

# Empowerment, identity and appropriation: How globalisation inhibits Brazil's local music industry

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**Abstract:** Culture plays an important role as both an indicator of and contributor to societal status, making it both a symbol of position and a vital tool to facilitate empowerment. Taking Sao Paulo's only vinyl pressing plant, Vinil Brasil, as its case study, this essay explores the role of music in Brazilian identity construction, and the subsequent conflict that surrounds its production amidst the overpowering influence of global forces on the domestic music scene. Drawing on an interview with Vinil Brasil's owner Michel Nath, the article seeks to identify how Brazilian music has been subject to commodification, appropriation and monopolisation by foreign companies, and how local stakeholders like Nath have been attempting to counter such forces to rebalance the relationship between the creators of Brazil's cultural artefacts and those with the power to produce and market it. Grounding the research in the cultural theory of Bourdieu, Nederveen Pieterse and various other scholars, the article will emphasise the importance of autonomy to a domestic music scene, and seek to highlight the myriad ways in which Brazilian musicians are engaged in an important and protracted struggle to resist the powerful forces of globalisation.

*"The mission of Vinil Brasil is the reconstruction of the legacy of Brazilian music made with soul, a kind of music of cultural importance for the city, for the life of the people and for the history of this place."* (Michel Nath, owner of Vinil Brasil, Sao Paulo, 2018)

The role of culture in social inequality is twofold: it is both an indicator of and a contributor to societal status; a symbol of position and a tool for empowerment. Upon a recent visit to Sao Paulo, I visited Vinil Brasil, a record pressing plant seeking to reclaim agency over Brazilian heritage by constructing the means for Brazilians to produce vinyl records after many decades of reliance on European and US companies. One of only two pressing plants in Brazil, and three in total in all of South America, Vinil Brasil makes an interesting case study in this examination of how music, a key element of Brazilian identity construction, has faced commodification, appropriation and transformation as a result of globalisation. This essay will attempt to explore these themes, drawing on an interview conducted with Vinil Brasil's founder and owner Michel Nath at the factory in Sao Paulo in early August 2018. Throughout the interview, Nath spoke about a variety of problems relating to globalisation, identity and the means to produce culture. These views resonate with many of the ideas put forward by cultural theorists including Bourdieu, Appadurai and Nederveen Pieterse about how culture aids the construction of individual and collective identities, and how its role is adapted to suit the dominant forces of global capitalism. Accepting the argument that music delivers a means to express the desire for social change (De Castro, 2006; Dunn, 2009; Roy and Dowd, 2010), this essay will seek to explore the ways in which a separation between creative expression and the means to turn it into a physical commodity – in this case a vinyl record – can be viewed as a manifestation of inequality, and an obstacle to the construction of identity and social transformation.

In order to better our understanding of the multitude of dynamics that are involved in globalisation's shaping of Brazilian music, this essay will be focused around an exploration of four main areas, each drawing on ideas discussed during the interview with Michel Nath. Firstly, the essay will seek to explore music as a component of identity and a tool for political and social expression, drawing on Bourdieu and Appadurai's theories on culture alongside examples of music's heightened importance in Brazil, and in particular the role of samba, funk and politicising musicians like Tom Ze.

Next, the essay will examine how the globalisation of music can be viewed through Jan Nederveen Pieterse's theories of cultural convergence and hybridity, and compared with various scholars' interpretations of the problematic rise of "World Music", a genre categorisation used to group together heterogeneous forms of non-Western music. Explored in tandem, these two lines of enquiry will help illuminate the unequal structures of wealth and power that have become prevalent in the globalised music industry, and broader conceptions of how culture is both a local and global phenomenon.

Having explored the high level of US and European dominance over the music industry in Brazil, the third section will look at consumer culture and the commodification of music, in order to explain how the dominance of global actors has been detrimental to music scenes on a local scale. Focusing on theories of the commodification of art and authenticity, this section of the essay will examine the notion that art when used for profit is stripped of its true nature and transformative power. Alongside this, the loss of art's ability to act as a symbol of resistance against structures of oppression will be a key theme.

Upon completion of these three sections, the essay will conclude with a section seeking to tie the three themes together with the main aims of Vinil Brasil, rooting the theories in the real-life conditions that the Brazilian music scene exists in now. Looking at the prominence of social inequality in Brazil's society, alongside the capacity of the nation's infrastructure to produce and consume music, the final section will explain why the vinyl pressing industry acts as a significant symbol of the battle that those invested in the music scene face in their attempts to "reclaim control" of the "legacy" of Brazilian music. Though the Sao Paulo pressing plant represents just one institution in a nation that is blessed with a rich musical heritage, it is an appropriate case study because of the political nature of its "mission", and because of its position as one of only two factories with the ability to produce vinyl records in the country.

Taking these four parts as its structure, the essay will build upon the ideas conveyed by Nath and the Vinil Brasil mantra in order to present a complex image of the ways in which the music industry has been separated from Brazilian people through globalisation, as well as the manifest impacts that this has left on the formation of cultural identity in Brazil. The hope is that this will help assess Nath's claims that the Vinil Brasil project is an example of what the wider industry needs in order for Brazil to take autonomy over the production and consumption of its music, a necessary step towards the stalwarts of Brazil's music scene being able to "produce their own future" (Nath, 2018). It is not the aim of this essay to make dogmatic conclusions about whether globalisation is positive or negative for the Brazilian music scene, but rather to explore the relationship between identity, creativity and ownership within the specific context presented, and to support those claims that it is important for local actors to retain autonomy over the way that art is produced and consumed.

