expansion of administrative bureaucracy in which a cascade of new documents -- identification cards, work papers, voter registration cards and military papers -- defined full citizenship. All of those papers were difficult for the poor to attain, and all depended on one key document -- the birth certificate -- which, as Bezerra's comment above reveals, was hard-won to begin with (Fischer 118-121).

Rio's working poor continued to find themselves in a situation akin to undocumented immigrants, and Bezerra joined them. Upon arrival in Rio, he found his

father in the suburban working-class neighborhood of Jacarepaguá, but the reunion went poorly, and Bezerra was back on the street within a week. After several months of working and sleeping at construction sites, Bezerra joined a girlfriend on Copacabana's Morro do Cantagalo, a hillside favela located directly in the middle of Rio's affluent South Zone, where most Cantagalo residents worked (Vianna).

That experience -- sleeping at work sites and ultimately finding a spot on a morro -- was also representative of the larger story of Rio's favelas and the lot of the working poor. Northeastern migrants poured into a city where the previous half-century of Eurocentric planning had ignored Brazil's social realities and failed to create space for the poor within the legally sanctioned city. Without formal housing options, new arrivals joined poor *cariocas* (Rio natives) in favelas because favelas were near places of work – an important truth long overlooked by policymakers and the public more broadly (B. Fischer 17; 43).

By the mid twentieth century, freelancing capitalists had identified the potential profits to be made off this booming informal real estate market, and had divided morros like Cantagalo into small plots that they rented or sold (McCann, *Hard Times* 23). Bezerra recalled having “rented a shack” on Cantagalo (qtd. in Stycer), investing in a market that distinguished favela-dwellers from the squatters they were often portrayed as.<sup>xviii</sup> Residents who rented or bought into that market did not gain rights to city services. Their land tenure was insecure, but they were often able to ward off expulsion: authorities recognized that the city needed these favela-dwellers' work, and affordable housing didn't exist within the bounds of the formal city. The informal arrangement allowed the working poor a place in the city without the full guarantees of citizenship (McCann, *The Arc of Formality* 118). Their struggle to claim those guarantees pervades Bezerra's repertoire.

Bezerra's affair with the woman who brought him to Cantagalo was short-lived,

but his relationship with the morro lasted the rest of his life. His corpus would later reflect this dynamic: Like the embittered Zé Pelintra, Bezerra rejected songs about romantic love, and instead curated a repertoire of songs about workaday life on Rio's morros, from his informed position as both "northeasterner and *favelado* – poor twice over" (qtd. in Vianna 22).<sup>xix</sup>

On Cantagalo, at small neighborhood bars, Bezerra picked up percussion and became acquainted with partido-alto, the samba sub-genre he would go on to promote as vocally as he flouted the label "sambandido." Partido-alto had emerged in early-twentieth-century Rio from a fusion of Afro-descended sacred and festive practices. Heavily improvisational and challenge-based, it showcases quick wits and versing acumen. It relies on call-and-response patterns and light instrumentation in a circle in which everyone is a composer, alternating improvised verses that are often imbued with humor (Lopes and Simas 211-213). Many of Bezerra's biggest hits are attributed to three composers, a sign of the partido-alto-style rodas in which those composers honed their verses. For these Brazilian citizens with second-class civic and social rights, creating sambas of social critique represented a powerful manifestation of what Eakin (273) has called "unofficial" cultural citizenship -- and Bezerra delivered their culture to millions of listeners.

By 1950, as he was becoming acquainted with *partideiros* -- practitioners of partido-alto -- around Rio's morros, Bezerra began to supplement his income playing backup percussion for *Rádio Clube do Brasil*. As he walked up and down Morro do Cantagalo to go to work, he recalled constant police harassment and preventive detainments called *prisão para averiguação* – imprisonment for a background check. That practice became even more rampant during the military dictatorship, from 1964-85 (Mustafa). Bezerra boasted jokingly that he was "champion of *averiguações*."<sup>xx</sup> The police always found him innocent and let him go, but Bezerra argued persuasively that

these arbitrary imprisonments, often carried out to meet quotas, reinforced to the news media and, in turn, the broader public that he and his neighbors were dangerous criminals and deserved to be treated as such (Vianna 19-24).

On the 1989 album *Se não fosse o samba*, Bezerra satirized that police harassment in the title track, an exuberant and powerfully revealing samba by Carlinhos Russo and Zezinha do Vale: “[E]very time I’d go down Morro do Galo/ I’d take a beating/ The men’d jump at my waist/ Thinking they’d find that .38/ But when they didn’t find it/ They’d grow bitter and wouldn’t let me go/ They’d open the cell and throw me in/ In the slammer again for *averiguação*/ They’d check my record/ And the clean slate would say: He’s a good citizen.” The song meanwhile credits samba for allowing the sambista to be a “good citizen”: “If it weren’t for samba/ Who’s to say today I wouldn’t be mixed up in the ‘animal game?’/It didn’t let the elite make me a criminal/And throw me away” (Silva, “Se não fosse o samba”).<sup>xxi</sup> The hit demonstrates how Bezerra’s composers denounced police abuses and defended their claims to citizenship through humorous sambas.

