

# "Hip Hop saved my life!": (counter)leadership and the education of a folk communicator at the university

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**Abstract:** The work presents the results of the presence of the folk communicator and educator Márcio Brown in an activity at the University of Sorocaba. It aims to understand how students associated Márcio Brown with folk communication studies, based on the use of ethnography in the city and the analysis of 19 activities carried out by the students. The findings indicate that listening to and witnessing a folk communicator leader has very significant effects on the assimilation of folk communication theory for social understanding. This discussion explores Márcio Brown's educational role in dialogue with aspects of Paulo Freire's theory regarding dialogicity, indignation, and radicality.

**Resumo:** O trabalho apresenta o resultado da presença do líder-comunicador *folk* e educador Márcio Brown, em uma atividade na Universidade de Sorocaba. Propõe-se compreender como os estudantes associaram Márcio Brown aos estudos folkcomunicacionais, a partir do uso da etnografia na cidade e análise de 19 atividades realizadas pelos(as) estudantes, chegando ao resultado de que ouvir e presenciar um líder comunicador *folk* implica em efeitos muito significativos no que se refere à assimilação da teoria da folkcomunicação para a compreensão social. Discute-se aqui, o papel educador de Márcio Brown no diálogo com aspectos da teoria da Paulo Freire sobre dialogicidade, indignação e radicalidade.

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**Palavras-chave:** líder comunicador; folkcomunicação; hip hop; radicalidade; educação.

An educator is somewhat like a stage artist; an educator affirms themselves while learning to move on the stage as an artist (Paulo Freire, 2014, p. 170, our translation).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hardt and Negri<sup>1</sup>, following Marx's writings<sup>2</sup> on the Paris Commune of 1871, alert us to the necessity of distinguishing between what can be considered a critique of leadership and the complete negation of organizations and institutions. This distinction is crucial because, by adopting alternative forms of social and political organization grounded in democratic radicalism and the refusal of representation, the Communards—through the protracted processes of collective decision-making—ultimately failed to perceive the rapid response of hostile governments to the Parisian uprising. Combined with crises of famine and internal betrayals, these circumstances led to the revolt's defeat and massacre.

On one hand, the absence of leadership in processes of contestation, claims, revolution, and resistance to oppression and exploitation can lead to critiques of democratic radicalism for its “angelicality” and lack of “tactical realism.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, negating the centrality of decisions and power reflects one of the most valued aspects of the democratic political perspective: more than merely promoting participation in decision-making, it embodies the refusal to exclude those who wish to exercise their—albeit thorny—natural right to persevere in existence by politically connecting and aligning with the resistant and the outraged.

When Marx, in his early critiques of Hegel and throughout his political writings, challenged both the State and capital, he suggested that the dictatorship of the proletariat, far from being despotic, embodied the radical democratic scope of the Paris Commune. This observation exposes an enduring ambiguity in political and social movements, which, more than 150 years later, remains one of the most significant theoretical and practical challenges in executing political and social actions.

In other words, by succumbing to the same political dynamics that govern modern and contemporary states—centralized power and restricted individual political participation, limited primarily to voting for representatives within institutions for fixed periods (when not suspended by usurping or tyrannical

1 HARDT, Michael; NEGRI, Antonio. **Assembly:** A organização multitudinária do comum. São Paulo: Editora Filosófica Politéia, 2018.

2 MARX, Karl. **A Guerra Civil na França.** São Paulo: Boitempo, 2011.

3 HARDT; NEGRI, *op. cit.*

coups)—revolutionary, resistant, political, and social movements risk reinforcing despotic institutions rather than necessarily transforming them into genuinely popular entities.

The critical question, therefore, concerns the necessity—or lack thereof—of leadership in the simultaneous processes of radical democratization and political efficacy in securing guarantees for insurgents<sup>4</sup>. This question motivates our discussion of the role of folk communicator and rapper Márcio Brown as a symbolic figure of social struggles in Sorocaba's Black periphery and his presence at the University of Sorocaba. Brown's leadership among the marginalized movements in Sorocaba, in Reigota's words<sup>5</sup>, asserts itself in his discourse within the university's educational space not only as a communicator of marginalized cultures and struggles but also as a purveyor of knowledge whose contribution to academic and scientific research this text aims to highlight.