## Identifying music as a component of identity and a tool for empowerment

*“It’s about giving a voice back to Brazilian people. It’s all about that.”* (Nath, 2018)

If we are to examine the hypothesis that globalisation has altered the relationship between Brazilian music and society, we must also explore why such a phenomenon is significant. Throughout the interview with Michel Nath, the Vinil Brasil owner discussed the necessity for Brazil to create a “legacy” with its music, relating the ability to produce physical copies of music in the form of vinyl records to the ability of Brazilian artists to assert a voice. Music, it has been theorised, is a key component in the construction of both individual and collective identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Roy and Dowd, 2010; Hertzman, 2009), and has played a particularly strong role in the formation of racial and national identity in Brazil (Dasilva and Camara, 1984; Dunn, 2009; Finn, 2014), and so Nath’s emphasis of its importance can be linked to a wealth of literature. By drawing on tropes of identity, Nath alludes to these ideas, claiming that the Vinil Brasil mission is “about giving a voice back to the Brazilian people” (2018), and so this first section will aim to identify why culture, and more specifically music, should be considered a precious possession to any society.

By identifying it as an important element of identity, this section will argue that music has been a significant tool for empowerment in Brazil, working on the understanding of empowerment as “the capacity of individuals or groups to determine their own affairs, and a process to help them exert control over factors that affect their lives” (Cole, 2007, p.946). Identifying economic, psychological and social as the three forms of empowerment, Cole’s analysis is well-equipped to inform this study, as the interaction between producers and consumers of music can be seen to traverse all three categories. As Nath talks about returning a “voice” to Brazilian people, he is alluding to the psychological importance of pride in cultural objects, which Cole argues is integral to social empowerment through the resultant cohesion of community. Whilst the Vinil Brasil factory aims at achieving economic empowerment by allowing the Brazilian music industry to achieve a greater level of independence, the resultant ability to shape the entire process of production is, according to this definition, also key to the social and psychological empowerment that Cole discusses. If music is an expression of its creators, ensuring that every stage of its production can take place within the community that creates it is necessary to protect its original form and meaning.

Drawing on Bourdieu, Roy and Dowd note that “it is music’s abstract, content-less quality that makes it appropriate for cultural capital” (2010, p.198), and Gartman argues that both Bourdieu and Adorno emphasise the importance of critical culture as a mechanism for opposing social inequality (2012). This critical culture, Gartman argues, “requires the autonomy of cultural producers from the economic imperatives of the marketplace” (2012, p.70). Critical arts are important because culture is a site for both the replication of and opposition to social inequality (O’Brien et al, 2017), and thus music offers a platform for both self-expression and the dissemination of social discourse, playing a “central role in how Brazilian citizenship has been imagined and articulated” (Dunn, 2009, p.218). Offering people the opportunity “to give meaning to themselves and their world” (Roy and Dowd, 2010, p.187), music plays an important role in the assertion of self, and particularly for people whose role in society has been limited by circumstance or structures of oppression, for whom the critical ability of art offers the chance to challenge systemic and institutionalised inequalities (De Castro, 2006). The relevance of this in postcolonial Brazil is stark, music having laid the foundations for Brazilians to “negotiate and contest their physical and symbolic places in society” (Finn, 2014, p.68), and particularly among “a large contingent

of poor youth” which finds “strong group affiliation and identification” through music emerging from peripheral districts of Brazil’s urban areas (De Castro, 2006, p.194). Social status, Bourdieu argues, is derived from symbolic capital, which is granted to an individual when their cultural, economic or social capital is recognised by others (1989). In this sense, music can contribute not just to the status of its creators, but to its consumers, as it is a form of knowledge that holds a value in society as well as a vessel for the communication of ideas. If identity is to be assumed to be a personal construction on behalf of its subject, expressions of identity are the means by which an individual or group of individuals can attempt to define the way that they are perceived by others, meaning that music’s role can in turn be identified as a means by which a sense of personal identity can be conveyed to the wider community, be it local, national or global. “Nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies”, argues Bourdieu (1989, p.19), and music in this sense is an important tool in the classification of self. Leaning on these definitions, the remainder of this section will look at the function that music has performed in the construction and portrayal of identity in Brazil, drawing on examples of the politicisation of citizenship and race by influential artists including Tom Ze and Tio Faustino.

Arguably, the most important site for identification through music in Brazil is to be found in samba, a genre which “became an important organizing mechanism for community solidarity” in the midst of “overt racial discrimination and marginalization from the economic and political mainstream” (Finn, 2014, p.72). Growing from roots in Angola and Congo which were transported to Bahia with the West African slave trade, samba was viewed as a “positive product” of Brazil’s multicultural society, and was “increasingly linked to national identity during the 1930s” (Hertzman, 2009, p.700), transforming it from an expression of local culture to one of national culture. The significance of samba was transformed as its popularity grew, and Finn argues that Brazil witnessed a transformation of samba from “the musical embodiment of black identity in the favelas” to “an aestheticized musical symbol of Brazilian national identity” (2014, p.77). Interestingly, the rise of samba as a national phenomenon beyond Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, where samba music found its foundations, occurred as a result of the proliferation of the radio and the backing of Getulio Vargas, president from 1930 until 1945. Often adopting patriotic themes, the samba of the 1930s suggested a departure from the racialised themes that the genre originally had at its core, having been “an important route for Brazil’s negro-mestizo population to assert identity, create Afro-Brazilian cultural consciousness, and claim a space within the city” in Rio de Janeiro at the start of the 20th century (Finn, 2014, pp.69-70). The embracing of the genre by Vargas, in particular, reflects Appadurai’s belief that states “seek to capture and monopolize ideas about nationhood” (1990, p.303), demonstrating how music as an expression of culture can be viewed as a tool for the assertion of identity on different scales. Conversely, Woodward notes whilst the rise of samba via radio did transform it into “an integral part of Brazilian national identity”, the interspersion of US consumer goods advertisements in the Victor and RCA managed radio industry meant that “Brazilian media, markets, and even national identity came to be fashioned amid the expansion of U.S.-centered consumer culture” (2012, p.395). In this sense, samba provides an excellent example of how Brazil’s music has been instrumental in the creation of both racial and national identities, but was also tied together with the rise in consumer culture that was brought along by US-led globalisation. Transformed from localised expressions of black identity into a symbol of Brazilian identity as a whole, samba demonstrates how the meaning attached to an art form can be constituted differently depending on the source of its creation, the targets of its consumption and the forces behind its dissemination. Arguably, its original role in the expression of Afro-Brazilian culture was negated by its rise in popularity among Brazil’s predominantly white middle class, which Finn argues has been “intimately connected to the development of dominant Brazilian racial constructions” which still exist today (2014, p.88). With