In the mid-1950s, Bezerra told his biographer, he went into “the gutter,” the realm of Zé Pelintra. He was unemployed and homeless; sleeping on newspapers, scorned by women, and, by his account, sharpening the wit that would infuse his performance style and ensure his culture-hero status in Rio and across Brazil. As he put it, “like the philosophers say, when the misery gets to be too much, it becomes comedy” (qtd. in Vianna 25).<sup>xxii</sup> Still, by Bezerra’s account, he hadn’t found that comedy in his tragic life quite yet, and attempted suicide by drinking a cup of poison. Yet, as he told it, just as he was raising the cup to his lips a force knocked it from his hand. He said he later found out that force came from his Umbanda spirit-guide Orixá, Ogum (also Zé Pelintra’s spirit-guide) (Vianna 26-27).

As Vianna’s biography relates, Bezerra told a woman who occasionally offered him meals about his botched attempt to end his life. She sent him directly to an Umbanda

*terreiro* in the suburb of Rocha Miranda. There, a woman possessed by another Umbanda spirit, *preta velha* -- an elderly, enslaved Afro-Brazilian woman -- told Bezerra that he had crossed an ex-lover and an Exu, and both were taking revenge. The spirit told Bezerra to "put on white clothes and perform acts of charity."<sup>xxiii</sup> She added, for good measure, that Bezerra was born to operate within the "world of music" and directed him to a *terreiro* in the south-zone neighborhood of Gávea to pursue his spiritual evolution. At that *terreiro*, Bezerra reported that the spirit of Ogum received him and claimed responsibility for saving his life. Ogum told Bezerra to stay at the *terreiro* and study. Bezerra stayed for four years, becoming, by his account, a medium -- someone who receives in both mind and body the pantheon of Umbanda spirits. Then, in 1961, Ogum told Bezerra he was ready to leave the *terreiro*, and would be granted a home. Bezerra said he walked out the door and a passerby handed him a key to a shack in a nearby favela, *Parque Proletário da Gávea* (Vianna 26-28).

Bezerra's biographer, Vianna, says this story reveals the extent to which Rio's poorest classes stretched the limits of reason and sought meaning for their hard-knock lives in Umbanda. But like his origin story, this tale may just as well reveal Bezerra's cunning intertwining of myth and reality as he crafted his Zé Pelintra-like image as culture hero -- the mischievous sambista mouthpiece for the voiceless masses.

Gávea Proletarian Park, where Bezerra moved in 1961, had begun as a Vargas-era housing project in 1942, one of several hastily constructed projects from that period. For the Vargas regime, as suggested above, favelas were places "where good, honest workers were corrupted by violence, alcoholism, laziness, and promiscuity" (Fischer 72-73). In turn, Vargas functionaries razed several favelas and showcased the proletarian parks as a model response to the favela "problem." Yet the projects housed around 8,000 people at most -- a negligible portion of Rio's burgeoning favela population (McCann, *The Arc of Formality* 123). As with most of Rio's state-planned housing

projects, within a short time, the projects became favelas themselves, subject to the same kinds of removal initiatives that had created them (B. Fischer 73-74).

Bezerra moved into his shack there with only a chair and a mat, but his work as a house painter and backup percussionist enabled him to slowly invest in his home. Yet these were the early years following the Cuban revolution, and as the Cold War climate intensified, leaders of Brazil's armed forces deposed leftist president João Goulart in 1964 and installed themselves in power. The conservative generals believed favelas were ripe for communist agitation and continued to support their removal. Bezerra lasted until 1970 in his shack in Gávea, when he came home from work one day to find that state agents had torn down his home and trucked his belongings, and pregnant wife, to the urban outskirts. He recalled the removal process as one of sub-human treatment: "They practiced terrorism, they'd come around with machine guns. ... The truck came and [they] threw my wife and everything in it, like animals" (qtd. in Vianna 30-31).<sup>xxiv</sup>

That day, state agents had taken Bezerra's belongings to a new housing project thirty kilometers outside the city, in Cascadura; other residents were sent fifty kilometers away, to Padre Miguel. In such removals, residents and their belongings were often hauled beyond the reach of the city's public transport system. New roads dug out for projects remained unpaved, and as McCann points out, "water and sewage networks were, at best, still under construction" (Hard Times 31-32). To make matters worse, the state proceeded to charge for infrastructure and services that were not yet provided. Some residents refused to pay in protest; most lacked the money anyway.

Bezerra recalled that agents from the state housing company, Cohab, harassed residents, threatening to send them even farther out if they failed to make their monthly installments.<sup>xxv</sup> "But if these people lived in a favela because they didn't have money for a proper home," he asked rhetorically, "how were they going to pay installments, condo fees, electricity, gas, and who knows what else? A lot of them lost those homes and went

back to the favelas. There was just no way it could work. And on top of everything, they had to pay for transport, because everyone's work was back in the city, in the South Zone" (qtd. in Vianna 31).<sup>xxvi</sup> Residents who didn't lose their homes often sold them on an informal market and rented their way back into favelas near the ones they had been removed from. Meanwhile, newcomers built shacks between the houses that comprised the original projects, and the state quickly lost any incentive to provide infrastructure and services (McCann, *Hard Times*, 31-32). The projects, like the proletarian parks before them, became favelas, and evolved into some of Rio's most violent. Bezerra's experience of being tossed between favelas and distant housing projects reflected the insecure rights of all favela residents, and helped prepare him to assume his role as their spokesman.