In this regard, it is essential to understand, as a starting point, the educational role that Márcio Brown plays—despite not being a formally certified teacher according to institutional educational standards—within the communities, and which we will also explore through his dialogues and interactions with students of the University of Sorocaba during his visit.

To this end, we draw epistemologically on Paulo Freire<sup>6</sup>, in three dimensions. We aim, through both the dynamics exercised by Márcio Brown and the impressions of Social Communication students, to situate: the "ethics of struggle and the beauty of the fight," especially in relation to the denunciations expressed through hip hop; the "democratic radicality," which enables a peripheral folk educator to exercise leadership without necessarily seizing power, as noted by Altamira<sup>7</sup>; and "dialogicity," which, in educational processes, compels the speaker to listen to differences in, of, and with the other.

Thus, the objective of this study is to understand how university students associated the presence of a folk communicator leader with the folk communication studies presented in the course *Regional Media Scenarios*, offered in the Communication programs at the University of Sorocaba, a community-based institution located in Sorocaba, in the interior of São Paulo.

The study's methodology encompasses urban ethnography, following Magnani<sup>8</sup>, with observation of lectures delivered by Sorocaban rapper Márcio Brown in April 2023 to approximately 200 students from the Communication and Psychology programs, in addition to a semi-structured interview with the hip hopper and an analysis of 19 written assignments submitted by Communication students as an individual activity, aimed at understanding how they associated the rapper with folk communication studies.

Among the main findings, the activities indicate that listening to and witnessing a folk communicator leader produces much more significant effects regarding the understanding of folk communication as a fundamental theory for social comprehension, highlighting the importance of such leadership in hegemonic educational environments.

4 HARDT; NEGRI, op. cit.

5 REIGOTA, Marcos. A contribuição política e pedagógica dos que vêm das margens. **Revista Teias**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 11, n. 21, 6, 2010. Available at: <https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/revistateias/article/view/24105>. Accessed in 30 Oct. 2024.

6 FREIRE, Paulo. **Pedagogia da Tolerância**. 3rd ed. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2014; FREIRE, Paulo. **Pedagogia da esperança**: um reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido. 24th ed. São Paulo: Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2018.

7 ALTAMIRA, Cesar. **Os marxismos do novo século**. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2008.

8 MAGNANI, José Guilherme Cantor. **Etnografia como prática e experiência. Horizontes Antropológicos**, Porto Alegre, ano 15, n. 32, p. 129-156, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-71832009000200006>

This text is therefore organized into four sections. The first addresses Sorocaban hip hop and its political and cultural formation as a marginal dimension of marginal musicality, defending the Black populations in the city's peripheries. The second section characterizes Márcio Brown as a leader—not only in folk communication but also in education—considering his trajectory in the formation of other peripheral leaders in Sorocaba. The third section presents the activities carried out by Márcio Brown during his visit to the University of Sorocaba and his interactions with students. The final section discusses the impact of Márcio Brown's presence and discourse on Communication students at the University of Sorocaba, highlighting the three dimensions that position this folk communicator as a dialogical and radically democratic educator, from a Freirean perspective.

## 2. SOROCABAN HIP HOP

Hip hop is a cultural movement that seeks, through art, to promote reflection on numerous social issues affecting various marginalized groups. Its elements include the MC (Master of Ceremonies), the DJ (Disc Jockey), Breaking, and Graffiti, as well as the fifth element, created by hip hop founder Afrika Bambaataa to articulate the movement's philosophy. This was necessary because groups began using the elements to promote ideals contrary to Bambaataa's proposal, which aimed to equip young people with awareness so that they would pursue peace and unity through enjoyment—the hip hop motto—rather than through violence and crime<sup>9</sup>.