advertises for American consumer goods riding the coattails of samba's radio popularity in Brazil, the genre also represented Brazilian culture's potential to create profit for external actors.

It is conceivable that the rise in popularity of samba had a twofold effect on the identity of those black communities which had originally birthed the genre; on one hand, linking it to a broader national identity could be viewed as an assertion of those communities' cultural capital within the nation, given that an artefact of their production had become so highly valued. Equally, it can be argued that the broadening of a local or race-specific context is akin to the dilution of its original meaning, instead framing it as a possession of the majority rather than an expression of a minority. This idea will be examined in the context of globalisation theories later in the essay, but also opens up questions regarding the contribution that other forms of music have had to citizenship in Brazil.

Music's role in the diffusion of ideas relating to Brazilian citizenship is perhaps best exemplified through the work of artists during the political repression of the 1960s and 1970s. Dasilva and Camara argue that a "fervour of revolutionary ideology in Brazilian arts" followed the military coup of 1964, but was "matched by vigorous governmental censorship and repression" (1984, p.24), and artists like Tom Ze reflected the importance of the critical culture. Dunn (2009, p.219), argues that "Tom Ze represented citizenship in terms of class privilege, social distinction, and political control during the period of authoritarian rule", highlighting the importance of music in conveying messages to the public during a time of strict governmental control over political discourse. Despite the repression of the government, many artists sought to use their music to create "a media for increasing social consciousness and political action", presenting challenges to "the existing dynamics enclosed within the taken-for-granted structure of Brazilian reality" (Dasilva and Camara, 1984, pp.17-18), and this idea is mirrored by De Castro in her analysis of music's importance to youths in poor urban areas of Brazil. "Musical expression has become the ample, and perhaps the sole, cultural means whereby poor youth can voice and express the silent and perverse conditions to which they are subjected", De Castro notes (2006, p.194), emphasising that rap, funk and hip-hop have in recent years offered a method for Brazilian youths outside of education to form positive self-conceptions as well as "denouncing the oppression and the social injustice of their social condition". These examples of critical culture can, according to Bourdieu, only be found when their producers are "freed from the practical necessity to make money by giving [the masses] what they want – beautiful illusions of freedom and individuality" (Gartman, 2012, p.66), and though the censorship against musicians in the 60s and 70s had the effect of limiting mainstream music to apolitical themes, political artists still found an audience for their music, encouraging the rejection of popular Brazilian music as a mass consumer product. In contrast to "stylized, elitistic, socially-apathetic versions of national music bossa nova", the revolutionary music of artists like Tom Ze, Geraldo Vandre and artists in "exile" challenged status quo politics from abroad, gaining popularity among intellectuals despite – and perhaps because of – the obstacles faced in the form of domestic censorship (Dasilva and Camara, 1984, p.19). Forced to operate outside of mainstream channels, artists were able to represent the periphery of society "as a place of artistic creation and intellectual vigour" (Dunn, 2009, p.234).

The use of music as a platform for the assertion of identity against powerful political forces in Brazil, both governmental and societal, was not only limited to the period of authoritarian government; even before the rise of samba, opposition to European appropriation of Afro-Brazilian culture had been expressed during the 19th century by the likes of Tio Faustino, one of a number of artists who tried to construct new definitions of Africa and Brazil through "conscious dialogue with market forces, property rights, and their nation's global standing" (Hertzman, 2009, p.696). Hertzman argues that "the idea that Afro-Brazilian musicians could own the music and

instruments that they wrote and played went against accepted ideas about property, blackness and Africa" (2009, p.712), demonstrating further evidence that music has long contributed to the construction of racial and political identity in Brazil. Though these are just a few examples of a vast array of Brazilian artists who sought to express ideas relating to culture and identity, they nonetheless prove that music has been a key tool in the construction of narratives about what it means to be Brazilian and dialogue about how citizenship is to be understood. To understand culture in this context is the first step in understanding why the capacity to retain autonomy over the production of cultural products is so important, and underpins the argument that Vinil Brasil represents a genuine attempt to "reclaim" ownership of Brazil's musical heritage. In order to explore this in further detail, the next section will explore theories of cultural convergence, building on these ideas of culture as a component of identity to create an image of how the ownership of Brazilian music has been transformed by globalisation.

