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Traditions and Transformations: From Candomblé to the Sambodromo Carnival

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ABSTRACT

Tujuan: Artikel ini akan berbicara tentang salah satu peristiwa paling penting di Brasil, bernama Karnaval Sambodromo. Ini adalah acara yang menyatukan orang-orang untuk perayaan dan kegembiraan saat berparade di jalanan. **Metode:** Artikel ini akan membahas bagaimana tradisi Candomblé sebagai asal mula samba, berubah menjadi karnaval Sambodromo modern, sekaligus menganalisis "O Santo EO Rei - Encantarias De Sebastião" oleh Paraíso Do Tuiuti sebagai salah satu peserta 2020 karnaval. **Hasil dan pembahasan:** Karnaval (keseluruhan perayaan populer, ritual, dan bentuk karnaval lainnya) mengakar kuat dalam jiwa manusia baik pada tingkat kolektif maupun individu. **Implikasi:** Karnaval di Brazil merupakan perpaduan antara tradisi dan transformasi. Ia mempertahankan semangat keberakarannya pada praktik religius yang berasal dari praktik Candomblé.

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil is the largest country in South America and the fifth-largest country globally, being the only Portuguese-speaking nation among the countries in Latin America. The country consists of a tremendous cultural, ethnic, and musical diversity. Brazilian culture is deeply marked by a long history of contrasts and clashes between the different cultures of Africans, Amerindians, and Europeans. As in countries of the

Caribbean, Brazilian culture is also distinguished by a conspicuous intermingling of these elements, a complex mix that characterizes the core of the country's musical scene (Moore, 2012: 229). Adding up to that statement, Brazil is also the largest Japanese population outside of Japan.

Although Brazil might seem a great place where different cultures meet together, the nation's history has its dark and dreadful stories. Since the Portuguese started colonization in 1530, it was predicted that around 4 million African people were coerced into enslavement. Mostly coming from Yoruba and Angola, people were forced to become slaves and worked at the sugar cane plantation. Sugar had become an essential form of trading, and most of the Portuguese economy relied on this to pay for their maritime quest and infrastructural buildings. Despite being forced into slavery and living a brutal and cruel life, African people brought their culture to Brazil, which we can witness in their ritual and musical practices.

As in many other Pan-African countries, we witness that there has occurred syncretism between the traditional African ritual practices and the Catholic Church. If Cuba has its Santeria practices, in Brazil, it is known as Candomblé. This ritual practice involves the veneration of spirits known as *orixás*. Deriving their names and attributes from traditional West African gods, they are equated with Roman Catholic saints. Furthermore, Assunção states that candomblé represents a complex religious system with four complementary dimensions: worshipping the gods, the cult of ancestors, divination, and healing. Even today, traditional cult houses pray to *orixás*, *vodun*, or *iniquices* in ritual languages derived from Yoruba, Fon, or Kimbundo, even if many followers no longer understand the meaning of the words (2003: 162). The ruling colony prohibited the ritual practice of Candomblé. To practice Candomblé was difficult to do at the time, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that Afro-Brazilians could practice the ritual in limited spaces. One of the essential features of Candomblé practices was its drumming and singing. Even when drumming mixes with other traditions, crosses over to the secular realm, and is performed in commercial popular musics, it never loses its symbolic power of communicating with the supernatural and of linking Brazilians with their African heritage (Moore, 2012: 243). This practice of drumming and singing is what becomes the roots of samba, which eventually transforms into modern-day carnival.

METHOD

Carnival has become an icon of Brazil that has attracted millions of tourists to witness the event. According to Bakhtin, carnival (the totality of popular festivities, rituals, and other carnival forms) is deeply rooted in the human psyche on both the collective and individual levels. Furthermore, Bakhtin mentions four categories of the carnival sense of the world (see Bakhtin 1984: 122-23). Those four categories are familiar and free interaction between people, eccentric behavior, carnivalistic mesalliance, and profanation. To understand the implementation of this theory, I will explain how the Candomblé traditions has transform into Sambodromo carnival in Rio de Janeiro. In collecting data, this research is based on literature reviews that discuss the topics of history, religion, and culture in Brazil. Data are gathered and then analyzed and redacted in relevance to this article. Musical analysis are also featured based on our interpretation of the “O Santo E O Rei - Encantarias De Sebastião” by Paraíso Do Tuiuti, which is accessed through Youtube. We identify the interesting musical and contextual features that signifies that piece as a product of traditions and transformation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

