

### 9.3. Being a mother, a wife and a female MC: strategies of production and gender constraints

*Guilherme Libardi*<sup>232</sup> and *Luiz Henrique Castro*<sup>233</sup>

#### **A b s t r a c t**

In this study, we observed how gender influences Brazilian funk music production strategies based on interviews with two female MCs and a funk music producer. The research is qualitative and exploratory and the gathered data is analyzed in the light of gender concepts established by Butler, McRobbie and Garber; and production strategies by Martín-Barbero. This analyse indicate that gender articulates consolidated roles such as “being a mother” and “being a wife”, that constrain the work of these women as MCs. We also focus on the appropriation of this very theme by the singers themselves who insert these speeches into their songs. We point out that this movement is not entirely political, as it is also mobilized by the possibility of their songs being marketable.

**Keywords:** *Brazilian funk, women, gender, performativity, strategies of production.*

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<sup>232</sup> Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: glibardi@gmail.com

<sup>233</sup> Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre, Brazil. E-mail: luizhenriquescastro@gmail.com

## 1. Context of research and methodology

This study contemplates the production strategy behind Brazilian funk music sung by women in Porto Alegre/Brazil. We intend to find an answer to this research problem: what are the dynamics established in the relationship between gender and strategy production for funk music sung by women?<sup>234</sup> Thus, the goal is to analyze in which way gender is imposed, in what conditions and how it permeates the daily life and work of these women, although the lines between these two domains are blurry. For this purpose, we use exploratory and qualitative research applied through semi-structured interviews with two female MCs: MC Helenzinha and MC Paty. We also interviewed a male funk music producer named Markinhos JK. The interpretations were articulated by two concepts that are central to this piece: gender and strategies of production. Content analysis was the method chosen for data interpretation in this study.

From this theoretical-methodological design, we point out the results in the following structure: firstly, from a bibliographical research, we synthesize a theoretical framework that orientates epistemologically the analytical path in this study. Following up, we describe the historical timeline of Brazilian funk music scene in Porto Alegre. We then present the data gathered from the interviews that bring up pieces of evidence and clues to answer the research problem. Lastly, from this set of empirical data, we interpret the resulting content in the light of the theoretical framework previously elaborated with the purpose of conforming possibilities to comprehend the relations among gender, funk music and strategies of production.

## 2. Strategies of production, gender and performativity

In this chapter, we briefly outline two key-concepts for the paper: strategies of production and gender. Both are found under the Cultural Studies epistemological perspective in which we circumscribe this study. By referring to the strategies of production, we are essentially bond to Jesús Martín-Barbero (2001) ideas. This author speaks from a perspective that confronts the dichotomies between “high” and “low” culture, hegemony and counter-hegemony, mass culture and popular culture. For him, strategies of production are about the main institutionalized logics in the range of capitalist industries. It concerns the capacity of producing and communicating media/cultural goods to a certain public/audience. We move this discussion in the direction of strategies of productions articulated inside the funk music scene. Just like for corporations, the strategies for funk music are basically the same: identifying the audience’s interest; materializing it through music, music videos, ads, etc.; and disseminating these products and its representations. We are, however, talking about a cultural production made within a precarious context and by a gender historically marginalized inside the funk music scene: female MCs from favelas. Because of that, we need to briefly look at the relationship formed between gender and popular culture.

We comprehend gender as part of a complex structure made of other categories and markers such as class, generation, sexuality, etc. Although we recognize its analytical and political importance, in this study we will not evoke an intersectional perspective<sup>235</sup>. Instead, we approach the subject of gender

<sup>234</sup> This article was produced based on data and discussions presented at the Master thesis entitled *How they do and hear funk: media self-promotion strategies and consumer practices* (Libardi, 2016). However, the goal now is not to merely reproduce a part of this bigger research, but to look at the data from others theoretical approaches in the search of new interpretative possibilities.

