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Title	Full of rage and references: Understanding Coronelâ€™s Frenesi (Frenzy) (2022) in the Brazilian rap scene â€“ An interview/review
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Publication date	2022-12-01
Original Citation	Marques, G. S. (2022) 'Full of rage and references: Understanding Coronel's Frenesi (Frenzy)(2022) in the Brazilian rap scene–An interview/review', Global Hip Hop Studies, 3(1-2), pp.191-194. https://doi.org/10.1386/ghhs_00063_5
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1386/ghhs_00063_5
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Download date	2026-10-30 17:06:31
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16160



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Global Hip Hop Studies
Volume 3 Numbers 1 & 2
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FULL OF RAGE AND REFERENCES: UNDERSTANDING CORONEL'S *FRENESI* (*FRENZY*) (2022) IN THE BRAZILIAN RAP SCENE – AN INTERVIEW/REVIEW

Reviewed by Gustavo Souza Marques, University College Cork

ABSTRACT

Coronel is an underground Brazilian rapper and music producer who has a psychologizing and post-gangsta musical work. In his album Frenesi *(2022), Coronel shows his rage against fake gangsterism in the Brazilian rap scene utilizing references from a diverse setting of cultural productions ranging from Hitchcock movies to Egyptian gods. This article examines the uniqueness of Coronel's musical work in the Brazilian rap scene considering his initial maromba rap phase as well. Maromba rap is a subgenre of rap music made for working out comprising motivating but also dissing lyrics against other bodybuilders. As a product of Brazilian rap scene on the internet, maromba rap is an interesting phenomenon that had its apex in early 2010s. However, Coronel's career moved beyond such a specific subgenre achieving deeper lyrics and more intricate music productions. In other words, this article examines not only Coronel's* Frenesi *but also its career as a whole and how the content of his album relates to the different phases he went through as an artist. Coronel comes back with an aggressive album replete with references from cinema to Egyptian gods and videogames.*

KEYWORDS

hip hop
rap
Brazil
maromba rap
internet rap scene
post-gangsta rap

Anubis, Hitchcock and *GTA San Andreas* … what do these (and many other) references have to do with each other? On Coronel's album *Frenesi* ('Frenzy'), all of them make sense in his amalgam of real hip hop, street knowledge and post-gangsta rap. The self-produced album is full of boom bap beats recalling the heaviness of hip hop groups like Griselda or even the grim mood of Tyler, The Creator at the beginning of his career. The ominous character of the beats helps to create the angry and intertextual atmosphere of the album.

Frenesi starts with 'Animal', featuring English lyrics and Coronel's beat-maker tag – a sample from the videogame *GTA San Andreas*. In his tag, we hear the game's main character saying: 'You better lock me up cuz' otherwise you dead. Let me go, bitch!' making clear that no one will limit Coronel's artistic freedom. This intro dialogues with the outro of the album in which Coronel posits himself as the 'God of the Underground' making reference to the dog-headed Egyptian god of death, Anubis.

'Animal' is the grimmest track of *Frenesi*, sounding more like a horror soundtrack than anything. Not by chance, the album cover and title refers to the movie *Frenzy* (1972) by Alfred Hitchcock. As Coronel put it to me in an interview for this review: '*Frenzy* is considered one of Hitchcock's most violent

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movies. That's why I chose to name the album that way with the crows on the cover and letters in bloody red' (Figure 1). Coronel also explains that the crows on the cover work as a reference to the Hitchcock's 1963, *The Birds*, and the 1994 movie, *The Crow*, creating another layer of meaning to his record.

The following track is 'Kimbanda', a reference to one of the Afro-Brazilian religions commonly stereotyped for its threatening spiritual powers capable of bringing suffering to its foes. Continuing his line of menacing symbolism, here Coronel posits himself as a bad omen for the fake rappers that seem to dominate the mainstream of Brazilian rap scene talking about 'money, drugs and parties', as Coronel puts it. The anger that permeates the whole album is channelled towards the '40% of the Brazilian scene' who don't do justice to what rap music and hip hop culture represents. The good news, as he put it, is that '60% are good and deserve our attention'.

Speaking of doing justice to Brazilian rap history, Coronel – a name meaning '*colonel*' in Portuguese – salutes and cites remarkable rap artists in the track 'O Rap Nacional Não Morre' ('Brazilian Rap Never Dies') which features a very beautiful beat built on a melodic and somewhat melancholy guitar loop that permeates the whole song. The track seems to work as a statement of Coronel's mission in the Brazilian rap scene: 'My work is to show the real shit and go against the grain of fake gangsterism in Brazilian rap', says Coronel.