History of Samba

Before samba emerged, *lundu* was considered the first type of Afro-Brazilian music. *Lundu* (also called *lundum*, *landu*, and *londu*) derives from *calundu*, a Central African healing ritual featuring drums, scrapers, and a circle of adherents surrounding one or two leaders. The *calundu* that was practiced in Brazil through the early eighteenth century closely resembled rituals performed at the same time in Central Africa, the region of origin for the vast majority of slaves who were brought to Brazil during the seventeenth century (Hertzman, 2013: 20-21). Many of *calundu*'s characteristic elements—collective gatherings, spirit possession, curing, percussive music, and dance— are also found in various Afro-Brazilian religions, including Candomblé. The performance of drumming and singing in Candomblé is often called *batuque* or *batucada*. *Batuque* was a generic term already used by the Portuguese in Angola to designate any singing and dancing by natives (see Assunção, 2003, Iyanaga 2015, Helmiawan 2013, McGowan & Pessanha 1998). By the 20th century,

samba became the term that replaced batuque as a generic term for music and dance performance.

Many scholars believe the origin of the word “samba” to be *semba*, a term in the Kimbundu language of Angola, refers to a choreographic move in which dancers move their navels and hips to suggest sexual pursuit and to invite others to dance (also known as *umbigada*). The first known printed reference to samba appeared in 1838 in northeastern Brazil. However, it was not until 1917, with the success of “Pelo Telefone,” that the term samba began to embed itself in the music market and the broader public conscience (see Hertzman 2013, Galinsky 1996, Sheriff 1999, Chasteen 1996). Many scholars believe that the song was composed at Tia (Aunt) Ciata’s house in Rio de Janeiro, a mulatto, and Candomblé priest. Her house was used as a place to conduct ritual practices and hide from the white authorities. It was in this house that samba grew more prominent and spread across the country.

It is important to note that samba was performed by *cariocas* (people born in Rio de Janeiro) that were black and mulattos that came from the hills (*morros*) or the slumps (*favelas*). There were two significant areas in Rio, the city for the whites and the *favelas* and *morros* as a place for the mulattos. Gil-Montero states that:

From 1870 to 1930, the piquant dance and beat developed in the destitute hillside favelas of Rio de Janeiro-while in town the highbrow Carioca elites listened French and Italian opera . . . [T]he orchestras of the former slaves forfeited religious essence of their rituals and the batucada became a profane dance melody with a choreography and a rhythm distinctively Carioca. It was splendor of the morros that the batucada also softened and turned into samba... The blacks clapped their hands or percussion instruments in three tempos-fast and one slow-and danced in a circle. The samba had a relaxing, pleasurable, funny, thoroughly ludic intention.... Social life in the favelas up on the morro centered around it, and the sambistas who created this music acquired the attributes of gods among the black population. The rest of the town ignored the pleasures of the very poor and considered the sambistas as noxious elements (1989:25-26).

This became what was known as *samba carioca* (music and dances from the people of Rio). The people in the *favelas* would party and dance all around the streets, and they were the ones that created the modern-day samba.

Sambodromo and Modern-day Samba

Samba carnivals in the streets of Rio started in the 19th century. Initially performed by *mulattos*, and then gradually, people from all social classes began participating in the parades. The music and dance were mainly derived from African culture but also influenced by European tradition too. This formed the unique tradition of Afro-Brazilian music and dance. Rio's pre-Lenten carnival, as we know in modern-day Brazil, started in 1930. During the Getulio Vargas presidential term, who saw samba grew more popular throughout the country and was promoted to become a form of national identity (see Sheriff 1999, Chasteen 1996, Helmiawan 2013). The participants of the carnivals came from samba schools or *escola de samba* that at that time were primarily located in the *favelas*. These schools were places where people would meet and practice samba for carnivals. The government started to offer to fund participants of the carnival. Despite the support, there was strict scrutiny for the participants. As Queiroz notes, authorities forbade any overtly political manifestation or one which might on a protesting note. The slightest violation of these rules brought automatic declassification of the offending school" (1985:16).