<sup>235</sup> For a discussion in this perspective, see Libardi (2016).

through the perspective of performativity (Butler, 2003), considering that it is socially constructed in the body through actions, creating meaning effects and locating the subject in “man” or “woman”. Binding ourselves to the perspective of Cultural Studies, we understand gender as a particularly structuring instance of social relations in popular culture. This is because, according to McRobbie and Garber, “[t]he position of the girls may be, not marginally, but structurally different” (1993, p. 211). Writing in the 1970s, the authors saw the female presence in the subculture scene being pushed to the margins so that they actually served other centralities, these being guided by the male audience of these scenes. Over the decades, we’ve had a series of shifts in the relationship between women’s roles and popular culture. Contemporaneously, in the mainstream funk scene, we have identified a glorious celebration of these female singers. This study departs from the common sense that “things are resolved for women” to think about how gender relations in a music scene of popular culture have been updated by funk music produced outside the major commercial circuits of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

From this theoretical framework, we later analyse the intrinsic relationships in the production strategies for the MCs interviewed based on their experiences and gender sociabilities. First though, we present a characterization of the funk scene in Porto Alegre, “locus” of the empirical research.

### **3. The recent history of the funk music scene in Porto Alegre**

The history of funk in Porto Alegre began to be outlined in the mid-1990s by two important personalities: ex-DJ, former radio and youth secretary of the City of Porto Alegre Jesus Cassiá, better known as DJ Cassiá; and the music producer and DJ Marcos Barbosa, known as Markinhos JK.

Cassiá believed it was an excellent idea to play black music and funk music from Rio de Janeiro in the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, precisely because he was convinced that Rio de Janeiro’s funk, known as “funk carioca” was in many ways similar to the lifestyle that the people who lived in the periphery of Porto Alegre led. At that time, the musical genre did not have the same national media visibility that it would in future have in the 2000s and so on, which was expressed as an obstacle to the dissemination of the funk carioca in the nightlife of Porto Alegre and on its radio stations. The funk music scene in the early years in Porto Alegre were not easy, since no radio or nightclub showed interest in playing the new musical rhythm. This music genre only began to have some visibility when, in 1994, Cassiá left his job in “Princess Radio” to work at the, now late, “Universal FM”, where he had more autonomy. It was at this moment that, gradually, funk began to be played in the radio, creating opportunities for it to be played in some celebrations in the capital.

Meanwhile, inspired by DJ Cassiá, Markinhos JK decided to leave his job in a car-wash to invest in his career as a music producer and funk DJ, beginning to commercialize his music mainly in the festivities that took place in the outskirts. Shortly thereafter, he and Cassiá met and began to organize parties cooperatively. Among the most played artists at these parties were Cidinho and Doca, MC Marcinho, Rap Brasil and Racionais MC’s. In short time, this rise of funk as a business allowed Markinhos and many other artists and producers to conquer their first home and car, symbolizing they had achieved success in life.

In the early years of the turn of the century, ascending socially, funk

emerged as a media product in the mainstream media outlets. If funk parties previously had only one DJ in charge of choosing and mixing the songs that would be played, in the early 2000s the role of the MC singing live appears in the venues and nightclubs of the capital. Up to 2009 approximately, the MCs who were played on radio stations and hired for concerts were all from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. This scenario changed when some professionals realized that hiring MCs from these cities was unprofitable, although they always guaranteed the success of the event. At that time, there were some MCs in Porto Alegre, however, none had good preparation or musical quality. One of the ways to create a legitimate “gaúcho”<sup>236</sup> funk of good quality was to seek new talents in the parties and “manipulate” the market, mainly through the radio. This “manipulation” occurred either by paying certain monthly fees to the stations or by offering free concerts, in an attempt to guarantee some visibility to local MCs.

Thus, with the support of radio professionals, some music producers worked hard to develop these young MCs. In 2009, when funk was at its peak in Porto Alegre, Cassiá, at that time occupying the position of councilman in the city of Porto Alegre by the political party PTB, was responsible for creating bill 231/09 that recognized funk as a cultural movement. The bill was received positively and was sanctioned in December 2010.

In fact, the funk scene in Porto Alegre had accomplished several achievements in a short span of time: from regional media projection to legislative successes. Meanwhile, around 2012, the funk market in the capital had begun to show some signs of it wearing off. The number of male MCs increased exponentially and they all sang about the very same themes: sex and drug vindication. Realizing this, Markinhos JK decided to innovate by “introducing” a female MC into the city’s funk scene. The chosen one to occupy the position was his wife Patrícia, baptized with the stage name MC Paty. All aspects of MC Paty’s career were planned taking into account what worked out for female singers in Rio de Janeiro, the birthplace of funk in Brazil: what kind of songs she would sing, what places to go, what to wear, etc. The formula worked perfectly and the success was great. Nevertheless, for personal reasons, Patrícia decided to leave her career as an MC behind. Since then, other female MCs have emerged in the local funk scene.