Figure 1: Hitchcock-inspired cover art for Coronel's new album, Frenesi *(2022). Copyright: Coronel. Reproduced by kind permission of the artists.*

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Such a statement relates to the various phases his own musical work went through: from maromba rap (motivational gym rap), to introspective rap and finally post-gangsta rap. However, as Coronel puts it, laughing gregariously: 'Everything is a form of evolution, there will be more phases in the future and I can't predict which is going to be the next one'.

Interestingly, Coronel is willing to pay the price for such changes and maturation throughout his career considering that his most popular phase was as a maromba rapper – a phase he is not willing to keep up anymore. A uniquely Brazilian subgenre, maromba rap emerged in the late 2000s and is characterized by heavy beats with lyrics of manly rivalry in the gym, motivating listeners to get mentally and physically stronger than foes. Indeed, in our interview Coronel explained that the inspiration for his stage name came from a video featuring the famously buff MC, 50 Cent – the video for G-Unit's 'Rider Pt. 2' in which the rapper and his crew are outfitted as US Marines. Coronel explained:

> In Brazil we already have MC Marechal (Marshal), so I had to come up with something different than his stage name. So I was inspired by 50 as the rap colonel of the USA that I could be the rap colonel in Brazil.

With time, however, Coronel's lyrics got more thoughtful and his beats darker and more diverse, signifying the evolutionary process he went through.

As Coronel explained, the collaborations on the album happened in an organic manner and added a special touch to it. Some of them started in freestyling studio sessions in São Paulo at Sheila Records – as was the case with Nuge's feature on the track 'Âmago' ('Core'). Other collaborations came from Coronel's interest in emerging MCs from the Brazilian rap scene, an approach that he describes as his 'helping hand' to those MCs. He continued:

> I like to invite people that are at the beginning of their careers, making an effort to achieve something bigger. I know I'm not that famous but I have my audience so I can help these MCs to develop their careers because I have been there too.

More than bragging that he's at 'the top of the game' – as have countless rappers on the Brazilian scene – Coronel is aware that the base of the pyramid (or should I say the underground?) is more important than anything. Not by chance, he recognizes his composer, battle rapper and social scientist friend Leticia Matareli as an important source of feedback to the production of the album. In his words: 'Without her feedback, I'd be very concerned and stressed with many things on this album. However, her artistic view on my productions made everything easier, especially because she is someone I trust, so I must say: thank you very much!'

One risky but successful manoeuvre on *Frenesi* was the third installation in Coronel's trademark 'Afro Samurai' series: 'Afro Samurai 3' featuring Cassol. The two first versions of 'Afro Samurai' – from his 2017 album *Goodbye* and his homonymous 2018 single – featured trap beats utilizing heavy sampling and programming of Asian string instruments evidencing the juxtaposition of Afro-Asian motifs in the musical production. The aggressive lyrics targeting fake MCs and emphasizing Coronel's and his collaborators' endurance in the Brazilian hip hop scene dialogue with the samurai ethos of violence and honour. However, this time Coronel decided to produce a traditional

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boom bap beat interlacing European orchestral elements and Asian string instruments to make it fit the overall atmosphere of the album. According to Coronel, this recurrent theme in his productions work as a reminder for always seeking progression in his music – just like the title character in the anime series, *Afro Samurai*, strives for the powerful number one bandana. Coronel says: 'Eastern musical instruments have a very unique sound and they cause a different sensation on those who hear it. Unfortunately, it is something rare to see in Brazilian rap music production but anyway I'm a big fan of Eastern music'. Well, so we are, Coronel!

The dopest tracks of the album are 'Intro', 'Kimbanda', 'O Rap Nacional Não Morre', 'MK 2.0', 'Âmago' and 'Deus do Underground (Outro)'. Actually, 'MK 2.0' has one of the best opening verses in *Frenesi* – and also includes an Asian musical instrument in the beat – as he spits:

> *Ouvi os álbuns que o povo do mainstream lançou, é mó sequela*
> *Tenho mais lírica que o album inteiro deles que à prova de favela*
> I have heard mainstream albums and it is wack
> My lyrical prowess overshadows theirs which are favela-proof

Here Coronel ends with some wordplay between being 'bulletproof' and being 'anti-favela' insinuating that the rappers he is critiquing are from the (white) middle class and/or disconnected from hip hop culture.

If you haven't yet heard this sonic bomb, it is time to go for it! Coronel always brings the sickest lyrics and beats that are a special case in the Brazilian rap scene.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Gustavo Souza Marques, also known by the stage names Gusmão and Gusashi, is an ethnomusicologist, drummer and beatmaker from Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Marques is a postdoctoral fellow with the CIPHER Hip Hop Interpellation project at University College Cork (Ireland) wherein he works as a Latin Americanist for the project. In his Ph.D., Dr Marques studied the musical work of Tyler, The Creator: African American rapper, music producer and entrepreneur from Los Angeles, California. Marques's main interests are critical race theory, postcolonialism, media studies, performance and web culture.

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