Through it all, Bezerra continued to pursue a career in music. He recorded his first LP with Tapeçar Records, *Bezerra da Silva o rei do coco*, volume 1, which was released in 1975, followed by volume 2 in 1976. Those two albums reflected Bezerra's esteem for his early musical partner, fellow *pernambucano* and Umbanda adherent Jackson do Pandeiro, the true "rei do coco."<sup>xxvii</sup> Tellingly, on volume 2, Bezerra released an homage to Zé Pelintra sung in first-person voice, by Pernambuco and Betinho: "Boy, you hear, I'm Zé Pelintra/ And I don't like people who overstep their bounds/ Anyone who messes with Zé Pelintra/ Is crazy or damned" (Silva, "Segura a Viola (Zé Pelintra)").<sup>xxviii</sup> And finally, in 1977, more than thirty years after arriving in Rio, Bezerra secured a steady job with a *carteira assinada* -- Brazil's official work-identification papers, instituted under Vargas. His job was studio musician for the Rede Globo orchestra, where he stayed for eight years before leaving to pursue his career as a recording artist (Vianna 32-33). And the same year as he obtained his first real job, Bezerra made his affiliation with the partido-alto style official, with the 1977 release of his album *Partido Alto Nota 10*.

Between 1977 and 1980, Bezerra recorded three albums with CID records (*Partido Alto Nota 10*, vols. 1, 2, and 3). On vol. 1, the popular samba “O Ricardão,” by Edenal Rodrigues and Darci de Souza, made humorous reference to the experience of removal to far-flung projects: “I too am living/ where nobody else lives/ Out there, there’s no pollution/ No cars or trains” (Silva, “O Ricardão”).<sup>xxix</sup> And Bezerra’s first major hit came on vol. 2, in 1979, with “Pega Eu,” by his friend from Morro do Cantagalo, Crioulo Doido (Silva, Pega Eu). That song and the other eleven tracks are representative of that moment on Rio’s morros. There is no mention of guns or hard drugs, which were still rare in the favelas. Most of the songs, including “Pega Eu,” satirized favela-dwellers’ poverty, recalling Bezerra’s experience:

O ladrão foi lá em casa / A robber showed up at my place  
Quase morreu do coração / And almost died of a coronary (2x)  
Já pensou se o gatuno / Can you imagine if that thief  
Tem um infarto, malandro / Had had a heart attack, *malandro*,  
E morre no meu barracão / And died in my shack?  
Eu não tenho nada de luxo / I don’t have anything nice  
Que possa agradar um ladrão / That could please a robber  
É só uma cadeira quebrada / Just a broken chair  
Um jornal que é meu colchão... / A newspaper that’s my mattress...

The early hit is typical of Bezerra’s repertoire. The Brazilian hip hop artist Marcelo D2 has observed that the humor in Bezerra’s songs – which owes to both the lyrics themselves and Bezerra’s spirited performance -- set Bezerra apart from contemporary hip-hop icons who offered similar social critiques: “[Bezerra’s] sly way of portraying things [is] more amusing. That’s the ‘Brazilian way.’ Don’t get mad, just make fun of your problems,” D2 told *New York Times* reporter Larry Rohter (Rohter). The phrase “Brazilian



way" is a translation of a cherished and reviled Brazilian cultural trope, the *jeitinho brasileiro*: the cunning way of improvising a solution to any problem, which evokes the craftiness of tricksters like Exu. What's more, like Exu, Bezerra made his presence felt in every possible space, as D2's comment reveals. While other *sambistas* rejected hip hop and rap as foreign imports, Bezerra embraced those styles, performing with and inspiring their practitioners, including D2, who called Bezerra the James Brown of Brazilian rap (Derraik and Neto).

In the years following Bezerra's rise to fame with "Pega Eu," global forces wrought dramatic changes on Rio's favelas. Those forces can be placed under two broad (and overlapping) umbrellas. The first comprises the regional debt crisis of the 1980s, the entrenchment of neoliberalism, and the attendant acceleration of globalization; the second, the reconfiguration of the global drug and arms trade. The former brought hyperinflation, economic stagnation, and state-contracting reforms, all of which characteristically hit Rio's poorest residents the hardest. The latter brought drug and arms trafficking, and the attendant violence, to Rio's morros. Those changes were portrayed with sophistication and humor in Bezerra's sambas.

As local and national leaders contrived policy responses, Bezerra gave voice, in real time, to the perspective from the favelas, as revealed in "A Rasteira do Presidente." That song responded to President José Sarney's (1985-90) "rasteira"-- a capoeira move akin to a slide tackle -- against hyperinflation, which had reached nearly 250 percent in 1985. Sarney's "Cruzado Plan" introduced a new and short-lived (to 1989) currency, the Cruzado, pegged to the dollar, and a wage- and price-freeze; like successive plans, it backfired, and by early 1987 inflation had surpassed January 1986 rates. "A Rasteira do Presidente" can be interpreted as a genuine celebration of the new Cruzado plan or as a mockery of yet another ill-fated policy. Regardless, the song cleverly highlights the

hardships of hyperinflation for favela residents, and denounces the jargon that elites used in their attempt to legitimate those hardships:

