



**SOBREVIVENDO  
NO INFERNO  
By Derek Pardue**

# Sobrevivendo no Inferno

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# Sobrevivendo no Inferno

Derek Pardue



Series Editor: Jason Stanyek

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Sobrevivendo no Inferno (Surviving in Hell), subsequently changing the  
hip-hop scene in São Paulo and firmly establishing itself as the point  
of reference for youth across Brazil. In an era when rappers needed to  
defend the very idea that their work was indeed music and a time when  
neighborhoods such as Capão Redondo, from where Racionais frontman  
Mano Brown hailed, often topped homicide statistics, Sobrevivendo  
empowered as it provoked.

As one journalist noted, "the underworld of São Paulo's working-  
class suburbs is dominated by cheap thrills and provides little space  
for representation." Sobrevivendo changed all of that; a brutal but

invigorating imagination was born. The lure of *Sobrevivendo* is the particular combination of word and sound that powerfully involves listeners, especially those millions of young Brazilians who live in the neighborhoods on the periphery of Brazil's megacities. This book celebrates the 25-year anniversary of *Sobrevivendo* by representing the album's power not only within the hip-hop community but also in other cultural domains such as cinema and literature. The author also provides his own narrative spins on the sentiment of *Sobrevivendo*, thus making the book a creative mix of cultural analysis and inspired testimony"—

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**Figure 1** *Racionais Show, 1995. Photo by author, image juxtaposition by Mariana Gil.*

# An Opening Salve

2021 . . . São Paulo, Brazil. Bremen, Germany. Lisbon, Portugal. Aarhus, Denmark. Capão Redondo, Brasilândia, Trøjborg, Anjos, Deichhorst, local neighborhoods and centers of worlds. I am all over the place. Employment, opportunities, and family life have taken me to a number of residences over the past couple of years during the writing of this book. And, yet, I undoubtedly *inhabit* São Paulo. The allure is undeniable, but, more often than not, São Paulo exerts a conflicted pull over its inhabitants. Residents are asked every day to put up with a number of banal challenges from basic logistics to overcrowding and pollution. But to know São Paulo is to take pride in getting over when it is all said and done. The city suffocates and occasionally yields, just enough to give an acknowledging wink. Or, was that something in her eye? In Portuguese, the city is feminine, *a cidade*.

For an elite few this daily grind is smooth with all the discomfort ameliorated through underpaid, informal economies. Servants surround the middle and upper classes and occupy any space that might cause a potential inconvenience. A normalized twisted capitalism. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority takes it on the chin with hopes of getting to the bar, the church, family, friends, and lovers a bit earlier this week. Maybe. And like everything else in Brazil, taking it on the chin is more pronounced when one is Black



or *mais escuro*, lives in the urban periphery, poor, a woman, an immigrant, homosexual or trans. Order of importance varies with the context. Few reflect on this *hell*.

Until the 1990s only some samba artists, such as Cartola and Bezerra da Silva in Rio de Janeiro and Geraldo Filme in São Paulo, captured these realities in the poetics of song from the point of view of the periphery or *favela* dweller. Samba works in metaphors via an aesthetic turn of a phrase that elicits a wonder in the listener. The brutality of neoliberalism, accompanied by increasing numbers of “bare bodies” of underemployed labor, beckoned an additional, complementary type of representation. Rap music and hip-hop culture allow for such transparency. A triumph of the aesthetics of indictment.

This book tells a story of a cultural breakthrough. In December of 1997 the rap group Racionais MCs (the “Rational” MCs) released the album *Sobrevivendo no Inferno* (Surviving in Hell), subsequently changing the hip-hop scene in São Paulo and firmly establishing themselves as a major reference for youth across Brazil. In an era when rappers needed to defend the very idea that their work was indeed *music* and a time when neighborhoods such as Capão Redondo, from where Racionais’ front man Mano Brown hails, often topped homicide statistics, *Sobrevivendo* empowered as it provoked. Even though more than twenty years have passed since its release, *Sobrevivendo* still holds a prominent place in Brazilian popular music as the best-selling rap album with approximately 4.5 million copies sold.

This huge success came from the voice and musical ability of four Black men who lived in the poorest areas of São Paulo, the richest city in Brazil. Their names are Edi Rock (Edivaldo