To understand Sorocaban hip hop, the “close and inside” methodology, which approaches urban ethnography, was employed. According to Magnani, the anthropological focus—particularly through the ethnographic method—avoids approaches that oppose the individual to the megastructures of the city. The close-and-inside perspective is “[...] capable of apprehending patterns of behavior, not of atomized individuals, but of multiple, varied, and heterogeneous sets of social actors whose daily lives unfold within the city's landscape and depend on its infrastructure.” This method allows for the observation of social actors through their behaviors, that is, “[...] through the ways in which they navigate the city, utilize its services, engage with its infrastructure, and establish encounters and exchanges across different spheres [...]”<sup>10</sup> According to the author,

this strategy requires an investment in both poles of the relationship: on the one hand, in the social actors, the group, and the practices being studied; on the other hand, in the landscape in which these practices take place, understood not merely as a backdrop but as a constitutive part of the analytical focus. This approach characterizes urban anthropology, distinguishing it from other disciplinary approaches and even from other options within anthropology itself<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, on January 19 and 26 and February 16, 2023, we spent the afternoons with hip hopper Márcio Brown<sup>12</sup>, engaging in conversations about the

9 POSTALI, Thifani. **Blues e Hip Hop**: uma perspectiva folkcomunicação. Jundiaí, Paco Editorial, 2011.

10 MAGNANI, José Guilherme Cantor. São Paulo: de perto (e de dentro) é outra cidade. *Ponto Urbe*, n. 18, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pontourbe.3116>, p. 18; MAGNANI, 2009, p. 132.

11 MAGNANI, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

12 Cabe ressaltar que a divulgação das informações foi autorizada pelo Márcio Brown, em documento assinado.

practice of hip hop in the city of Sorocaba and its relationship with the urban environment. Some discussions took place at Clube 28 de Setembro; however, most occurred during walks through the central area of Sorocaba, where the history of hip hop began. It is worth noting that walking with the research subject, as well as sharing meals in communion (commensality), are methods that, from Morin's perspective<sup>13</sup>, foster closer connections between people. The walking method proved effective during our contact with Márcio Brown, who, while moving through the streets of Sorocaba, would stop at key points of interest, explaining how they were used and what activities took place there, while also providing additional information upon encountering acquaintances on the streets, among other observations. This approach allowed for a far more meaningful collection of information compared to a single-location interview or conversation. For this study, the most significant locations contributing to the construction of Sorocaban hip hop history were selected.

Not unlike the arrival of hip hop in Brazil, Márcio Brown recounts that Sorocaba followed similar patterns, perhaps due to its proximity to São Paulo, approximately 103 km away, the birthplace of the movement in the country. While in the capital, in the mid-1980s, young people gathered to dance at Black parties and at the São Bento Metro Station, located at Largo São Bento (109 – São Paulo Historical Center), in Sorocaba, peripheral youth gathered at parties held in central spaces rented by DJ Nelson Maçã for this purpose and at breaking circles held behind the Cathedral Church and at Praça Coronel Fernando Prestes, both in the heart of Sorocaba. Not coincidentally, while the metro in São Paulo enabled access for numerous youth from peripheral areas to Largo São Bento, the central region of Sorocaba houses the final stops for public buses serving different city areas.

Through exposure to Black US culture—which arrived in Sorocaba and promoted breaking circles—the movement gained momentum, and soon the potential of peripheral arts as tools of social communication became evident. According to Márcio Brown, Sorocaba became a hub for Brazilian hip hop, giving rise in the 1990s to key figures and groups in the movement's history, such as Fora do Crime, DMR (Defenders of Rap and Dance, Movement and Rhythm), Black or White MC's (later becoming Grupo X da Questão), RCS (which evolved into Grupo X4 and had the music video *Mano se liga* aired on MTV), and Suburban Breakers (featured in an edition of *Revista Raça*), among other important names and groups.

As a city in the interior of São Paulo, Sorocaba has a conservative character and did not escape racial prejudice. The Sorocaban hip hop movement had to develop strategies over the years to maintain its cultural vitality. Márcio Brown recalls that public spaces were restructured to, in some measure, prevent young people from occupying them. Central public squares, which previously featured arenas, benches, and floors suitable for cultural expressions, were renovated into empty spaces, with fewer benches and no arena. The most emblematic case, according to the rapper, is the square behind the Cathedral Church.

13 MORIN, Edgar. Crônica de um filme. In: ROUCH, Jean. *Ciné Éthnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Until 1990, it had an arena and appropriate flooring and served as one of the main gathering points for young hip hoppers practicing breaking. One day, the space was transformed into a garden: the floor was replaced with grass, and the square was fenced off, forcing youth to seek alternative spaces to practice their culture. It is noteworthy that traditional city families have always frequented the Cathedral Church, and according to Márcio Brown, many disapproved of peripheral youth occupying the back of the church, even though they were engaging in cultural activities.