*E não é mole não / And it's not easy*

*Vivendo dessa maneira / Living this way*

*Eles inventaram essa tal de inflação / They invented that thing called inflation*

*E o Presidente deu aquela rasteira / And the president made that tackle*

*(...)*

*ORTN e INPC / ORTN (national treasury bonds) and INPC (inflation index)*

*Eu escuto dizer, mas eu não sei o que é / I keep hearing talk – but I don't know what it is*

*Eu só sei que recebi meu pagamento / I just know I received my payment*

*Que não deu pra comprar meu alimento / And it wasn't enough to buy my food*

*Remarcaram os preços eu fiquei a pé (...)/ They marked up the prices and I was left behind (...)*

*O banco não me empresta dinheiro / The bank won't lend me money*

*porque não tenho bens para me garantir / Because I don't have any assets as guarantees*

*Veja bem, não pedi nada emprestado / But look here, I didn't ask for anything on loan*

*Dizem que devo dolar adoidado / Yet they say I owe mad dollars*

*Ao famigerado, FMI / To that infamous IMF*

The song evokes a key aspect of Bezerra's, and Zé Pelintra's, opposition to the ruling class, which revolves around language. As "A Rasteira do Presidente" highlights, Brazilian elites tossed around cryptic acronyms to justify economic policies that left favela residents in increasingly desperate straits. Bezerra denounced the protective walls elites built around themselves through the use of jargon, and, as the mouthpiece for his

composers, responded with heavy slang as a form of resistance. In *Onde a Coruja Dorme*, the documentary mentioned above, Bezerra observed that slang as a weapon of resistance dated back to slavery, and that Brazil's elite had since co-opted that weapon through jargon.<sup>xxx</sup> "So what do we do?," he continued. "We can talk to a 'doctor' just the same way, and he can sit there all day and not understand a thing. And then it's zero-zero." (Derraik and Neto).<sup>xxxi</sup> Bezerra's songs were so laden with slang that one 1987 news story in *O Estado de São Paulo* included a glossary for readers (Stycer). And Bezerra released a veritable tribute to slang with the 2002 hit "*A gíria é cultura do povo*" -- Slang is the Culture of the Masses (Silva, "A gíria é cultura do povo").

## WHITE COLLARS AND WHITE POWDER

From its industrial peak in the 1960s, Rio had been gradually deindustrializing and shifting toward a tourism-driven economy. Globalization from the 1980s onward accelerated that shift as the city's population continued to surge, prompting an expansion of the informal economy. Formal work grew increasingly scarce on the morros as cocaine use soared among the world's wealthy. The U.S. government and South American leaders largely blocked the export of cocaine from Andean nations, so drug and arms traffickers found new trade routes, and Rio emerged as a regional hub (McCann, *Hard Times* 134-135).

Favelas were an especially propitious terrain for traffickers, because of the lack of economic opportunities; their proximity to middle-class consumers (both tourists and locals) and poorly monitored ports; and their labyrinthine built environment with privileged look-out points (Perlman 175). Cocaine producers established processing plants in the jungles along Brazil's borders with the coca-growing countries of Paraguay, Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. From there, the processed drug flowed to Rio. By the mid 1980s, U.S. and European arms, sometimes more sophisticated weapons of war than

those in the hands of police, flowed alongside cocaine into Rio's favelas (Perlman 179-181). Turf wars between rival traffickers escalated on Rio's morros and became a defining feature of life there.

Other forces intervened on a national and local level. When Brazil redemocratized in 1985, the right (and obligation) to vote was granted universally for the first time in the country's history. In turn, as Fischer highlights, "Brazilians from every corner of the country embraced the right to demand rights and thought deeply about how citizenship might be a catalyst for social transformation," a national and local dialogue that was reflected clearly in the idealistic constitution of 1988, and also in Bezerra's sambas. Yet "bribery, patronage, skewed media coverage, and networks of private interests" continued to dominate political culture, and Brazilian politicians went on stealing with impunity (B. Fischer 306-307). For favela residents, meanwhile, work that guaranteed any legal recognition or rights grew both scarcer and less desirable: the minimum wage was too low to pay for life even on the favela (B. Fischer 307). As McCann has shown, those forces brought the situation on Rio's favelas to a breaking point by 1988. The border between morro and *asfalto* was increasingly guarded by young men carrying automatic rifles, a situation that persists at present writing (Hard Times, 11-16).

Bezerra's composers proved some of the most astute observers of those deadly developments and the inherited injustices they betrayed. And Bezerra's recordings of their songs defied the media's sensationalist portrayal of urban violence. As chronicles of life on Rio's favelas, many of Bezerra's songs indeed reflected the increasing entrenchment of the drug trade. Cocaine earned frequent mention, usually hidden under humorous double-entendre, as in "São Murungar," by Jayminho, from the album *Justiça Social* (1987): "Tell me, grandma, who put cornmeal (*maizena*) in my powder?" (Silva, "São Murungar").<sup>xxxii</sup> The song was banned from radio and television play. In typical trickster fashion, Bezerra said the idea of cocaine came from the censors' dirty minds: "It

could be cement powder, coffee powder," he provoked, adding, "cocaine is a habit of the capitalists" -- a truism ignored by most policymakers (Maria).<sup>xxxiii</sup> On the same album, the song "*Preconceito de Cor*" (Racial Prejudice), by G. Martins and Naval, offered a compelling explanation for the generalization of favelas as the carriers of violence: "I vouch for my guys/ we're dark-skinned morro dwellers/ but nobody's stolen a thing/ that's racial prejudice" (Silva, "Preconceito de Cor").<sup>xxxiv</sup>