## Globalisation, cultural hybridity and the problem with 'World Music'

*"Those countries think that they rule the world – we give them everything, we give them silver, gold, wood; we give them the important things and they take it, they process it, and they sell it back to us at a higher price. In this game we are colonised, like slaves. Produce the best, give it for nothing, and we remain with nothing."* (Nath, 2018)

References to Brazil's colonial history appeared frequently during the interview conducted with Michel Nath, the Vinil Brasil owner suggesting that today's music industry demonstrates residual inequalities from Brazil's relations with colonial powers. This section will aim to explore this theme by looking at the impact of globalisation on culture along two lines: firstly, it will draw on theories of cultural homogenisation and convergence to analyse the ways in which local cultures are impacted by exposure to global markets; secondly, it will look at how structural inequalities prevent peripheral countries from regaining control of industries. Finally, this section will then lay the foundations for the next by looking at the rise of 'World Music', a genre classification which has the impact of homogenising disparate styles of music from the non-Western world.

Appadurai argues that "the central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (1990, p.295), noting the complexity of cultural interactions and the way in which commodities are indigenised by recipient communities, not just imposed on them. Though globalisation and homogenisation are not the same, they nonetheless use many of the same tools, and in being opened up to the influence or admiration of new audiences, culture can be profoundly transformed from its original, local character. Given the significance of culture in identity construction and empowerment discussed in the previous chapter, the absorption and transformation of cultural objects at the hands of external powerful groups is an important factor in any study of social inequality, as globalised societies are no longer able to be viewed as single entities but networks of interacting ideas and communities (Said, 1995; Lockard, 1998). The interaction of these ideas can be productive, with music and wider popular culture "now more and more evidently involved in fission and fusion than ever before" (Connell and Gibson, 2004, p.357), but it is important to note that cultural hybridity itself is not inherently progressive, and can have the effect of allowing dominant groups to appropriate minority culture for capitalist gains (Mitchell, 1996; Finn, 2014). This latter view signifies the possibility that the process of cultural hybridisation can have negative impacts on its subjects, especially less powerful groups which may suffer "cultural absorption by politics of larger scale" (Appadurai,

1990, p.295). In the case of Brazil and its music industry, the bourgeois classes were seen to attach high social value to US imports in the early 20th century (Alcadipani and Caldas, 2012, p.43), and there remains a strong desire for US cultural goods in Brazil. Michel Nath alludes to this in his declaration that “[Brazilian] people need to stop thinking that things from outside are better”, suggesting that part of his task with *Vinil Brasil* is to reinforce the value of Brazilian music amidst a general preference for American goods (2018). This fits with the view that North America and Europe have become the “cultural center of gravity” for cultural convergence, with the diffusion of culture from these dominant actors into other societies now interpreted by proponents of dependency theory as a form of cultural imperialism and Eurocentrism (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009, pp.58-59). This exchange of culture from centre to periphery can be detrimental to the recipients, as local culture is superseded by the imported culture, and the potential for this form of hybridity has been accelerated by the proliferation of the internet (Connell and Gibson, 2004, pp.355-356). Working with the understanding that “science and technology arise as enablers of new forms of (neo) colonial control” (Alcadipani and Caldas, 2012, p.38), it is clear that the internet has expanded the potential for centre-produced culture to be impressed upon the periphery with greater force than ever before, and with 60.9% of the Brazilian population now online (United Nations Development Programme, 2018) this channel for cultural convergence is clearly wider than ever in Brazil. Of course, such an exchange can go both ways, and the rise of the internet has simultaneously offered Brazilian culture a greater global platform, however much of this periphery-to-centre cultural exchange is similarly detrimental to local culture in peripheral countries, as the next part of this section will explore.

Whilst external cultural products may threaten domestic interest in local cultures, the latter also face challenges to form when embraced in the global arena. Just as samba could be seen to have lost its racial character when assumed as part of an overall Brazilian identity, it can be argued that the globalisation of culture often amounts to an extension of extractive colonial policies, with the centre profiting from products of the peripheries. Gartman, for instance, argues that “the myriad manifestations of culture in modern capitalist society - art, music, television, film, consumer goods - are inextricably linked with the unequal structures of power and wealth” (2012, p.41), suggesting that the mixing of cultures is often destructive rather than productive for the peripheries.

This is particularly important in cases where the power to distribute the cultural product is held by the centre, as is undeniably the case with the music industry; the “big four” record companies - Universal, Sony BMG, EMI and Warner - owned between 75 and 85% of the \$20 billion world market in 2005 (Finn, 2009, p.193). Considering the monopolies of these Western companies, there is little doubt that the market is dominated by the centre, and thus it remains the centre that dictates how those resources available to it are used, even if those resources are from artists in peripheral countries. Following this understanding, when the music of Brazil comes under the control of Western companies, it is those companies that hold the power to determine how products of the Brazilian music scene are portrayed and received internationally, with Brazilian people unable to affect perceptions. Brazilian music chosen by Western record labels may end up on sale in Brazil, endowed with a greater profile due to its perception as marketable by businesses far-removed from the Brazilian scene itself. In this sense, even the domestic market is disproportionately affected by a music industry based predominantly in USA. When the *Vinil Brasil* mission statement claims to hand the power back to the Brazilian people, it does this by offering music a route to the shops that is not dependent on any actor outside of Brazil.