Youth also had limited access to city clubs located around Praça Fernando Prestes—such as Sorocaba Club, Clube Recreativo Central, and Círculo Italiano (nicknamed Chirculo or Chiqueirão)—due to economic barriers or structural racism that made young, particularly Black, participants feel unwelcome and disconnected from these spaces.

A few clubs did open spaces for hip hop, usually rented by DJ Nelson Maça for Black parties and shows featuring established groups in the hip hop circuit, such as Thaíde & DJ Hum, Sampa Crew, Ndee Naldinho, Pepeu, Região Absal, Os Metralhas, Nelson Triunfo, and Racionais MC's, among others. Nevertheless, the main venue for hip hop parties and shows—past and present—is Clube 28 de Setembro, which hosted the first performances of Racionais MC's and Thaíde in Sorocaba.

Clube 28 de Setembro deserves special attention in the city's history. Located a few meters from Praça Coronel Fernando Prestes, specifically on Rua Machado de Assis, the Sociedade Cultural e Beneficente 28 de Setembro was founded on September 28, 1945, by a group of 14 railway workers. It was created to provide recreational opportunities for Sorocaba's Black community, which had been excluded from the city's dominant spaces. Since then, the association has worked to defend and promote Afro-Brazilian culture, hosting numerous events of special interest to the Black community. It has become one of the primary meeting points and promoters of hip hop culture in Sorocaba.

The Sorocaban hip hop scene has endured over time, continuously developing strategies for social transformation. One of the city's most influential cultural agents is Márcio Brown, who, in addition to his work in rap, organizes and participates in various movement-related events. As Márcio Brown states: *He is Hip Hop*.

### 3. MÁRCIO BROWN: A COMMUNICATOR LEADER

The Brazilian university environment remains a hegemonic space, whose culture, often Eurocentric, renders invisible the diverse cultural expressions, particularly those originating from groups marginalized by the dominant culture. In contrast, since the mid-1960s, Luiz Beltrão dedicated himself to the study of communication agents and popular media. In 1967, he defended his thesis at the University of Brasília, already presenting the theory of folk



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communication—a study that still faces resistance in universities, as many scholars, despite recognizing Beltrão’s other contributions as fundamental to the field of communication, tend to avoid employing the theory he advocated.

Among his studies, Beltrão<sup>14</sup> introduced the concept of the folk communicator leader, that is, a person who holds relevant opinions for their social group and who, based on information collected from various sources, encodes it in a form more accessible to their audience. Such individuals are highly regarded within their communities and are essential for the communication of their group and/or territory.

It is in this context that we understand the work of Márcio Roberto dos Santos, known as Márcio Brown, a rapper, sound artist, activist, and cultural producer. Among his initiatives, he conducts lectures and discussions in public schools with the aim of promoting social awareness and hip hop among peripheral youth in Sorocaba. As a rapper, he delivers narratives infused with Afro-Brazilian elements, including reflections on collective life in the periphery and hip hop as a potential positive pathway for young people.

Márcio Brown’s life story embodies the philosophy of the hip hop movement and reinforces the phrase frequently expressed by many artists within the movement: “Hip hop saved my life.” As a child of six, he ran away from home and began living on the streets of Sorocaba and, later, São Paulo. He lived with other children at Praça da Sé, São Paulo, confronting all the challenges faced by street children. On one occasion, a ROTA police unit confronted the children, and an officer pointed a 12-gauge shotgun at Márcio’s mouth, saying: “Either you die or you run, little Black boy.” At the time, Márcio was eleven and ran to the bus station. His life on the streets ended when, at the São Paulo bus terminal, he was taken in by a Black policewoman who told him she would take him home, as she was also heading to Sorocaba.

His engagement with the hip hop movement began during this period. Unable by age or means to enter Clube 28 de Setembro but curious about the breaking circle, he jumped the wall and attempted some dance steps. Someone then nicknamed him Brown, in reference to the American musician and dancer James Brown. Since then, he has been known as Brown. As he recalls in his lectures, Márcio was Brown even before the rapper Pedro Paulo Soares Pereira became known as Mano Brown.