From the mid 1980s, indiscriminate police brutality and desperate economic conditions fostered an environment in which drug traffickers could play a role akin to Hobsbawm's social bandit, ostensibly protecting their communities from a state and societal war against them.<sup>xxxv</sup> One such trafficker was José Carlos dos Reis Encina, or "Escadinha," who earned the appreciation of many of his neighbors on Morro do Juramento for the favors and protections he offered. Escadinha was in and out of prison in the 1980s; after two spectacular escapes-- one by rowboat, another by helicopter on New Year's Eve 1985 -- he was recaptured in 1986. A few months later, Bezerra released "Meu Bom Juiz," by Beto sem Braço and Serginho Meriti, which gave voice to competing visions of legality and justice -- that of the "official" Brazil, versus the "*lei do morro*," the law of the hill (Silva, "Meu bom juiz"):

*Aah, meu bom juiz / Oh my good judge*  
*Não bata este martelo nem dê a sentença / Don't pound your gavel or give a sentence*  
*Antes de ouvir o que o meu samba diz.. / Before you hear what my samba has to say*  
*Pois este homem nao eh tao ruim quanto o senhor pensa / Because that man isn't as bad*  
*as you think*  
*Vou provar q lá no morro/ I'll prove that on the morro*  
*Ele é rei, coroado pela gente/ We've crowned him our king*  
*(...)*

*O morro é pobre e a pobreza não é vista com franqueza / The morro is poor, and poverty isn't viewed frankly*  
*Nos olhos desse pessoal intelectual / In the eyes of those intellectuals*  
*Mas quando eu alguém se inclina com vontade / But when someone shows the will*  
*Em prol da comunidade / To help the community*  
*Jamais será marginal / They'll never be a criminal*  
*Buscando um jeito de ajudar o pobre / Finding a way to help the poor*  
*Pra mim isto é mto legal / To me, that's really "legal" (cool and legal)*

As the song implies, favela residents respected a parallel law, the *lei do morro*, which enshrined mutual protection and community cohesion. That law included protecting traffickers because, as one favela community leader told Fischer, "'They were considered sons of the morro. And they were sons of workers.'" They were not to be turned over to the "violence and abuse of the criminal justice system" (208).

In his repertoire and in interviews, Bezerra denounced that tragic criminal-justice system (see for instance "Ilha Grande," 1987, by Laureano). He also played countless shows in prisons, and in favelas, with the sponsorship of drug traffickers and *bicheiros*. In 1996, Bezerra told *Estado de São Paulo* that he in fact *solely* played such venues in Rio, remarking on the elite's distaste for his style: "Here in Rio I only play in favelas and prisons," he said; "I've played in every prison in Rio except for Bangu I and Água Santa [maximum security prisons], which are supposed to be punishing the criminals [more harshly] and don't offer shows" (qtd. in Migliaccio).<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Facile interpretations cast Bezerra as an apologist for *bandidos*. Bezerra responded that the most pernicious criminals in Brazil were the ones in white collars. His shows did not make him any more of an apologist for gangsters than any other artist, he argued, as his biographer related: "He doesn't deny knowing plenty of criminals and doing shows in the favelas that they sponsor," Vianna wrote in the late 90s; "but he also

says he knows plenty of police commissioners (*delegados*), judges and lawyers, and plays shows sponsored by television, radio, ... multinational companies, municipal governments"; these sponsors, by his account, committed more damaging crimes than any drug traffickers he might know (Vianna 124).<sup>xxxvii</sup> Bezerra's comment evokes the law of "*você sabe com quem está falando?*" (Do you know who you're talking to?), which Roberto DaMatta has analyzed (DaMatta 166-67), and which we might consider an elite parallel to the *lei do morro*. Meanwhile, Bezerra advocated that most of the so-called "bandits" he sang for were hard-working, upstanding citizens. He included himself in that mix, joking about how straight-laced he was: "[S]ometimes I'm even embarrassed; I get to the *bocada* [drug sales point] and drink mineral water" (qtd. in Stycer).<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Bezerra's composers shared those messages on white-collar crime on the one hand, and their own hard work, on the other, through the songs he recorded for them. In 1992, Bezerra released the album *Presidente Caô Caô* (Crooked President). The title refers to President Fernando Collor de Mello, who was impeached at the end of that year for a massive embezzlement scheme. One track on the album, "*Não é conselho*," by Dario Augusto and Nilcileo Gomes, remarks on the misplaced scorn for favelas in the face of such systemic political chicanery (Silva, *Não É Conselho*):