With the stagnation of the funk market in the capital, music producers no longer made as much money as they did before, to the point where the amount of money invested in getting an MC’s song to play on the radios was not being recovered back at concerts. To dribble this scenario, Markinhos JK started to negotiate a new form of payment for the radios: the music producers would offer a free funk music gig of one of their MCs monthly. According to Markinhos, this is how the market works to this day. Concerning the funk in Porto Alegre, nowadays, we noticed that it has lost space in the music scene of the State. It is a consensus that the economic crisis that has hit Brazil since the second half of 2014 has had an impact in several segments, including the funk market. In addition to the economic crisis, another factor contributing to the decline of “root” funk is the preference for other musical genres that have gained prominence in radios, such as “sertanejo universitário”. For Markinhos, a third contributing factor to the decline of funk in the capital is related to the lack of diversity of MCs. He considers that part of the blame for its fall lies within the producers themselves who do not focus on career planning for their MCs, reproducing more of the same old mistakes. On the other hand, Cassiá is

**236** The word gaúcho refers to something or someone who is from the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, in this case, gaúcho funk means that the songs were made in that state.

optimistic, considering that some MCs that developed in Porto Alegre are very good, being responsible for carrying a positive message to the society.

## **4. Experiencing gender between the lines of the everyday life**

### **4.1 Gender and the daily life: the centrality of the 'mom' and 'wife' roles**

The information collected regarding the daily life of the MCs was brought up spontaneously by the women interviewed together with themes related to the practices of funk music. This means that, in advance, we may consider that the activities they perform in the music scene are not isolated from their private lives. When we deal with gender, these issues are even more evident, as we see in the description of the relationship between gender and daily life of the MCs as follows.

MC Helenzinha considers that her daily practices are divided into three parts: being a mother, being a wife and being an MC. In this triad, the fact she plays both the roles of wife and mother crosses some of her professional practices in her career as an MC: "he [her husband] never forbade me to sing, he never wanted me to stop, maybe, deep down, that's what he wants, but I think it's a natural jealousy he has" (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016). As she mulls over her sexy onstage performances - available on YouTube<sup>237</sup> - and some songs lyrics filled with explicit sexual content, the MC says: "I think that because I worry about what she [her daughter] would think or how she would deal with it in her teens that I ... I changed my style a little bit" (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016). In summary, we note that some roles historically defined as "played by women" constrain, to some extent Helenzinha's performances in the funk scene. In addition to the issues of "roles", the singer has expanded the senses of female rivalry within funk to a natural competition in their daily lives:

*The thing is that woman compete with other woman from the moment she wakes up in the morning, gets up from bed and it's already competing with another woman. When she takes a shower, gets dressed up and thinks about the clothes she's going to wear, she's thinking she wants to be better than other women* (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016).

Therefore, we can synthesize gender by evoking certain MC creative practices based on the elements of wifehood, maternity and the relationship of rivalry with other women. All these instances end up reflecting or being continuities of their practices as MC.

For MC Paty, her artistic career at the time she worked as an MC was also conditioned by the roles of being a mother and a wife. Even the end of her short trajectory in the funk scene was due precisely to the conflict between this duality. At one point, she realized that Markinhos JK, her husband, was hampering her career development. "Whatever I could do to fly more, he would ... Block me. (...) Kinda like, putting me aside without showing me what he was doing, but I realized what was going on, and ended up leaving and

<sup>237</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRLNspP6Yzo>

making myself believe that I couldn't continue, get it? "(MC Paty, personal communication, February 18, 2016). In the name of the stability of her marriage, MC Paty decided to return to her life as just Patrícia, which did not, however, guarantee the security of the relationship.