Márcio Brown is part of the first generation of hip hoppers in Sorocaba. His work has involved numerous collaborations and the formation of groups since 1989. Among his projects, he participated in groups such as Juventude Negra, Os Brothers do Rap, DMR (Dance, Movement, and Rhythm), Irmãos de Quebrada, 13 Volts, Banda Fuzuê—which combined percussion instruments, beatboxing, scratching, rap, and capoeira—and the group Fora do Crime, which produced the first rap recording in the metropolitan area of Sorocaba.

As a solo artist, Márcio Brown released the single *Coisa de Negro* and the EP *Na Larika da Arte* in 2015. He is currently producing *É Preto Amor*, featuring

14 BELTRÃO, Luiz. **Folkcomunicação**: a comunicação dos marginalizados. São Paulo: Cortez, 1980.

contributions from Carlo Rappaz (X Da Questão), Silas Puro Osso and Diales TX (Sarjeta project), and Márcio Richard (Caixa Vedada).

It is noteworthy that Márcio Brown also acts as a sound artist and cultural agent, organizing various events, especially those related to Black culture. He runs the YouTube channel *Fala Brown*, where he hosts live sessions with guests, described as: “We exchange information, reflections, emotions, interventions, and even discuss situations! Share with diversity and respect.” As a producer, Brown also directed the documentary *Hip Hop em Movimento*, released in 2007.

His compositions and work align with the philosophy of hip hop, emphasizing the Fifth Element: knowledge. They bring reflections on the everyday life of peripheral communities, Afro identity, and social critique, intertwined with the motto Peace, Love, Unity, and Fun.

In his speeches, Márcio Brown reinforces the importance of the hip hop movement for the lives of young people and how members of the movement are invited to “exchange ideas” in schools. From his reflective song lyrics to his talks, Márcio Brown demonstrates the qualities of a folk communicator leader. According to folk communication—a theory focused on the communication practices of marginalized groups—a folk communicator leader is someone who crafts messages, encodes them, and transmits them through languages and channels familiar to their audience, which is known to the communicator both psychologically and experientially<sup>15</sup>. In this sense, the folk communicator leader functions as an opinion-shaping agent, leveraging available information—from both mass media and other forms of communication—and transforming it through their cultural repertoire.

According to Beltrão<sup>16</sup>, leaders are not necessarily authorities or famous individuals but possess charisma and communicative power, attracting listeners, readers, admirers, and followers. Thus, they act as influencers within their territory and social group. Trigueiro<sup>17</sup> complements the concept of a communicator leader by stating that “[...] it is an individual with a biography rich in local references, customs, and family and school life histories, but with a broader purpose regarding social media and more experience beyond the local world.”

When Márcio Brown is examined as a cultural agent and producer, he can also be understood through the concept of the media activist, coined by Trigueiro. According to the author, a media activist is a protagonist in mediation processes, appropriating language and the possibilities offered by new communication technologies to develop and produce content that circulates popular narratives beyond their immediate group.

The media activist acts guided by their own interests and those of their social group in shaping the symbolic and material practices of traditional and modern cultures. They are narrators of everyday life, guardians of memory and local identity, recognized as spokespersons for their social group, and navigate between traditional and modern practices, leveraging new communication technologies to circulate popular narratives on global networks<sup>18</sup>.

15 BELTRÃO, 1980.

16 *Ibid.*

17 TRIGUEIRO, Osvaldo Meira. **Folkcomunicação & ativismo midiático**. João Pessoa: Universitária da UFPB, 2008. p. 45.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 48.



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In this way, the media activist is a communicator leader with access to new communication technologies, amplifying their message to reach national and potentially global audiences. They “[...] can operate within both informal spheres of popular cultural production and institutional spheres, connecting experiences from their world with those of others, particularly live, via radio and television.” In Márcio Brown’s case, these connections are primarily made through digital communication platforms and his social media pages.

#### 4. MÁRCIO BROWN AT THE UNIVERSITY: A FOLK COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

On April 5, 2023, Márcio Brown was invited to exchange ideas with students from the Communication and Psychology programs at the University of Sorocaba, Brazil. On that occasion, he contributed to the course *Regional Media Scenarios*, taught by the author of this article, which includes studies in folk communication. The event was also part of the project *Affirmative Dialogues*, promoted by the Social Communication: Advertising program, organized by the article’s author.

