



## Traces of African religiosity in Rio Carnival

Traços da religiosidade africana no Carnaval carioca

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### Abstract

Discussions about the sacred in contemporaneity have gained prominence when we consider the new prospects opened up with the inclusion of some themes related to the cultural and religious diversity in Brazilian society. Every day, the space occupied by the sacred in the daily life of ordinary people becomes more noticeable. The presence of the sacred in the daily life of Brazilian culture is a mark highlighting a relevant aspect of national identity. Brazilian culture is plural. Beyond the Indian and European matrices, there is a great cultural variety within the scope of Africanness. This article aims to analyze how this sacred element with an Afro-Brazilian nature shows up in the plot-themes by samba schools in Rio de Janeiro during the Carnival parades in 2011 and 2012. Our references consist in the lyrics of *sambas-enredos* [samba-songs] by samba schools from groups C, D, and E that parade in Intendente Magalhães, on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

**Keywords:** African religiosity; sacred; Carnival; Rio de Janeiro.

### Resumo

As discussões a respeito do sagrado na contemporaneidade têm ganhado relevância ao considerarmos as novas perspectivas que se abrem com a inclusão de alguns temas relativos à diversidade cultural e religiosa na sociedade brasileira. A cada dia se torna mais perceptível o espaço que o sagrado ocupa na vida cotidiana das pessoas comuns. A presença do sagrado no cotidiano da cultura brasileira é uma marca que realça um relevante aspecto da identidade nacional. A cultura brasileira é plural. Para além das matrizes indígenas e europeias, existe uma grande variedade cultural no âmbito da africanidade. Este artigo objetiva analisar como esse elemento sagrado de caráter afro-brasileiro aparece nos enredos das escolas de samba do Rio de Janeiro durante os carnavais de 2011 e 2012. Nosso referencial são as letras dos sambas-enredos das escolas dos grupos C, D, e E que desfilam na Intendente Magalhães, no subúrbio do Rio de Janeiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Religiosidade africana; sagrado; Carnaval; Rio de Janeiro.

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*The world does not work only with beliefs,  
but it is unlikely to be able to work without them.*  
(Geertz)

## Introduction

*Sambas-enredos* [samba-songs] in Rio Carnival have been systematically devoted to exploring aspects of African religiosity in Brazil. Numerous samba schools include the Orishas in their plot-themes. Nowadays, this is a recurring theme, although there has been in the history of Rio Carnival contempt for schools portraying it.

This article analyzes the way how, in Brazilian culture, Orishas are portrayed<sup>1</sup> in the event considered the biggest festival of the country – Carnival in Rio de Janeiro. The paper is divided into two sections, preceded by an introduction and followed by a closure by way of final remarks.

Initially, we report the presence of religiosity in the history of Rio samba, then we analyze the way how it manifests in samba-songs by samba schools parading on Intendente Magalhães. From the methodological point of view, this article is based on documentary research. Lyrics written by samba schools for the Carnival parades in 2011 and 2012 are analyzed. The analysis presented here is related to the Carnival parade that takes place on Intendente Magalhães<sup>2</sup>. It is worth delimiting this space due to differences in relation to the Carnival parade that takes place every year at the sambadrome on Marquês de Sapucaí avenue. Intendente Magalhães, an avenue that becomes catwalk for Carnival parades, is located on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, in

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<sup>1</sup> Orishas are children and messengers of Olodumare, the supreme and only god, and we can only communicate with to this god through them. All of them have legends according to which they are claimed to be powerful people who became gods, even still carrying the passions and imperfections of human beings. They are associated with elements of nature, from which they are products, since, in the legends, when an Orisha vanishes, it always merges with one of these elements. Many are the definitions of them and African legends, but agreeing on some basic points. Orishas are intermediate deities, between the supreme god and the earthly world.

<sup>2</sup> The organization of Rio Carnival has regulations for standardization of samba school parades. There are schools classified in Group A and Group B, parading at the sambadrome in Marquês de Sapucaí Avenue, and the responsibility for organizing Carnival falls upon the Independent League of Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro. There are also schools with lower expression, divided into groups C, D, and E. These, in turn, parade at Intendente Magalhães Avenue, on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

the region of Campinho and Madureira. This is the location where samba schools from groups C, D, and E parade, the so-called “Carnival of poor people”.

## 1 Religiosity in the history of samba

Samba and religion have always been very close in the daily life of black people in Brazil. A little history helps understanding the theme under analysis. Cabral (1996, p. 27) states that:

No researcher early in the century realized that the black community, located downtown in Rio de Janeiro, had created more than a genre, but a musical culture. This is a reason why data about the origins of Rio samba are so obscure. Moreover, the prejudice embedded in our society, especially in the years following slavery’s abolition, prevented the cultural and religious manifestations of black people from deserving even some freedom to come into being, what to say about attracting the attention of those who, perhaps, could be interested in the history of these people.