The incorporation of peripheral cultures into the centre is not solely extractive, however, and

cultural hybridity theories emphasise the capacity for new ideas to come from the fusion of cultures drawn from different sources (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009). Appadurai suggests that “the new global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order” (1990, p.296), arguing that centre-periphery models are no longer sufficient, but whilst this idea certainly helps explain how cultural exchange is now multidirectional, the prominence of power relations in the music industry means that we should not reject the centre-periphery model entirely. The case of “World Music”, a genre coming to prominence in London in the late 1980s, is exemplary in this regard, providing “valuable insights into how constructions of place, identity and deterritorialization are uneven and selective” (Connell and Gibson, 2004, p.343). The genre, which classifies a stylistically and geographically unrelated array of music together as a single entity, has the effect of drawing a separation between Western styles of music, which are classified in a diverse range of genres, with a single ‘Other’, the distinct category of ‘World Music’. Connell and Gibson attribute the rise of this phenomenon to “the collusion of entrepreneurs, reviewers and consumers” (2004, p.358), with agents of the Western-dominated music industry drawing on tropes of authenticity that appeal to “an aesthetic of exoticism” (ibid, p.344). Satisfying the desire of Western audiences to meet cultures far-removed from their own, World Music presents a method for classification of music without paying attention to its source or musical character, merely the fact that it is not of Western creation, or is of Western creation but incorporates elements of styles from outside.

Paul Simon's 1986 album *Graceland* is often cited as one of the first examples of the latter definition of World Music, and set a precedent for musicians “more wholly schooled in Western musical traditions” to borrow “exotic” sounds from other regions of the world (Connell and Gibson, 2004, p.348). The othering effects of this process mirror the *Orientalism* described by Edward Said (1995), perhaps best witnessed in the way in which record sleeves for music recorded in Africa, Central or South America often displayed artwork with stereotypical images of “semi-naked natives” or “dreadlocked revolutionaries” (Connell and Gibson, 2004, pp. 346-347). Such artwork draws on a Western-imagined ‘other’, appealing to fetishes for exotic or ‘authentic’ culture by presenting images which in most cases had little reflection on the musicians that actually made the music. In this sense, the actual character of the culture is negated, replaced by a portrayal that fits the imaginations of an audience that perceive those regions as undeveloped or primal. Ironically, Connell and Gibson note that “third-world performers could gain more effective access to global markets through these networks” only when they conformed to Euro-American standards of intonation, scales and tunings (2004, pp. 352-353), meaning that even the ‘authentic’ music itself was subject to Western parameters before being judged suitable for the Western markets. Again, it should not be argued that exposure to a broader array of sounds and ideas is detrimental to any musician, but what is more problematic is the way in which expectations from the powerful centre are forced upon music from outside, as any external assertion of parameters is a limit on the creative scope of an art. There is undoubtedly a paradox evident in World Music as a categorisation which is marketed on the authenticity of its content, but applies an understanding of music that pairs together anything that is not Western as a single entity, offering little acknowledgement of the individual character of the heterogenous cultures that are included. It is in this way that local culture offered to a global market can be stripped of its original identity, which further demonstrates why it is problematic for the distribution of cultural products to be removed from the culture's site of origin, which has become the norm in the music industry due to Western domination of the means to produce. The next section will focus on this idea more closely, exploring ideas on the commodification of music and how globalisation has encouraged the dilution of local identity.



## Commodification of music and the loss of local identity

*“[Leno] recorded the album, and the business people looked at him and said ‘You are crazy. This is not the music we want to work with, we’re not gonna sell that shit.’ And they put it in a box, and it disappeared.”* (Nath, 2018)

Part of Nath’s argument against the monopoly held over music production resides in the idea that the ability to value music, deciding what is given a platform and what is not, is held by profit-driven companies rather than those parties to whom the music is culturally significant. Following Castells’ assertion that “value is what the dominant institutions of society decide it is” (2011, p.27), it can be understood that the cultural significance of music, along with its function as an expression of identity, is often discarded when it is commodified; its value is determined by its marketability, not its message. “To Bourdieu, while most artists are primarily concerned with art for the sake of art, the commodifier uses the artist’s art for profit”, Finn summarises succinctly (2009, p.193), and this discord between the creative and profit-seeking parties will serve as the basis for this section. Investigating the ways in which separation of the means to produce music from its creators leads to a negation of the music’s capacity for disseminating a message, this section provides the final theoretical explanation for how globalisation can prove detrimental to local culture, and more precisely, how Nath’s assertion of the necessity for Brazilian music to be taken “back into our own hands” can find support in the theories of commodification (Forest, 2017).

Various scholars have discussed the commodification of art, and the power relationship involved in a dominant force possessing the means to select, distribute and profit from expressions of cultural derived from less powerful groups. In the music industry, “the Western industry assumes ownership, often to the extreme of being credited with having discovered or unearthed the sound, style, or even the musicians themselves” (Finn, 2009, p.196), in a phenomenon that shifts the recognition of an art form from its creator to its disseminator, creating a dynamic where little credit is given to the scene that produced the music itself, whilst the Western actors that “discover” the music are lauded for their knowledge. More problematic still, “Once commodified for Western consumptions, the cultural product as a symbol of resistance arising from a site of marginality is lost” (Finn, 2014, p.84). Considering the strong symbolic capital attached to Brazilian music, as has previously been discussed, the loss of its symbolic meaning constitutes a reduction in power to the community that it is taken from, and Gartman argues that its apolitical use as a product for profit eliminates “the painful reminders of repression and ugliness” that art is able to convey (2012, p.44). In the case of Brazilian music which has become highly marketable on the world market, the fact that it is sold to audiences that cannot speak Portuguese means that the content of the lyrics will largely be ignored; given that samba, the most exportable product of the Brazilian scene, has roots in expressions of black identity, it is expressions opposing marginalisation that are effectively silenced. Hesmondhalgh regards this consumption of music in disregard for its original meaning as akin to the superficial exploration of culture conducted by tourists, who “pass through a culture without really paying serious attention to the meanings of the experiences they ‘consume’” (2006, p.56). Profit-seeking Western institutions select music from the Global South because they believe it will appeal in some way to the global consumer market, and that market pays little heed to either the process or the motive behind the art that is being consumed (Cole, 2007; Finn, 2014; Ganahl, 2001).