Márcio Brown was present in both the morning and evening sessions, speaking for approximately three hours each time to around 200 university students per session. His speeches were unscripted. As he explained, they were based on freestyle, a term common in hip hop referring to improvisation, a practice highly valued in the culture. The main topics addressed by the rapper included his life story, his experiences as a Black man, racial prejudice, the significance of hip hop, and above all, the awareness of unity and respect among people.

It is noteworthy that respect and unity are repeatedly emphasized in Márcio Brown’s statements across his various activities (song lyrics, lectures, live sessions, etc.). According to Márcio Brown, this was the first time he had been invited to speak to a university audience—that is, a group that, for the most part, does not belong to the rapper’s social circle. In this context, he highlighted the importance of connection and unity among people from different groups and social classes as a means to strengthen the struggle against social inequalities.

To meet the requirements of the course *Regional Media Scenarios*, I asked Communication students to complete an activity in which they wrote about their experience with Márcio Brown, taking into account their learning about the theory of folk communication. The Keywords “*cultura*,” “*folkcomunicação*,” “*líder comunicador folk*” and “*identidade cultural*” were provided to guide the students’ reflections. The activities were submitted through the Moodle educational platform, used by the University of Sorocaba.



**Figure 1:** Márcio Brown at the University of Sorocaba

Source: Photo provided by Leticia Fávero, journalism student.

To understand how the students interpreted Márcio Brown, 19 validated assignments were analyzed. A total of 23 documents were submitted; four were excluded because they did not meet the objectives of the activity, as the students were absent on the day of the discussion. Overall, the texts demonstrated coherence between the content presented in class and the students' interpretation of Márcio Brown.

Regarding folk communication, it emerged as a theory that values the communication practices of marginalized groups, with one assignment highlighting that it is a Brazilian theory that enables an understanding of the country's authentic communication, as each locale has its own specificities. One paper emphasized the rapper's interpretation through folk communication, including his use of slang and gestures specific to his social group.

In nearly all assignments, Márcio Brown was assertively recognized as a folk communicator leader. The rapper was interpreted as a genuine leader who exercises influence in the struggle against inequalities and racial prejudice, serving as a crucial voice for social awareness and speaking from a horizontal perspective. He was also identified as an important representative of his social group.

Popular culture emerges as a mechanism of communication for marginalized groups, with hip hop interpreted as a tool for communication, struggle, and resistance against social inequalities. One noteworthy aspect is the framing of hip hop as a cultural medium that allows non-peripheral White audiences to

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gain a broader understanding of society. One assignment emphasized that hip hop “makes you understand your place in society,” while another highlighted the importance of Márcio Brown’s presence at the university, as it enabled him to reach an audience beyond his immediate social group. Regarding hip hop, one reflection emphasized: “Hip hop is a communication tool that supports these agents in their struggle to transform their local environment.”

In relation to reflecting on the role of others in combating inequalities and various injustices, some assignments suggested that Márcio Brown’s presence “must have planted a seed in everyone who was there” and reinforced the importance of “supporting movements like those led by Márcio Brown.”

## 5. THE IMPACTS OF MÁRCIO BROWN’S PRESENCE

The 19 assignments considered for analysis support the hypothesis that connecting other social groups with folk communicator leaders contributes significantly to social understanding. In general, the works highlight the empathy generated by the rapper’s presence and the practice of alterity, as most students expressed their impressions from a different social standpoint and reported the importance of their interaction with the rapper for their learning.

In this sense, the presence of communicator leaders in hegemonic environments prepared to receive them—such as the university—contributes to students’ curricula, offering content beyond the dominant academic mediation. It is also important to note that in-person communication possesses powerful characteristics that facilitate understanding, as one assignment highlighted, emphasizing the way Márcio Brown communicates through gestures and slang. According to McLuhan<sup>19</sup>, words represent “complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience to our manifest or externalized senses.” For McLuhan, the spoken word is immediate, provoking a reaction from the receiver: “[...] in speaking, we tend to react to each situation, following the tone and gesture even of our own act of speaking.”<sup>20</sup> Regarding a disc-jockey, he states:

Dave Mickie moans, grunts, sways, sings, hums, intones, runs, always reacting to his own actions. He moves almost entirely in the realm of spoken experience, not written, thereby creating audience participation. The spoken word engages all the senses intensely [...]<sup>21</sup>.