To accommodate the growth of carnival, in 1984, Rio de Janeiro's government built the iconic Sambodromo or Sambadrome. It was designed by the renowned architect Oscar Niemayer, who also designed Brasilia, Brazil's new capital. It is a mile-long street with bleachers on either side holding some 65,000 spectators (Moore 2012: 247). Every year, the carnival is the marker of Lent's season, which starts on Ash Wednesday, 40 days before Easter. The performance will be focused on a specific theme, hence, the music, dance, and costumes will refer to the decided theme. Today, Rio's Sambodromo carnival has become an enormous commodity that attracts sponsors and tourists worldwide, resulting in millions of dollars in revenue. The competition among the samba schools became more intense and expensive. Each year the performance involved thousands of performers, with bright and colorful costumes, energetic choreography, and decorative automobiles. Thus, more and more smaller schools with less financial support were knocked off. It became a competition among major samba schools. Although the big samba schools were still associated with the hillside communities where they originated, their members were often far-flung. They were managed by professionals and funded by Rio's robust tourism department and *bicheiros*, the millionaire kingpins of Brazil's illegal numbers game

(Sheriff 1999:6). In earlier years, the carnival was an event that all classes of people could participate in and free, but it now has become a big touristic event that locals cannot pay for the entrance. This is a sad side of a glamorous cultural event.

Analysis of “O Santo E O Rei - Encantarias De Sebastião” (The Saint and the King: Charming Sebastião)

Samba music is played at an upbeat tempo, where people can feel excited to dance for parties. It is played in the form of duple meter, mostly in 2/4 but sometimes also in 4/4. Around 300-500 musicians participate in each samba school that mainly consists of percussive instruments. The instruments used in samba music also derives from African cultures, such as *surdo* (bass drum), *repenique* (high pitched drum), *cuica* (friction drum), *carixa* (snare drum), *pandeiro* (single-headed frame drum), *tamborim* (high pitch single-headed drum), *agogo* (African bell), *ganza* (shaker), and *apito* (whistle that the ensemble leader usually plays to provide cues) (see Moore 2012: 248-249).

In this section, I will focus my analysis on a piece by Paraíso Do Tuiuti entitled “O Santo E O Rei - Encantarias De Sebastião” (The Saint and the King: Charming Sebastiao) that performed at the 2020 Sambodromo. Paraíso Do Tuiuti is categorized into one of the elite samba schools in Brazil, founded on April 5, 1952, and is based in São Cristóvão, in the North Zone of Rio. The community itself has been participating in the carnival since the 1930s before forming a formal samba school.¹ The schools’ colors are blue and golden-yellow, with a crown as its symbol, representing Tuiuti’s fashion shows, which in this video, we can see the costumes dominated by these two colors.² This school has achieved many awards since it participated in the carnival.

This song tells the story of Saint (Sao) Sebastião, a saint that was believed to be born in Milan, Italy, around the 3rd century. He managed to convert many pagans to Christianity. On one occasion, Sebastião was denounced, going against his duty as a law enforcement officer. He then had to appear before the emperor to explain his procedure. Before the Emperor, Sebastião did not deny his faith and was sentenced to death without the right to appeal. Tied to a log, he was stabbed with arrows in the

¹ For more details see the official website <http://paraisodotuiuti.com.br/nossa-historia/>

² Paraíso Do Tuiuti full performance in the Sambodromo can be watched on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_N-HeAJs3A

presence of the praetorian guard. However, a widow named Irene removed the arrows from Sebastião's chest and treated him. As soon as he recovered, showing great courage, he presented himself again to the Emperor, reproaching him for the injustices committed against Christians, accusing him of being an enemy of the State. Perplexed by such boldness, Diocletian ordered the guards to flog him to death. The event occurred on January 20, 288. Sao Sebastião is a famous saint in Rio. In the Candomblé religion, he is also known as Oxossi, a great hunter and king of the woods.³

The song is structured into six sections, which I will name A, B, C, D, E, and F.⁴ If we look closely at the lyrics, it is clear that the song's inspiration is based on the story of Sao Sebastião and Oxossi. The first line in section A says “todo 20 de Janeiro,” meaning every January 20, which is the day Sao Sebastiao died. Further down in section C, we hear the song says that Sao Sebastiao is reborn under us (Brazil) as a *caboclo* (indigenous person). This is common in Candomblé practices where Catholic saints have taken form in an Afro-Brazilian figure, in this case as Oxossi. Praises to Oxossi as the guardian of Rio is mentioned in section E. The last section states that the people of the Tuiuti *morro* (the origin of the samba school) will greet the saint. The costumes used in the carnival were dominated by blue and gold. On top of the vehicle was a person dressed in white to represent Sao Sebastião. We can also see statues of people unfurling an arrow, and buffalos, which means the powers of Oxossi.