*É, doutor/ Hey 'doctor'*

*Isso é um alô não é conselho/ This is a lesson, not a suggestion*

*Mas não foi o preto quem botou/ It wasn't the black man who put*

*O meu brasil no vermelho / My Brazil in the red (...)*

*Juros alto, inflação/ High interest rates, inflation*

*mutretagem, mordomia/ kickbacks, fat-cats*

*Mas não foi o preto quem botou/ It wasn't the black man*

*Meu povão nessa agonia / Who put my people in this agony*

*É o colarinho esperto / It's the slick [white]-collar*

*Que dá lucro certo à elite vadia/ Who assures profit for that nasty elite...*

As the '90s wore on they brought increased criminal turf monopolization in Rio's favelas and a deeper entrenchment of *milicias* -- brutal paramilitary groups comprised of former or off-duty police officers -- throughout the city in response. As McCann has shown, it was the decade when "criminal networks -- both traffickers and militias -- became integrated further in city and state politics, through local associations and direct support for corrupt officeholders." Homicide figures reflected those changes: during that decade in the metropolitan region of Rio, for every 100,000 men aged fifteen to nineteen, approximately 190 were killed each year in a shooting -- a mortality rate that surpassed that of any active war zone (McCann, *Hard Times* 160; 163).

In the face of those developments, Bezerra's composers reminded listeners that the culprits for that tragic situation were from the *asfalto*. In 1996, Bezerra released "*Desabafo do Juarez da Boca do Mato*," by Juarez da Boca do Mato and Zaba, which offers one example of a samba that gave voice to that political stance (Silva, "Desabafo do Juarez"):

*Só combate o morro/ You only fight the morro*

*Não combate o asfalto também/ You don't fight the asfalto, too*

*Como transportar escopeta?/ How are pistols transported?*

*Fuzil AR-15 o morro não tem/ The morro doesn't make AR-15s*

*Navio não sobe o morro doutor/ Ships don't go up the morro, 'doctor'*

*Aeroporto no morro não tem/ And there's no airport up there*

*Lá também não tem fronteira/ There's also no border*

*Estrada, barreira pra ver quem é quem/ Highway, patrols to see who is who*

*Para você/ For you*

*Que só sabe do morro falar mal/ Who only says bad things about the morro*

*Fale também que somos vítimas/ Say we're also victims*



*De uma elite selvagem e marginal/ Of a savage and criminal elite*  
*O morro pede/ The morro pleads*  
*O fim da discriminação/ For the end of discrimination*  
*Embora marginalizados/ Even though we're marginalized*  
*Nós também somos cidadãos/ We're citizens too*

The final line yet again reveals how Bezerra's composers explicitly invoked citizenship to claim the rights they were systematically denied. And as other sambas assert, not only were they citizens, they were among the country's hardest workers. Bezerra's albums consistently included references to the work of the so-called *marginais* of the morros. "O Poeta Operário," by Romildo and Nei Alberto, released on the 1990 album *Não Sou um Santo* (I'm No Saint), represents perhaps the most singular tribute to the labor of those composers from Rio's violently marginalized segments, who, despite their treatment, continuously remade Rio through their craftsmanship and culture (Silva, "O Poeta Operário"):

*Poeta, operário e compositor, compositor/ Poet, operário [blue-collar worker], and composer*  
*Repórter cronista do seu dia-a-dia/ Reporter, chronicler of his day-to-day*  
*Que canta a tristeza e fala a verdade/ Who sings sorrow and speaks the truth*  
*Compondo o progresso e também poesia/ Composing progress and poetry, too*  
*Pinta o sofrimento maior que o salário/ Reveals suffering greater than salary*  
*E nem com talento vê compensação/ And even with talent, isn't rewarded*  
*Isso é que é um povo bom/ That's a good people*  
*Mesmo passando fome, ao invés de revolta/ Even going hungry, instead of making trouble*  
*Faz brotar no momento a mais nova canção/ He creates in that moment the newest song*

*E o poeta é quem vai levando a cruz/ And the poet is the one who goes on bearing the cross*  
*Ganha mais quem nada faz/ Those who do nothing earn the most*  
*Menos ganha quem produz/ Those who earn nothing are those who produce*  
*Alegando a multidão/ Bringing joy to the masses*  
*Que se embala em euforia/Who get wrapped up in euphoria*  
*Vai cantando e no refrão/ Go on singing and in the refrain*  
*Bom humor, filosofia/ Good humor, philosophy*  
*Só sucesso não consola/ But success isn't enough*  
*Pois só ganha micaria/ Because he earns chump change*  
*E o grosso que vai para o bolso/ And the big bucks go to the pockets*  
*Do Ecad é parceria/ of ECAD, that's a partnership*

As the song relates, the blue-collar worker builds not only the city itself but the city's famous culture, bringing joy to the masses. Even that work goes unrewarded, as the white collars at ECAD pay only a pittance to the composers while keeping the rest for themselves.

In 2006, Simplicio Neto and Marcia Derraik's documentary *Onde a Coruja Dorme* (filmed in 1998), introduced above, put Bezerra's composers in the spotlight for the first time, reinforcing the message that they -- and the populations they spoke for -- were hard-working citizens. The production crew visited several of Bezerra's composers on Morro do Cantagalo, Morro da Coroa, Rocinha, and the Baixada Fluminense, the lowlands to the north of the city where much informal development spilt over in the late twentieth century. The documentary follows the protagonists between their places of work and the neighborhood bars where they did their composing, revealing the extent to which work permeates every aspect of life for those "good malandros." As they take breaks from their work to talk to the camera, they beat out samba rhythms with spades,

buckets, and the central instrument to partido-alto, their hands. The scenes capture how those hands built and rebuilt the city: they keep refrigeration systems running, sort and deliver Rio's mail, and remove the dead. They also create culture and recast citizenship, giving voice to the millions of favela dwellers who, in spite of this work, in the early 2000s continued to find themselves not only disenfranchised but targeted as criminals.