Another notable point is the reference in one assignment to “horizontal speech.” This can be interpreted through the lens of Buberian philosophy, which asserts that genuine communication occurs only through dialogical ethics—when diverse individuals recognize that they traverse different paths and, consequently, are willing to engage respectfully, learning from one another. Buber emphasizes that dialogical ethics foster sincere relationships capable of promoting alterity. For Buber<sup>22</sup> the natural habitat of humans is composed of interpersonal relationships; however, humans have been violently estranged from

19 MCLUHAN, Mac. **Os meios de comunicação como extensões do homem**. São Paulo: Cultrix, 2001. p. 77.

20 Ibid., p. 95.

21 Ibid., p. 95.

22 BUBER, Martin. **Do diálogo e do dialógico**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1982.

their nature when modernity produced pedagogies that amplify individualism or collectivism, conditions that obscure self-perception.

Buberian philosophy reflects on human existence, considering that dominant social patterns have reduced humans to mere concepts, disregarding their singularities. Thus, when Márcio Brown provokes reflection in his audience through speech perceived as horizontal, it is evident that, despite the lecture format, communication—as a phenomenon of human nature—occurred through the manner in which the folk communicator presented himself. This was guided by dialogical ethics, which, from the perspective of reciprocal openness to the world, as theorized by Freire—a reader of Martin Buber<sup>23</sup>, particularly in his later letters<sup>24</sup> proposing educational acts—helps us understand Márcio Brown's presence at the university as an educator. This is due to the promotion of dialogicity both toward himself, as he confronted differences between his trajectory, experiences, and activism and the perspectives of university students, and toward the academic community, which, by perceiving that knowledge construction does not occur solely within university assumptions, dynamics, and settings, but through exchanges enabled by the experience narrated here, moves from exclusivity toward a collective orientation.

Understanding Márcio Brown as, in his Buberian ethical-dialogical action, an educator in the Freirean sense of the term aligns with Paulo Freire's conception of radically democratic education. In the folk-communicative experience, education does not consist of transmitting knowledge based on preconceived notions of democracy through a “banking” pedagogical practice. Rather, it involves promoting the construction of alternative knowledges through dialogical openness between differences, particularly through the marginal and indignant approach that Márcio Brown brings to the university. Consequently, the university is exercised not solely as an educating institution but also as an educative space, wherein the folk communicator simultaneously and continuously assumes the roles of both learner and educator.

Thus, it becomes clear that the presence of folk communicator leaders—whether media activists or not—in hegemonic environments that facilitate connections between diverse groups is fundamental for the social understanding of numerous non-peripheral youths. These individuals, often overwhelmed by dominant narratives that continue to stigmatize peripheral populations, typically fail to engage in reflective thought and, as a result, do not participate in the struggle against social inequalities. The presence of communicator leaders such as Márcio Brown serves as a powerful catalyst for reflection on prevailing sociocultural practices.

Regarding students who identified with the rapper through shared social background, Márcio Brown received a message from an engineering student via social media, who passed by the venue and was deeply impacted by the university event. Additionally, the author of this article received, spontaneously via email, a testimony and a drawing from a student of a class that had not participated in the folk-communication activity. In the same email, Thiago, a

23 PENA, Alexandra Coelho; NUNES, Maria Fernanda Rezende; KRAMER, Sonia. Formação humana, visão de mundo, diálogo e educação: a atualidade de Paulo Freire e Martin Buber. *Educação em Revista*, Belo Horizonte, v. 34, e172870, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-4698172870>

24 FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogia da indignação: cartas pedagógicas e outros escritos*. São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2000; FREIRE, Paulo. *Cartas a Cristina: reflexões sobre minha vida e minha práxis*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2013.