Cole (2007) notes that commodification of cultural products is not always entirely negative, and in some cases can empower marginalized people by bringing their culture to wider attention,

but this argument is undermined by the way in which the Western music industry can be seen to construct participants from the Global South as an 'Other', as earlier discussed with regard to World Music. Even for those communities who are boosted by interest in their cultural products, the process of packaging a product for the new audience is in itself a loss of cultural agency, as commodification tends to subvert marginality and incentivise the production of commodities in accordance with predetermined aesthetics – those which appeal most to the consuming audience (Finn, 2014; Gartman, 2012). Samba is a prime example of this, with the Brazilian state and powerful Western music institutions selectively promoting examples of the genre which did not demonstrate the political, anti-racist, anti-violence themes that were central to its history, in order to “tame cultural content for marketability to largely white audiences throughout the First World” (Finn, 2014, p.83). As far back as 1936, Brazilian journalist and politician Carlos Lacerda had expressed the need for Samba to stay connected to its roots as its presence abroad increased, arguing that “it suffers deformities by passing from the poor to a form of entertainment for the rich” in an article for *Diario Carioca* (Hertzman, 2009, p.713). As globalisation has meant that the consumer audience has grown exponentially in the years since, Lacerda's warning should resound with even more volume today.

What complicates this discussion further is that the popularity of imported music is often based on the notion of 'authenticity', described by Cole as “a Western cultural notion associated with the past “primitive Other” articulated in opposition to modernity” (2007, p. 944). Though the desire for authenticity suggests prioritisation of cultural products which are free of Western influence, the reality is that ethnic and geographical differences are manipulated for marketing, often exaggerated in order to appeal to Western exoticism. This in turn perpetuates ideas of non-Western cultures as being less civilised or developed, again drawing parallels with Said's *Orientalism* (1995) in the construction of homogenising or stereotypical portrayals of Third World producers.

Three parameters for judgement of authenticity are identified by Connell and Gibson (2004): distance from capitalist music businesses; a distinctly non-Western “sense of feeling”; and appeals to an unchanging fixed past (p. 345). These criteria are somewhat paradoxical with an industry that profits from “uneven and selective” constructions of place, identity and deterritorialization (Connell and Gibson, 2004, p. 343), and Appadurai argues that the depiction of an 'authentic' product disguises transnational capital production as “local control, national productivity and territorial sovereignty” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 307), effectively hiding the power dynamics inbuilt into an industry of domination. Even though non-Western producers may be given greater exposure to powerful consumer markets in order to satisfy the desire for 'authentic' goods, they are often still “not afforded the same creative freedom as their white, male, middle-class counterparts” (O'Brien et al., 2017, p. 275), meaning that inequality is reproduced despite their seemingly elevated platform.

Cultural commodification, then, can be viewed as a problematic theme in the music industry, and completes the theoretical exploration of the ways in which inequality is present in the interaction of music from the non-Western world with global markets. The next section will attempt to refocus the theories thus far discussed on their manifestations in the Brazilian music industry, in order to explain exactly how Vinyl Brasil plays a role in opposing the forces of inequality.

## The Record Industry in Brazil

*“Europe has many factories, USA has many factories; we need to have something in Brazil, making our own music.”* (Nath, 2018)

It has been established that music's capacity as a vehicle for cultural expression and an enabler of social transformation can be inhibited by its recontextualization for global audiences, and so it is clear that there is a problem inherent in the inability of an individual or group to retain control of how their cultural products enter the consumer market. The final step in this enquiry is therefore to explain how Vinil Brasil is attempting to readdress this problem, which has proven especially significant in Brazil. For this purpose, this section is divided into three parts; the first will look at why vinyl records are an appropriate medium for this study; the second will explore the domestic market's ability to consume, and the third will look at the domestic industry's ability to produce.

Of course, the focus on production of vinyl records, which occupies only a relatively small part of the Brazilian recorded music industry, presents only a narrow picture of the nation's industry as a whole, but the decision to study only this medium has been made for a number of reasons. Vinyl has experienced a huge resurgence across the world in recent years, becoming the medium of choice for many music lovers seeking higher quality audio than CDs and digital files, selling more units in 2017 than it had in a single year since the heyday of vinyl in the 1980s (Passman, 2017). The decision to exclude these latter formats from this study is twofold: firstly, unlike vinyl, between 48 and 65% of the Brazilian CD and digital music market is pirated (Mello, 2012), and as such it would be difficult to provide accurate analysis of the state of production and consumption with these formats included, given the prominence of black-market versions of the goods. Secondly, though the wider music industry is still dominated by major Western labels, it is the technically demanding nature of vinyl production that places restrictions on the ability to manufacture music, as the means to produce CDs and digital formats is less difficult to acquire. Whilst CDs and digital files can be copied and shared easily by anyone with a computer, only two factories in Brazil are capable of pressing records, and so the vast majority of vinyl records reaching shop shelves are produced outside of Brazil. Naturally, this means that our exploration of consumption will be restricted to a study of a certain demographic of record buyers, who tend to be more affluent than consumers of other mediums due to the increased average cost. It would be beyond the scope of this essay to examine how globalisation has affected the music industry as a whole, but in looking selectively at the ability to produce vinyl records, we can understand a microcosm of it. This is yet more significant because without the ability to facilitate a modern record buying culture, the Brazilian music scene is unable to encourage interest in the wealth of music recorded prior to the proliferation of CDs, most of which is only available on the original format. Without the means to produce new music as affordable records, the Brazilian music industry also lacks the means to create interest in the medium itself, and thus much of Brazil's musical heritage is now largely unexplored by the modern consumer market.

