

# **Before and After Exile: The Music of Protest in Brazil**

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## **1. Reactions to the Dictatorship**

The Brazilian military dictatorship, established as a result of a coup d'état in March 1964, prompted a strong social reaction especially amongst the younger generation of Brazilians. Many students of Brazilian universities took to the streets to demonstrate against the government. The year 1968 was a decisive year in which political movements and demonstrations against the military regime emerged all over Brazil, showing widespread dissatisfaction with the military government. Most leaders of the political movement were young

people, aged between 18 and 30, as were the majority of the participants.

The rebellion of these young people was generally regarded as a fight against the political dictatorship. Some of them adopted violence and used guns. The military government responded to their violence with more violence, imprisonment, censorship and torture, evidence of which can be seen in many testimonies and books written by ex-militants and ex-prisoners from the dictatorship period<sup>1</sup>. The big youth demonstrations at the end of 1968 meant inevitable confrontation with the police and resulted in stricter laws by the military government, such as AI5 (Institutional Act number 5)<sup>2</sup>.

Others protesters, mainly artists and musicians, participated in the movement against the military dictatorship, some of them writing their songs and lyrics

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as a call to arms against the government. One example is the song known as '*Caminhando*' [Walking], also known as '*Pra Não Dizer que Não Falei de Flores*' [Don't say I didn't speak about flowers], by Geraldo Vandré, which was released in 1968. This song became a popular anthem in demonstrations against the military government. Another form of resistance adopted by musicians was the "Chico Buarque de Hollanda" style famous for lyrics critical of the dictatorship, which were sung in metaphors designed to trick the censors.

After 1969, as the political situation became more difficult to cope with, many Brazilians, especially those who had engaged in violent political movements, were deported from the country. Some were sentenced to compulsory expatriation while others went into voluntary exile. Most migrated to European cities and some of

them settled in London. This Diaspora resulted in a counter-cultural explosion in Brazil when at the start of the 1980s these exiled migrants returned. They had changed their habits and behaviour in exile and had been subject to the influences of the young peoples' movements in Europe, especially the May of 1968 protests in France. Many had studied in universities in the UK. Some of those who had lived in London adopted ideas from intellectuals, reunited in the *New Left Review* journal and implanted them into leftist Brazilian political movements and Brazilian universities, especially in the social sciences departments. Life in London, according to the testimony of some of the ex-left militants<sup>3</sup>, made them rethink their violent, militant and radical practices, and caused them to engage in more peaceful democratic

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movements for political, economical and social changes in Brazil.

In the cultural arena, the deporting of Brazilians to London affected the so-called *Tropicália* musical movement, which was launched in 1967 by a group of Brazilian singers and bands. The movement involved a fusion of several musical genres such as Brazilian, African and rock and roll rhythms, and featured names like Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Torquato Neto, Os Mutantes, Gal Costa and Tom Zé.

Living in Notting Hill and Hampton Court in 1969, the musicians Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso socialized with West Indian immigrants, who introduced them to reggae music. They were also influenced by The Beatles. These singers choose the city of London because of the musical movement that was taking place

in this city at the moment. They met the Brazilian music entrepreneur Claudio Prado and ventured into the London underworld, visiting the best rock n' roll venues in the city. They also met hippies and bohemians and took part in the first Glastonbury Festivals. All these experiences resulted in a new wave of influence on the *Tropicália* scene in Brazil.

The attendance at the first Glastonbury festival in September 1970 by Brazilians Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso and Claudio Prado resulted in the organization of the '*Agua Clara*' festival in Sao Paulo in 1975, 1981, 1983 and 1984. The festival focused mainly on rock music and was intended to celebrate peace, love and justice.

The exiling of Brazilians to London resulted in the establishment of what was called 'counterculture' on

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their return to Brazil in the 1980s. ‘Counterculture’ referred to changes not only in Brazilian music but also in the habits and behaviour of the people, especially regarding sexual relationships and casual drug use. During this time, a conflict of generations, was taking place in Brazil. Both young people and adults were taking part in a social conflict involving drugs, sex and rock and roll.

## **2. Mods and Rockers in Brazil: the Impact of “Quadrophenia”<sup>4</sup>**

The return of exiled Brazilians from London to Sao Paulo in the late 1970s and early 1980s had a significant impact on culture and politics within Brazil. People who returned began to influence other Brazilians with the introduction of youth music, clothes and attitudes

imported from London. Clothes and attitudes similar to those of the mods and rockers in the UK were being adopted by Brazilian young people, as well as bands playing music in English or Portuguese influenced by British punk or hard-core punk. This new wave of Brazilian bands tended to perform songs concerning such themes as dictatorship, poverty and violence in Brazil. British youth culture was therefore absorbed by young Brazilians and adapted by them to address issues in their own country. Furthermore, some music festivals around Sao Paulo, such as *Agua Claras*, were inspired by British music festivals.