“Hip Hop saved my life!”:

(counter)leadership and the education of a folk communicator at the university

- Thífani Postali and Rodrigo Barchi

seventh-semester student in the Social Communication program: Advertising and Propaganda, authorized the reproduction of his message:

Another statement by Brown that marked me was: ‘Rap taught me to seek knowledge, so I wouldn’t be just another.’ This resonates directly with my own history, where academic knowledge was, for years, a distant reality for my family and remains unimaginable for many others from less privileged environments. Being present in this space, a sense of responsibility takes the lead, just as an artist, reflecting on a reality of hardship through music, feels compelled to influence ‘their own’ to achieve the best. As a Black student, seeing and hearing about hip hop culture within the university felt like coming home, to a place of identification. What fascinated me most was observing the power embedded in every statement, story, and perspective shared—this power in revealing a truth, in expressing what one loves, made almost three hours feel like minutes. To immerse oneself in this ‘life passion’ and count the minutes would, in my opinion, be folly. As a leader, Márcio Brown carries his culture and proudly gives it a voice. Listening to him that night and sensing his emotion made me feel represented, even far from home. I could recall an artwork I created in 2021, which bears the phrase: “a world in which I do not bear the weight of being first and do not need to be the only one.”



**Figure 2:** Illustration by Thiago

Source: Image provided by student Thiago.



From Thiago's account emerges the radically dialogical and democratic character—what Paulo Freire refers to as “the ethics of struggle and the beauty of the fight.” When the educator from Pernambuco emphasizes “struggle and fight,” he does not do so in a banal sense, as mere release of forces or catharsis of pent-up energies, but rather as a redirection and focus on processes of liberation and the political construction of alternative individual and collective forms of existence. By making the voice of the struggling periphery heard and resonant within a university setting, emblematically impacting the experiences of young people in the academic environment, Márcio Brown, thinking in a Freirean manner, imbues the indignation and anger present in hip hop culture with beauty.

In the dialogical and communicative scope, it is not solely Brown's status as a musician that allows him to extend the eloquently indignant voice of the social, geographic, and historical margins to wider audiences. Rather, it is because his presence necessitates a Freirean openness to the world, which necessarily transforms dialogue into the construction of alternative knowledges through encounters and connections. This collective production, generating alternative knowledges, demonstrates that other curricula and content assert themselves upon individuals in communication. By transforming those who are willing to listen and engage with the folk-communicator leader, Márcio Brown enacts education.

Finally, the folk-communicative and educational practice promoted by Márcio Brown represents a unique radicality. By bringing to the university, through music, the tragic gravity of issues affecting Brazil's peripheries and Black populations, he compels Communication students to reverse their perspectives on these realities. This is because when these students encounter lessons on Brazilian social issues at the university, they are generally taught by individuals who do not experience these challenges firsthand, often under constant persecution and harassment resulting from racism affecting poor Black communities in Brazil. This inversion of perspective constitutes, educationally, a radical transformation in the formative processes of young students.

## 6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to investigate the presence of a folk communicator leader within the university environment. The objective of the article was to understand how students associated the presence of the rapper Márcio Brown with folk-communication studies. To this end, ethnographic research was conducted, including event observation, a semi-structured interview, and content analysis of 19 student assignments. The findings indicate that witnessing and interacting with a folk communicator leader produces significantly greater effects in relating folk communication as a theory fundamental to social understanding.

Proximity to the rapper motivated students to engage with the hip hop movement and reflect on their own realities, confirming that a process of alterity occurred, as most did not belong to Márcio Brown's social group. Conversely, students who shared his social background felt more comfortable and represented in the university environment.

Beyond the initial objective of understanding the impact of a folk-communicative leader and educator in the university, this article also highlighted relevant aspects for comprehending the practice of hip hop in Sorocaba, which continues to be strengthened through events and gatherings, many of which are promoted by Márcio Brown. It was observed that incorporating folk-communication theory into a curricular component, together with the presence of a communicator leader, enhances teaching aimed at fostering social understanding.

The leadership exercised by Márcio Brown, before being conflated with charismatic authority or a guiding figure of sects and crowds, and beyond its representational role, embodies the very presence of Brazil's peripheries—particularly urban centers. Rather than speaking for those who identify with this leadership, the community effectively speaks through him and his music. It is a form of leadership that functions as a vector of collective action, stimulating other individuals and groups with shared interests, rather than a command that restricts cooperative action and centralizes decision-making, privilege, and display.

In this sense, Márcio Brown's presence at the University of Sorocaba can be understood as an extreme difference engaging in dialogue with others who were previously perceived as equals. This contact and connection across dissimilarities—and often disparities—does not foster violence or barbaric conflict but rather enables powerful encounters among multiple singularities, which, through shared practice and interests, create possibilities for alternative modes of conducting politics, culture, and communication.

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