## CONCLUSION: LESSONS FROM A CULTURE HERO

As Kubrusly suggested with his 1989 piece, Bezerra da Silva represented a singular mediator between favela and *asfalto* at a time when relations between the two were growing dangerously polarized. Bezerra was able to achieve that stature, in part, because his life story so closely paralleled the story of Rio's favelas. That lived experience prepared him to serve as ambassador for those communities. Meanwhile, the tales he told about his life and the public persona he projected gave him near mystical status. The ambiguity he cultivated surrounding his background and behavior evoked trickster tales and spirits dear to much of Rio's and Brazil's poor population. Bezerra sharpened his culture-hero image in the image of those spirits and practiced the same transcendence, communication, and defense of the voiceless, unsung lives that Zé Pelintra and Exu represent.

Bezerra's repertoire offered privileged perspectives from the favelas on the developments that fundamentally altered their relationship with the formal city in the 1980s and '90s. One can shed the more caustic lines berating the "nasty elite" and still find resounding yet unrecognized truths in Bezerra's songs. One is that the white-collar crime called "corruption" – which, when prosecuted, is more often than not treated as an individual, rather than a systemic, problem -- is a much more corrosive determinant of the city's and nation's fate than any ills emerged from the favelas. Yet urban Brazil's poorest residents continue to be treated as the root of the problem. As many of Bezerra's

sambas indicate, systemic racism -- another reality the country's elite (and some scholars too) have long denied or glossed over -- is at the root of that marginalization. In response, favela dwellers have protected themselves through a parallel law -- the law of the hill -- and through gestures, language, and humor of their own, as exemplified through Bezerra's life and work.

The greatest message from Bezerra's repertoire may still be that the forces governing life on the favelas, and life for the Brazilian and global urban poor more broadly, are much larger and more deeply entrenched in the global capitalist order than any local or national policy response has accounted for to date. Policymakers who continue to make decisions based on the city they imagine, rather than the city as it actually exists and organically evolves, would do well to heed those warnings. Bezerra died in 2005, and as the country continues to be rocked by the forces that took shape in his lifetime, no one has quite replaced him in offering crucial life lessons, with humor, from the "other side."<sup>xxxix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Original title in Portuguese: "Lições de vida com samba e humor, por Bezerra da Silva." All translations are my own. Brazilian artists are often known by their first names or nicknames, and this paper follows that custom.

<sup>ii</sup> Original Portuguese: "um exuberante vitrine de um mundo habitado pela violência e pelo horror"; "lado da fartura"; "[se] aproximar um tiquinho do território onde está quase todo mundo nesse país mal dividido".

<sup>iii</sup> On this phenomenon, also see Sean Purdy, "Constructing Pariah Spaces in the Americas: Newspaper Representations of Slums, Ghettos, and Favelas in the 1960s," in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2009), Chapter 21.

<sup>iv</sup> For more on this, see Claudia Neiva de Mattos, "Bezerra da Silva: singular e plural," *Ipotesi*, Juiz de Fora, v.15, n.2, 111.

<sup>v</sup> Original Portuguese: O morro não tem voz. Como o morro não tem direito a defesa, só tem direito a ouvir - marginal, safado, ladrão - então que que faz os autores do morro? Ele [sic] diz cantando aquilo que ele queria dizer falando, e eu sou o porta-voz".

<sup>vi</sup> Original Portuguese: "ilustres desconhecidos."

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vii Original Portuguese: "A razão do meu sucesso/ Não sou eu nem é minha versatilidade/ É que eu gravo com uma pá de pagodeiros/ Que são compositores de verdade."

viii ECAD stands for *Escritório Central de Arrecadação e Distribuição* (Central Collection and Distribution Agency). The agency is notoriously corrupt. See "ECAD e associações de direitos autorais são condenadas por formação de cartel, multas somam mais de R\$ 38 milhões," *Conselho Administrativo de Defesa Econômica*, March 3, 2013, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://www.cade.gov.br/noticias/ecad-e-associacoes-de-direitos-autorais-sao-condenadas-por-formacao-de-cartel>.

ix Original Portuguese: "uma quadrilha de bandidos."

x Original Portuguese: "'Porque eu gravo para pessoas pobres, me chamam de cantor de bandido'"

xi Original Portuguese: "Dizem que eu sou malandro / cantor de bandido e até revoltado/ somente porque canto a realidade/ de um povo falido e marginalizado/ na verdade eu sou um cronista que transmite o dia a dia do meu povo sofredor."

xii On the centrality of the malandro to samba beginning in the 1920s and 30s, see also Carlos Sandroni, *Feitiço Decente*, part II, esp. ch. 3: "De malandro a compositor"; and Claudia Matos, *Acertei no milhar: malandragem e samba no tempo de Getúlio*.