It could be said that mod culture in Brazil was more a style than a movement. Brazilian mods were frequently seen in rock bands and mod clothing, which appeared in some high class stores in Brazil, though their cost



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prevented them from being especially popular. The so-called ‘violence’ of mods and rockers assumed different facets; although these groups were not as aggressive as their English counterparts, they were nevertheless similar in terms of criticising society and confronting old values.

The style grew more and more popular among the youth of the late 70s and early 80s, and was strongly influenced by the *The Who*’s album, *Quadrophenia*, which was released in the UK in the early 70s. Mods inspired a famous song and album from the punk rock band *Ira!*, whose name was inspired by the Irish Republican Army. This group adopted mod culture in their second album, which featured a song called ‘*Ninguém entende um mod*’ [Nobody understands a Mod]. They were also influenced by the British rock band *Led Zeppelin*, the late punk rock and mod revival

band *The Jam*, and George Harrison's song 'Taxman', from the *Beatles* album 'Revival'. *Iras!*'s original name was '*Subúrbio*' [suburb]. They became famous playing at a school festival in Sao Paulo, where their controversial song '*Pobre Paulista*' [Poor *Paulista*] became a hit. The leader of the group, Edgard Scandura, described it as disguised public criticism of the government and an expression of youth rebellion. However, the song was later seen as a xenophobic rant against poor immigrants from the Brazilian northeast, which came to live in Sao Paulo.

Some other hits by *Ira!* were called '*Gritos na Multidão*' [Scream in the Crowd], and Base Nucleus, the latter song being intended as a backlash against military recruitment. The album '*Vivendo e Não Aprendendo*' [living and not learning], featured the hits '*Envelheço na*

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*Cidade*’ [Becoming Old in the City] and Dias de Luta [Days of Fighting], as well as ‘*Flores em Você*’ [Flowers on You], which was based on The Beatles track, ‘Eleanor Rigby’, from the album ‘Revolver’, - the most played song on Brazilian radio in 1986 and 1987. The band also displayed confrontational behaviour, such as refusing to wear Santa hats in a special Christmas TV programme, and destroying a guitar in front of the audience at the 1988 edition of the Hollywood Rock Festival in Rio de Janeiro and later vandalising their dressing room.

The British mod movement from the 60s continued to inspire Brazilian bands in the 90s, such as *The Charts*, who used to play in the Sao Paulo underground scene and in alternative rock bars. They launched an album called ‘*Carbônicos*’ [Carbonics] in 1996, with lyrics

written completely in the Portuguese. This band could not join peers at the time because the underground bands, influenced by alternative British and American rock, always sang in English. Thereafter they acquired a cult following in Sao Paulo for their idealism and for being the pioneers who had brought the mod style to the Sao Paulo rock scene. Other mod bands in the 90s, playing 60s style gigs at alternative music venues in Sao Paulo and independent rock festivals, were *Os Sky Walkers*, known as the music of garages, *O Sala Especial* [Special Room] and *Os Espectros* [The Spectres], all of whom played raw rock very loudly, performing scenes and dressing in costumes inspired by horror films, or performing as if they were under the influence of drugs, calling such performances as lysergic journeys.

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### **3. The ‘Aggressive’ and Morbid End of the 70s and Start of the 80s in São Paulo**

The Brazilian punk movement was born after a music store in Sao Paulo started selling tracks by the British hard-core punk band *Discharge*, most significantly the album ‘Why’, as well as the music of some American bands. Increasing amounts of hard-core punk material subsequently started arriving in Sao Paulo, including the extended version of ‘Realities of War’ also from the band *Discharge*, and ‘Complete Disorder’ from the Bristol band *Disorder*. Some other British bands to appear in the 80s Sao Paulo market were *Chaos UK*, *Chaotic Dischord*, *The Varukers*, *UK 82* (or *UK Hardcore*), and the British street punk band *Charged G.B.H.* Hard-core punk music easily found a place in the Sao Paulo urban scene.