The fact that she was a mother also directly influenced the style of music she sang, MC Paty, out of concern for this role, decided, along with her ex-husband, that she would not invest in the "dirty funk" type of music. "Imagine your son showing his classmate what you sing?" (MC Paty, personal communication, February 18, 2016). Her ex-husband, the music producer Markinhos JK, also commented on the "roles" played by his wife:

*(...) if she's going to come up with a response to a dirty song, she's going to automatically go down a notch with her words too, get it? And she's the mother of a family, my wife, who has two children. How am I going to let my daughter, who's a young girl, listen to her mother singing ... sometimes even talking about 'pussy', like, it's not okay. Get it?*  
(Markinhos JK, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

We highlight here, in Markinhos' speech, the way the producer refers to MC Paty: "mother of a family" and "my wife". Well, so if Paty was not a mother nor his wife, then there would be no problem for her to sing songs in which she had to "go down a notch". In his perspective, from the moment that Paty takes the role of his wife and mother of his daughter, her identity as an MC is no longer suitable for "dirty funk". Summing up, roles historically defined as "performed by women", such as being a wife and a mom, not only directly guided MC Paty's artistic performance in the funk scene, but also culminated with the end of her career.

#### **4.2 Gender and strategies of production: producing the female MC role**

Funk songs are permeated by lyrics that relate to the point of view of young people from the periphery, expressing their lives in different situations: recreation, violence, consumption, sexuality. These guidelines are experienced in different ways by different MCs, especially when taken into account gender cuts. Therefore, this mediation becomes central to delimiting or boosting production strategies in the funk scene.

MC Helenzinha considers that her position within funk music originates in a perspective that seeks to legitimize the different possibilities of practices of the female audience:

*So I say this ... That the woman can be beautiful, she can be intelligent, she can be independent, I think that this independence, the woman's power to work, the woman's power, as I'll tell you, to behave the way they want or live the way they want, without depending on someone* (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016).

The notion of "independence" guides most of Helenzinha's speeches when

mentioning the concept behind her songs and performances. This notion comes mainly built in a framework of independence through consumption:

(...) I had a song called 'Luxury Doll', and it really did portray all that, the luxurious life of a woman, right, what the woman wants, the bag she wears, the perfume she wants, the perfume she wears, you know? This ostentation thing (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016).

The possibility of consuming autonomously, that is, without needing the financial help of another man, presents itself as the apex of the feminine independence. It is important to emphasize that this is not about any possibility of consumption. MC Helenzinha portrays a way of life in which there are no barriers – neither financial nor symbolic – to spend her money.

Another issue, within the gender spectrum, that orbits some MC practices in the scene is the production of "response funks": "For example, the male MC goes there and makes a song talking, for example, like, that, ah, that he dumped the girl, whatever, he does not want the girl anymore, then I go there and show the other side of this story, I give him an answer" (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016). In short, what is at stake in her statement as an MC is: "I do not want to diminish or say that I am better than men, (...) I think that's it, to be equal" (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016). MC defends her point of view from the conception that "we [men and women] are in the same world, we live the same things" (MC Helenzinha, personal communication, February 20, 2016).

*This matter of the quest for equality between men and women, not necessarily through a funk response, is also a strategy adopted by MC Paty: "I always made it clear that I wanted to go on mocking men, get it? That it was something that defended women that was my trademark" (MC Paty, personal communication, February 18, 2016). However, the idea of working with the theme did not come from her, but from her producer (and husband, at the time), and the lyrics were composed by third parties.*

The first lyric was from [DJ and songwriter] Martin, so when I listened to it he said 'we're going to defend women and mock men'. That was something sensational to me. He was the one who came up with that idea though, then I only continued on this path (MC Paty, personal communication, February 18, 2016).

MC Paty's trajectory was artistically shaped by her ex-husband Markinhos JK, who launched her into the funk scene of Porto Alegre as the city's first female MC, as it was seen in chapter 3. Though others existed, such as Helenzinha, none of them had achieved visibility and gained as much space on the stage and in the media as MC Paty. That is, Paty's entire identity as an MC, especially the speech of feminist inspiration present in her media products, was regulated by men, including her "presentation" in everyday life:

*(...) [she had to be] always flouting a little, you know? Always looking good, that whole thing, because there's always someone to take a picture, right? She already had to have her makeup done, had*

***to dress like an MC, get it?*** (Markinhos JK, personal communication, February 22, 2016).

These demands on the MC, coming from her producer and ex-husband, to always be presentable when it comes to dressing up and having makeup on are reflected in the media representations of female MCs<sup>238</sup>, we observe here that, the sexualization of the female body reverberates directly in its production within the funk music scene.