xiii On Exu as a key "mouthpiece" in the world of samba, also see Muniz Sodré, *Samba, o Dono do Corpo*, 67-68. Exu's role as guardian of the crossroads, and his propensity to do acts considered "evil" in the Judeo-Christian tradition, have meant that over the years he has often been linked to the devil in westernized Afro-Brazilian religions. On this connection, and the evolution of interpretations and invocations of Exu in Brazil, see especially Prandi.

xiv Original Portuguese: "Ja começa daí a confusão."

xv Original Portuguese: "[porque] ia custar muito dinheiro retificar isso"

xvi Original Portuguese: "Mas depois pedi perdão a Deus e tudo bem."

xvii Population data from *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, Sinopse do Censo Demográfico, accessed online at <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/sinopse/index.php?dados=6&uf=00>.

xviii Original Portuguese: "Aluguei um barraco."

xix Original Portuguese: "nordestino e favelado – pobre duas vezes"

xx Original Portuguese: "campeão das averiguações."

xxi Original Portuguese: "E toda vez que descia o meu morro do galo/ Eu tomava uma dura /Os homens voavam na minha cintura/ Pensando encontrar aquele três oitão/ Mas como não achavam/ Ficavam mordidos não dispensavam/ Abriam a caçapa e lá me jogavam/ Mais uma vez na tranca-dura pra averiguação/ Batiam meu boletim/ O nada consta dizia: ele é um bom cidadão"; "E se não fosse o samba/ Quem sabe hoje em dia eu seria do bicho?/ Não deixou a elite me fazer marginal/ E também em seguida me jogar no lixo."

xxii Original Portuguese: "Como dizem os filósofos, quando a miséria é demais ela se torna engraçada."

xxiii Original Portuguese: "botar roupa branca e fazer caridade."

xxiv Original Portuguese: "O que eles faziam era terrorismo, eles chegavam com metralhadora. ... O caminhão chegou e botou mulher e tudo dentro, fazia feito bicho"

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<sup>xxv</sup> In the early '70s the "city of Rio was still delineated by the former Federal District, and it comprised the State of Guanabara, separate from the State of Rio de Janeiro." COHAB (*Companhia de Habitação Popular do Estado da Guanabara*) was the state housing company that, together with the national-level program, CHISAM (Coordenação da Habitação de Interesse Social da Área Metropolitana), was charged with removal-and-resettlement programs. See Perlman, 272.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Original Portuguese: "Mas se o cara vivia numa favela porque não tinha dinheiro pra ter uma casa, como é que ia pagar prestação, condomínio, luz, gás e sei lá mais o quê. Muitos perderam a tal da casa e voltaram para as favelas, não tinha condição. Ainda tinha que pagar transporte porque o serviço do pessoal era por aqui, pela cidade, zona sul... era aqui que trabalhavam antes da tal remoção."

<sup>xxvii</sup> According to Jackson do Pandeiro's biographers, Jackson and Bezerra had become friends and begun composing together in 1959. See Moura and Vicente.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Original Portuguese: "Menino é que eu sou o Zé Pilintra/ E não gosto de nego abusado/ Quem mexer com Zé Pilintra/ Está doido ou tá danado."

<sup>xxix</sup> Original Portuguese: "Eu também tô morando/ onde não mora ninguém/ Lá não tem poluição/ Não passa carro e nem passa trem."

<sup>xxx</sup> The documentary was filmed in the late '90s and released several times (2001; 2006; 2010, and 2012) in different formats; for the purposes of this paper, I reference the 2006 release, which is the version that was made for television and is available on YouTube.

<sup>xxxi</sup> "Doctor" is often used in Portuguese to refer to someone with a university degree, or, more broadly, just a member of the elite. Original Portuguese: "Então que que a gente faz. A gente também pode conversar com o doutor do mesmo jeito, ele ficar o dia todo sentado, e não entender nada também, aí é zero a zero."

<sup>xxxii</sup> Original Portuguese: "Me diz, vovó, quem foi que botou maisena na minha pó?"

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Original Portuguese: "Pode ser pó de café, pó de cimento... cocaína é coisa de capitalista"

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Original Portuguese: "Eu assino embaixo doutor por minha rapaziada / Somos criolos do morro mas ninguém roubou nada / Isso é preconceito de cor."

<sup>xxxv</sup> On "social banditry," see Eric Hobsbawm, *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels* (Hobsbawm), and McCann, *Hard Times*, 126-127.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Original Portuguese: "[A]qui no Rio só canto em favela ou então em presidio. ... Já cantei em todos os presídios do Rio, menos em Bangu I e Água Santa [maximum security prisons], que são considerados castigo para os presos e não podem receber artistas."

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Original Portuguese: "Ele não nega conhecer muitos bandidos e fazer shows de comunidade patrocinado por eles, mas também afirma conhecer delegados, juizes, advogados e fazer shows patrocinados por televisões, radios, sindicatos, empresas multinacionais, prefeituras, clubes etc."

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Original Portuguese: "tem hora que eu tenho até vergonha: chego na bocada e bebo agua mineral."

<sup>xxxix</sup> One journalist recently published a piece about how much Brazil could use Bezerra da Silva, relating themes from each of his albums to the current economic, political, and security crisis. See Pedro Alexandre Sanches, "O que Berrava Bezerra," *Carta Capital*, accessed online at <http://farofafa.cartacapital.com.br/2012/07/23/bezerra-da-silva-o-partideiro-indigesto/>.

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