The first hard-core punk album launched in Brazil was a compilation of songs from three bands, *Olho Seco*, *Inocentes* and *Cólera*. The 1982 album was called ‘*Grito Suburbano*’ [Suburban Scream]. The album included songs such as ‘*Desespero*’ [Despair], ‘*Medo de Morrer*’ [Fear of Death], ‘*Garotos do Subúrbio*’ [Boys from Suburb], ‘*Lutar, Matar*’ [Fight, Kill] and ‘*Pânico em São Paulo*’ [Panic in Sao Paulo]. The first band to adopt the hard-core label was ‘*Ratos de Porão*’ [Basement Rats], also from Sao Paulo, in 1983. The urban scene in Sao Paulo was ready to welcome hard-core punk in the 80s after the punk rock of the late 70s had reached underground and alternative music venues like *Madame Satan*, *Napalm*, *Carbon 14*, *Lira Paulistana* and *Plastic Acid*. The neighbourhood of Vila Carolina in the northern zone of Sao Paulo was the place where rock

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groups first played variations of punk tracks at the end of the repressive political military dictatorship and the establishment of the new political system of inclusion which was then taking place in Brazilian society.

“Ghosts were frightened and fears were transformed into attitudes,” was what the “existentialist and revolutionary”<sup>5</sup> band *Restos de Nada* [Rest of Nothing] used to say about their own worldviews and attitudes. The leaderless group’s first concert was called ‘*Nos, acorrentados no Inferno*’ [We, Enslaved in Hell]. Following this, the band members formed another group called *Desequilibrio* [Disequilibrium], performing a music event called ‘*O Começo do Fim do Mundo*’ [The Beginning of the End of the World]. The political engagement of the group was demonstrated when one of the most active members of the band collaborated with

an ex trade union leader in the late 80s in the scripting and filming of a famous video depicting the postal strike, which had taken place throughout the whole of Brazil several years before.

The Brazilian crossover hard-core punk band from Sao Paulo, *Ratos de Porão*, criticized Brazilian society in their lyrics. Their first album, *Crucificados pelo sistema* [Crucified by the System] was released in 1983. In 1984 the band split up for a while due to the fact that the Sao Paulo's punk scene was at that time linked with gangs and violence. Reuniting again in 1985, their style became closer to that of the Brazilian heavy metal band *Sepultura* [Sepulchre], and they were later influenced by the British hard-core punk band *English Dogs*, thereafter including trash metal in their performances. It was around this period that they released the album



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‘*Descanse em Paz*’ [Rest in Peace]. In the 90s they released two more albums: ‘Just Another *Crime in Massacreland*’ and ‘*Carniceria* [Carnage] Tropical’.

Finally, in the second half of the 1980s the themes of the Brazilian hard-core music became increasingly morbid and heavy. The band Lobotomia [Lobotomy] use to play in various underground venues in Sao Paulo, performing songs such as ‘Faces da Morte’ [Faces of Death] and ‘Só os Mortos não Reclamam’ [Only dead people don’t complain]. The band ‘Cólera’ [Cholera] spoke of “agitation, revolution and destruction”<sup>6</sup>, and the band *Armagedom*, the self-proclaimed ‘sound of death core’, whose name was that of the biblical battle at the end of days, spoke of poverty, death, injustice, hopelessness and agony. Their songs included ‘*Mortos de Fome*’ [Starvation] and ‘Força Macabra’ [Macabre

Strength], which spoke of tomb waiting to be filled.

They also launched an album called ‘*Das Cinzas ao Inferno*’ [From Ashes to Hell].

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<sup>1</sup> Alfredo Sirkis, *Os Carbonários: Memória da Guerrilha Perdida* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1998).

Fernando Gabeira, *O Que É Isso Companheiro?* (Rio de Janeiro: Codecri, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> The Brazilian military dictatorship issued this act on 13 December 1968 in response to the wave of protests that occurred in 1968. The AI5 was, among seventeen others, the highest form of legislation after the 1964 coup d’état. This act is considered the most infamous decree of the Brazilian government at the time.

<sup>3</sup> Sirkis, *Os Carbonários*.

Gabeira, *O Que É Isso Companheiro?*.

<sup>4</sup> Allusion to the Album of the British Band The Who and the film of the same name, which subject is the mod.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia “Restos de Nada.” pt.wikipedia.org. October 17, 2013, [http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restos\\_de\\_Nada](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restos_de_Nada)

<sup>5</sup> João Punk, ‘A lendaria Colera,’ *Contracultura Punk Revolucionando o Cotidiano* (blog), World Press, December 21, 2012, <http://contraculturapunk.wordpress.com/tag/bandas/>