### ***5. Strategies of production as an MC and gender performativity: the challenges between clashing interests***

From the interviews presented, we can weave some interpretations that connect their daily and professional lives as MCs in the same cosmos of interpretations. For this purpose, the category “gender” presents itself as a delineator of such relationships, permeating practices in a way that is complementary, sometimes contradictory, but always structuring.

Mother, wife and MC. These three attributes were evidenced as roles among the MCs, which leads us to consider the performance character of each of them. That is, in a normative imaginary framework, the simple act of saying “mother”, “wife” and “MC” triggers a series of cognitive processes that lead us to materialize concrete (images and acts) and abstract senses (adjectives, emotions, values) to each of these words: children, breastfeeding, care; husband, stability, discretion; stage, sensual dances, erotic speech - to name a few. On the side of motherhood and marriage, we have values related to a woman’s private domain. On the other, as an MC, there is a body exposed by the technologies of a musical scene in the public domain that triggers a sexuality that “inexists” in the other roles. This set of questions and differentiations (mother / wife x MC) would not be problematic if the acts performed in each of these roles were not, also, performative (Butler, 1993). That is, more than a series of reproduction of neutral roles, such acts communicate ways of being and delimit expectations that curtail freedoms and forms of expression. Based on the reports of MCs interviewed, being a mother and wife conditions, at different levels, their activities as MCs.

MC Helenzinha cannot leave aside her embarrassment when she remembers there are videos available on the internet of her doing sensual dances denoting positions of the sexual act. In addition to the dances, the lyrics also refer to the so-called “dirty funk”, that themes sex. Thinking of her daughter – that is, in her role as mother – Helenzinha confesses a certain degree of embarrassment to think of the possibility that, one day, her child could watch these videos. That is why Helenzinha says she changed her way performing in the funk scene.

MC Paty currently leads her life as a businesswoman and a single mother, away from the stage. However, in her MC era, her condition of wife and mom of two children already triggered morals in relation to her presentations as an MC. In Paty’s case, there is still the factor of the ubiquity of her husband-producer regulating Paty’s identity as an MC. As we have seen, this set of relationships was so structuring and contradictory to her MC role that she had to give up a promising career in the funk scene in the name of another set of expectations. Gender presents itself, therefore, updating, shaping, and imprisoning their MC roles to the detriment of what it means to be a mother and a wife, roles valued as more worthy and “deserving of respect”.

**238** For more information about media representation of female MCs, see Libardi (2016).



However, gender issues are also used in favor of these MCs when we analyze their production strategies in isolation. MC Helenzinha uses irony and debauchery with a male “other” through her compositions, trying to exalt the woman’s positioning in a specific situation (usually a love relationship and / or consumption practice), depreciating the man by attacking his hegemonically consolidated gender roles, such as their virility and autonomy. In the song “Luxury Doll”, for example, she sings: “My intention is this / To make you spend” (MC Helenzinha, 2015). MC Paty also appropriates genre experiences to perform her songs in a very similar way to MC Helenzinha. In “The girls are worse”, MC sings: “And the girls of Porto Alegre here only have angry mouth / their consumption dream / And terrorize the jealous girls / If the guys are bad / the girls are worse” (Mc Paty, 2014). Although her songs signal a possible emancipation, we find that her productions do not always necessarily reflect a complex political consciousness about the gender problems placed in her songs.