Many scholars have noted that across the world consumption has taken on a role as an expression of identity (De Castro, 2006; Dunn, 2009; O'Brien et al, 2017), and this is certainly true of Brazil, where consumption practices "become landmarks of 'inclusion' and citizenship" (De Castro, 2006, p.183). Disparities in the population's purchasing power are stark, as "Brazil remains one of the most unequal class societies in the world with high indices of rural and urban poverty" (Dunn, 2009, p.230). This claim is supported by the 2018 Human Development Index, which lists Brazil as suffering a 23.9% loss in HDI as a result of inequality, compared with an average loss of 16% for similarly high HDI nations. With a Human Inequality Coefficient of 23.2%, income inequality of 36.7% and education inequality of 22% (Human Development Report, 2018), Brazil evidently suffers from a significantly divided population, and this has magnified the symbolic status of products, as seen in the use of autoconstruction as an assertion of identity in poor urban areas (Holston, 1991). Gori-Mae also argues that though only higher earning citizens may have

the ability to consume non-essential goods, “the desire for such things increases in the rest of the population”, undermining life satisfaction (2013, p.1202). In much the same way, “for many poor urban Brazilian youngsters, demands to consume, and thereby become part of society through the adequate markers of distinction, embed identity in a process of ‘psychological survival’” (De Castro, 2006, p.182). Despite this heightened significance, consumption remains inhibited by the cost of imported products, and Nath argues that the result is that “people need to choose if they pay the bills of electricity and water, or buy a record” (2018). A vinyl will arrive at the shops in Brazil for around 80-150 reais (20-37USD), prices comparable with new records sold in shops in the EU and North America. This is despite Brazil having a Gross National Income per Capita of just \$13,755, compared to 39,166 in the UK, 54,941 in USA and \$46,136 in Germany (United Nations Development Programme, 2018), showing that the relative cost of a record in Brazil is significantly higher than in those countries where the majority of pressing plants are concentrated. Nath argues that the creation of a greater “culture of appreciation” for the format is inhibited by the high cost, and has allowed record buyers from Japan, USA, Germany and the UK to exert disproportionate power in the market, leaving only “the worst quality, most scratched and warped” records behind (Forest, 2018).

If the relative cost of records in Brazilian shops is to be reduced to a more attainable level for the average consumer, it is fundamental that record production itself be made cheaper. Given that the rights to reproduction are often “passed into the hands of the most powerful corporations in the cultural industries” (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p.66), and these companies are located in the centre, Vinil Brasil becomes an important institution in the bid to bring down the cost of records in Brazil, with Nath arguing that “My dream is to make albums that cost \$R20 (£5.50) in Brazil. I don’t want people to have to choose either to make rent or buy a few albums” (Forest, 2017). Difficulties still remain, however, with much of the machinery and materials needed to produce vinyl having to be sourced from outside Brazil, and therefore being subject to taxes set by the government. “The taxes of the government are not fair; the prices of the materials are not fair”, Nath suggests. “We can’t find the suppliers, [so] I need to import things and pay taxes, and suffer due to exchange rates” (2018). De Castro argues that the “global effectiveness of international capitalism is zealously looked after by the dominant Brazilian elite” (De Castro, 2006, p.196), supporting Nath’s claim that not only do Vinil Brasil and Rio de Janeiro’s Polysom face powerful international competitors in the record industry, but they are also not supported by domestic governmental policies in their attempt to bring down production costs. This demonstrates the “contested terrain between music as the cultural property of its creator and as the business interest of the capitalist” (Finn, 2009), a dynamic that has been present in the Brazilian music industry since its early days, when it was a European entrepreneur named Fred Figner who first acquired the ability to record music in Brazil in 1902 (Hertzman, 2009). Figner “used his international connections to bolster his empire in Brazil – but he was also often at the mercy of foreign companies and entrepreneurs” (Hertzman, 2009, pp.708-709), and it was not until 1912 that records were forged entirely on national soil, after a decade of reliance on North American and European factories. By 1995, no domestic pressing plants remained in Brazil (Scruggs, 2014), and though Polysom would open in 1997, the “significant control over the production and sale of music in Brazil” held by European and North American actors has not yet been drastically challenged, Brazil still holding the status of an “economically and politically marginalised former colony” (Hertzman, 2009, p.697). Though the addition of a second factory in Vinil Brasil has offered a step towards addressing the imbalances that put disproportionate control of the record industry outside of Brazilian hands, the issues discussed make it clear that there are still many barriers in place. In particular, Nath points out that Vinil Brasil was only able to be opened because of the fortuitous acquisition of pressing machines which had been abandoned by a closed down

Continental factory in Brazil; the cost of importing the machinery from outside would have made the business unsustainable (Forest, 2017). This suggests that the hopes of more factories being developed in Brazil remain slim, with no companies able to produce the machinery domestically.