“O Santo E O Rei - Encantarias De Sebastião” (The Saint and the King: Charming Sebastiao) by Paraíso Do Tuiuti

Section	Portuguese	English
Intro 0:00		
A	<p>Todo 20 de Janeiro</p> <p>Nos altares e terreiros</p> <p>Pelos campos de batalha</p>	<p>Every January 20</p> <p>On altars and terreiros</p> <p>Through the battlefields</p>

³ See http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/pwdtcomemorativas/default.php?reg=8&p_secao=57

⁴ The analysis is based on the Youtube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0KIQdQJOrg>

0:18	<p>Uma vela pro Divino O imperador menino Um Sebastião não falha</p>	<p>A candle for the Divine The boy emperor A Sebastião does not fail</p>
B	<p>Nas marés, o desejado Infiéis pra todo lado Enfrentou a lua cheia</p>	<p>At tides, the desired Infidels everywhere Faced the full moon</p>
0:31	<p>No deserto, um grão de areia Dom Sebastião vagueia Sem futuro, nem passado laia laia No deserto, um grão de areia Dom Sebastião vagueia Sem futuro, nem passado</p>	<p>In the desert, a grain of sand Dom Sebastião wanders No future, no past laia-laia In the desert, a grain of sand Dom Sebastião wanders No future, no past</p>
C	<p>Renasce sob nós, um caboclo encantado Na Praia dos Lençóis, é o Touro Coroado Vestiu bumba-meu-boi Até mudou o fado No couro do tambor foi batizado</p>	<p>Reborn under us, an enchanted caboclo At Praia dos Lençóis, it is the Crowned Bull Wore bumba-meu-boi It even changed fate In the leather of the drum was baptized</p>
D	<p>Poeira, ê! Poeira! Pedra Bonita pôs o santo no altar Sangrou a terra, onde a paz chorou a guerra Mas ele vai voltar!</p>	<p>Dust, eh! Dust! Pedra Bonita put the saint on the altar The land bled, where peace wept war But he will come back!</p>
1:03 (played 2x)	<p>(Oh, meu Rio...) Rio, do peito flechado Dos apaixonados</p>	<p>(Oh, my Rio ...)</p>
E	<p>Rio batuqueiro</p>	

a great representation of Candomblé, Catholicism, samba, and carnival elements meet together in performance.

CONCLUSION

The Sambodromo is an event that encompasses the four elements of carnival, according to Bakhtin. First, familiar and free interaction between people: carnival often brought the unlikeliest people together and encouraged the interaction and free expression of themselves in unity. Second, eccentric behavior: unacceptable behavior is welcomed and accepted in the carnival, and one's natural behavior can be revealed without consequences. Third, carnivalistic mesalliance: the familiar and free format of carnival allows everything that may normally be separated to reunite — Heaven and Hell, the young and the old, etc. Lastly, profanation: in carnival, the strict rules of piety and respect for official notions of the 'sacred' are stripped of their power — blasphemy, obscenity, debasing, 'bringings down to earth,' celebration rather than condemnation of the earthly and body-based.

Many people come together and interact, even though they are total strangers. We might see people become more expressive and even sometimes “wild” during the carnivals, which in everyday life would be unacceptable. However, it is very much welcome and sometimes expected during the parades. Carnivals unite people of different ages, social classes, and educational backgrounds. And lastly, it is clear that carnivals are in the sense of profanation. In the piece performed by Paraíso Do Tuiuti, we witnessed Sao Sebastião, which is considered a holy God, are brought down to earth and interpreted distinctively based on the culture. Thus, undoubtedly looking at those four categories, it is clear that Sambodromo is a form of carnival.

The spirit of the Sambodromo carnival and samba has its roots in the Candomblé traditions. While scrutinized by the colonists, African slaves could bring part of their “homeland” religion to a new place. As Bakan states, “music is a mode of cultural production and representation that reveals much about the workings of culture, from the resilience of traditional ways to our remarkable human capacities for adaptation, innovation, and transformation” (2019: 10). The more we look at the carnivals and music, the more it provides meaning than just the music itself, it gives value to the culture. We cannot talk about this carnival without knowing where it originated and its history. The Sambodromo carnival was firmly based on its ritual

practices. In other words, Sambadromo is a product of traditions and transformations yet still maintaining its spirit in Candomblé practices.

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