Although MCs sing songs in which they represent themselves as self-sufficient women, this practice takes place on a more imaginary than concrete level, as we can perceive by their own attitudes towards men in their daily concrete experiences. MC Helenzinha is embarrassed in relation to her sexually oriented performance freedom on stage in the name of maintaining her good image as a mother. But it is MC Paty who represents this analysis very well when we remember that, in fact, who is behind the MC’s songs is her husband. These issues do not diminish the service that these MCs provide in talking about “women’s empowerment” primarily in a subculture context such as the funk scene, whose history was built mostly by men. However, as we look at the layers of this process, we find that such speeches are sometimes contradictory to their expectations of themselves as female-mothers or female-wives. Still, we must consider what Martín-Barbero (2001) points out about the way of operation on production strategies, while recalling their insertion in a capitalist circuit. The “salable” character of the songs is central to the MCs (and their producers). As noted by Markinhos JK, Paty’s husband, enhancing the female image in funk would be the key to success. In the brim of this strategy, the producer allowed his wife to sing about it. Although Paty recognized and identified with this discursive idea, we cannot ignore the fact that it was first constructed in the name of a commercial cause. The case of MC Paty is still interesting when we take into account the relationship between her role of wife and MC.

Within this role-playing game, Paty ended up deciding to preserve the health of her marriage, leaving behind a career that seemed to be promising within the funk scene. We emphasize that she made this decision because her husband, who had nurtured her dream of being a great MC, could not handle her exposure on the scene. In this relation, we perceive the establishment of power relations in two roles: the producer and the husband. When the same person absorbs both powers, the professional and affective choices become tangled. In this case, it culminated with the woman-mother-wife-MC Paty choosing to give up her artistic life in search of the stability of her married life. MC Paty, now separated and owner of her own business, shows regret that she has not continued on with her dream of becoming a big MC. Therefore, we emphasize that these gender roles directly affect the production strategies of these MCs.

The phenomenon observed in this study leads us to agree with McRobbie and Garber (1993) when the authors are thinking about the reason for the

absence of women in subcultural scenes. Although the female audience has gained a legitimate space within these scenes, as is the case of the funk scene through various exponents at the national level, we still show how the career structure of some MCs is delimited by the roles played in the private domain. Their careers follow different directions and they can undergo drastic transformations from day to night by the fact they became mothers or wives. We did not observe the same said phenomenon with male MCs, such as Mr. Catra, who died in 2018, leaving three wives and thirty-two children. This MC is known for some controversial compositions, such as, "Hot Truck Driver", in which he sings: "Now it is with you love, you can decide / Take iron up to Juá / Take wood up to Tupi" (Mr. Catra, 2017). Through wordplay and puns that rhyme in Portuguese Mr. Catra adds explicit sexual innuendos in his lyrics and no moral judgement is made because of his condition of husband or father.

## 6. Conclusions

This study aimed to analyse the relations of two MCs with their strategies of funk music production from their gendered socialities. We have found out that this marker is central to the MC experiences in their daily and artistic lives. The gender, performatively, guides expectations around their roles of mothers and wives, which constrains and repositions the performance of these women as MCs. It is because they are mothers that they will stop talking about certain subjects in their songs; and it is because they are wives that they will even abandon their dreams of being great MCs. In another instance, we can consider the impossibility of full coexistence between these different roles as a dispute of moralities. In this game, being an MC does not fit in with what is required of other female roles as mother and wife. These roles function as straitjackets and act even on the psychic level, nullifying the spontaneity of these MCs in the exercise of their creative drives whether on stage or in the studio.

In this construction, not only the maintenance of the female hegemonic roles is overvalued, but the role of MC becomes a problem. This is what the dichotomous logic imposes us: the impossibility of contradictory existence. Therefore, the image of MC is transformed into the enemy of the other versions of the same woman. The consequences of this are, as we have seen throughout the study, the impossibility of exercising a full artistic life in the name of a compulsory commitment with gender attributions.

It is important to emphasize that, even though this research presents gender as a sociological category of greater evidence, this overlap is justified by the cut of our object: the funk produced by "them", women. However, we cannot fail to highlight the relevance assumed by class conditioning, which also manifests itself in their speeches and practices as a background that structures the experiences (Munt, 2000) on which these women commented throughout the interviews.

Finally, we consider that this article opens up the possibility of new studies to come from the perspective of different feminisms, especially in the contemporary rhetoric of "post-feminism" that, for authors such as McRobbie (2009) and Faludi (1991), it's a discursive construction, especially in the media, that women have finally achieved "feminist success". According to our analysis, the conception that female emancipation has been achieved in the funk scene simply because "they are there" is something that scratches only the surface of the problem. It is by observing the other layers of production strategies in relation to their daily lives that we capture the contradictions still present in their gender performativity.

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