## Conclusion

As emphasised in the introduction, the aim of the essay was to explore the relationship between music, identity and empowerment, and how this relationship is subject to transformation in the setting of consumer culture and exposure to the global consumer market. Working with the example of Vinil Brasil, only the second factory with the capabilities to produce vinyl records in the whole of Brazil, the essay has aimed to give theoretical context to some of the statements presented by the factory's owner Michel Nath about the state of Brazil's music industry, and why it is important that the domestic capacity to produce records is increased. Outlining the disproportionate power held by North American and European institutions over the global music industry, Nath's interview offered insight into the way that local actors in Sao Paulo perceive the city's music scene, as well as the wider national scene, and suggest a strong desire for the reunification of the creators of art and the means to produce and disseminate cultural products.

It is the argument of this essay that a discord exists between centre and periphery economies with regards to the global music industry, with the institutions of developed countries at the centre yielding the power to selectively assert value over art from peripheral countries, appropriate it and turn it into a commodity for profit on world markets. The fourth section of this essay was devoted to presenting a picture of the vinyl record industry in Brazil, demonstrating that the high cost of vinyl records in Brazilian shops makes the creation of a record-buying culture difficult amidst a significant lack of consumer power in the domestic market. The reason for this is largely due to the necessity for the vast majority of records that enter the market to be imported.

The significance of the high-cost of imported records is not just in the resultant inability of much of Brazil's population to purchase the products; as discussed in the final chapter, vinyl records constitute only a small part of the wider recorded music industry in Brazil, and the production of CDs and digital music in Brazil is not closely related to the lack of vinyl production capacity. It is not, therefore, the case that US and European domination of the vinyl industry means that Brazilians cannot consume music, but rather that the medium of vinyl is much costlier to acquire relative to countries in the centre, where the majority of pressing plants are located. Given that Brazil is a country with a rich musical heritage, most of which exists only on vinyl, this essay argues that difficulties in encouraging a record-buying culture in the country presents an obstacle to engagement with Brazil's history, and that this is what Nath describes in his assertion that "All the great vinyl production done in Brazil in the 50s, 60s, 70s, our 'precious stones', those records are not here anymore. They're in Japan, USA, Germany and the UK" (Forest, 2017). The resurgence in popularity of vinyl records has once again empowered the centre-based institutions that run the global music industry, and the case of Brazil demonstrates how peripheral audiences are struggling to gain access to this growing sector. Products which were once local, when selected for global markets by global companies, become unobtainable; those that are not selected for international markets, are simply not produced.

The significance of this is demonstrated in the theoretical roots of the essay, which explored themes of identity construction, cultural appropriation and commodification. It is argued that music has held a particularly high level of importance in the creation of both racial and national

identity in Brazil (Dasilva and Camara, 1984; De Castro, 2006; Dunn, 2009; Finn, 2014), and the capacity for music to act as a vessel for communication of social and political ideas has been especially evident in the history and development of Samba (Finn, 2014; Hertzman, 2009; Woodward, 2012). Providing a basis for the expression of ideas relating to citizenship in post-colonial Brazil, and especially during the period of political repression during the 1960s and 1970s, music has demonstrated its function as a form of critical culture, which is a key facilitator of identity formation and social transformation (Roy and Dowd, 2010). Also adopted as a source of pride in underprivileged urban youth communities (De Castro, 2006), music can be considered a potent example of cultural capital in Brazil.

The high significance of music as a local cultural product means that there are a number of problematic developments which can arise as a result of globalisation, with cultural homogenisation and convergence producing the possibility for racial content to be diluted, and cultural products to lose their local character. Domination of the music industry by capitalist forces located in the centre economies of Europe and North America has created an environment where music is marketed to new demographics based on its suitability for audiences far-removed from the original context of its production, and this has the effect of neutralising much of its critical content. The genre classification 'World Music' is presented in section 2 of this essay as a manifestation of this phenomenon, and demonstrates how the 'local' content of music is either disregarded (Connell and Gibson, 2004) or else fetishized (Appadurai, 1990; Connell and Gibson, 2004) in order to make it profitable with largely Western audiences.

Delving deeper into this theme, the third section of the essay argued that commodification is a significant problem in the music industry, as it turns art forms which were intended to have social or political significance into commodities with little of their original character intact. Peripheral creators of art, often portrayed to fit with Western consumers' preconceptions of the non-Western world, are effectively marginalised by homogenisation, with practices of 'Othering' akin to Said's *Orientalism* evident in the extraction of profit from cultural goods found and taken from other cultures. Whilst greater exposure to global markets can of course provide economic benefits to those artists offered the platform, the power to offer this platform is monopolised by the powerful institutions of the West, and this represents an extension of colonial relations of domination and the reproduction of inequality (Cole, 2007; Finn, 2014; O'Brien et al, 2017).

Drawing all of these conclusions together, we are left with an image of a drastic imbalance in the global music industry, with power concentrated in the hands of institutions of the centre, and products from the peripheries subject to appropriation and commodification as they are repackaged for global audiences. As exemplified by Brazil's vinyl industry, the importance of local means of production cannot be understated, as reliance on external industries to produce locally composed music allows unequal global power relations to affect consumer culture domestically. When Michel Nath evokes tropes of "reclaiming" Brazilian musical heritage, he refers to the need for Brazilian people to be autonomous over the entire process of production, from the writing of the music all the way through to the shrink-wrapping of the packaging. Only when musical products can be manufactured without the interference of non-domestic actors will the Brazilian record industry be able to provide for more than a small minority of the population by reducing costs to reflect the domestic market's income, and only then will the record industry in Brazil be reflective of its local character, rather than the influence of powerful forces in Europe and North America. If music is to be understood as more than its value to a consumer market, a return of power to local producers is surely the first step along the road towards reducing these manifestations of inequality that still reside in the globalised music industry.

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## Notes

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