Since the early days, it is possible to see a close link between religiosity and samba and, as a consequence, Rio Carnival. After a long period of prohibition and persecution of religious spaces where the African religions were practiced, there came a time when, due to political convenience, it was concluded to legalize their operation. According to Cabral (1996), samba took advantage from some gaps left in the process for legalizing the houses, relying on the inability of police officers to tell the difference between religious and heathen music. As a result, *sambistas* could keep dancing and singing their songs in the end of meetings. At the early days of samba schools, there were not samba in songs, song writers in the 1920s created samba lyrics according to their will, since there were no pre-designed themes for the parade. A samba song that had achieved the status of people’s favorite, the most frequently sung, was used for parades; usually, this samba song was chosen due to the echo it acquired through the voices of female pastors (a female chorus) attending the spaces where meetings took place. Back then, a samba song had only the first head (first stanza). The second part of a samba song was improvised over the parade by *line-makers*.

In 1930, samba-song is introduced as a key element in Rio Carnival, to provide samba school parades with more liveliness; in this period, samba is created with melody and it starts presenting simple themes related to facts of nature, the history of samba itself and of samba lovers' daily life. This was based on improvisation and creativity, during parades.

In 1946, it was decided that samba-songs should not be improvised during parades; then, they began to be planned well in advance. Thus, several samba-songs are created and best lyrics and melody defended the samba school at parades.

The strength of ideological power during the Vargas era leads the plot-themes of samba school parades to the patriotic exaltation atmosphere. This compels composers to strive in order to avoid controversy in their melodies, without departing from the overoptimistic patriotic attitude proposed by the State. Failure to follow the ideological orientation implied penalty against the samba schools Vizinha Faladeira and Império Serrano. The school Vizinha Faladeira, by presenting the theme "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", was disqualified; and Império Serrano (then named Prazeres da Serrinha), by taking a *samba de terreiro* to the avenue, instead of having its samba-song chosen, achieved a miserable place, indeed.

Samba-song, according to Theodoro et al. (2006), more than providing samba with theme or purpose, became over history a specific aesthetics of samba. Based on the structure of the Carnival parade, this aesthetics combines the powerful sound of samba school drums with a song form that is different, especially due to its theme, which gradually became imperative in the composition of sambas aimed at the parades.

During the 1940 and 1950s, samba-song acquires marked features regarding time signature, rhythm, writing, and melody; and in subsequent years, the composition of samba-songs increasingly shows up interconnected to narratives, with extensive lyrics virtually with no repetition.

According to Theodoro et al. (2006), in the period between the late 1960 and early 1970s, there is a major transformation in the whole context of the Rio Carnival parade, which absorbs the internal practices of *samba de terreiro* and *samba de partido alto*. Power structures, acquired by samba schools, and the organization of Carnival, gradually abandoned the obligation to fully describe the plot-theme as in previous decades. And, then, composers focus on samba composition with refrains, seeking to conquer the new audience, relying on longstanding musical structures from the Rio scene.

Samba, which in the past had some of its freedom and creativity put into cast, when *sambistas* had to put aside their original motivations to create samba-songs aimed at the community aspects, collective singing, and group storytelling, resumes its original characteristics and meanings. With this, African religiosity, even being suppressed from samba for so many years, due to the ideological tutelage, is resumed since the 1970s in samba-song. In this context, samba-song takes a new formatting, with a fast pace, with less orderly plot-themes, something which includes religious ethnic expressions described in the compositions. The theme becomes important again, and it starts being elected by *carnavalescos* or samba schools' directors.

The plot-theme “Menininha do Gantois” (TOCO; MEDEIROS, 1976), by Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, considered one of the best samba-songs that year, shows us the new trend for composing samba-songs after the 1970s:

The day has already dawned/ The catwalk is gonna turn/ Into a magic scenery/ Recalling the old Bahia/ And the famous Gantois/ Arerê, arerá/ Candomblé comes from Bahia (again)/ Where come down the Orishas/ Oh! Dad Ogun/ In thy faith/ Saravá, Nanã, and Oxumaré/ Shango, Oxossi/ Oxalá, Yemanjá/ Oshun's daughter to help us/ Come give us axé (again)/ With erês from Orishas/ Mama/ Oh! Mama Menininha/ Come see how the whole city (again)/ Sings to praise thee/ With Mocidade/ ... It has already dawned.

The reunion of samba-song with the theme of African religiosity creates a new configuration in the Carnival scene. The presence of sacred in everyday Brazilian

culture becomes a feature highlighting a relevant aspect of national identity. Brazilian culture is a pluralistic culture. Beyond the Indian and European matrices, there is a great cultural variety within Africanness. Referring to the African languages, Fiorin claims that, “the variety attested in Brazil may also reflect the varied origin of African languages, which served as the source languages” (FIORIN; PETETER, 2009, p. 104). This variety of languages influences on the way of naming deities in the universe of religions with an African matrix in Brazil. Taking this understanding as an assumption, when referring to Orishas, we are designating all this ethno-religious plurality to address such a reality. It is worth noticing that it is usual in rites to Orishas the presence of dance and music played with the sound of drums. The drums, rhythms, dances are key features of the Afro-Brazilian culture. These elements will join others in the development of samba school parades in Rio Carnival. With this, the presence of Orishas in plot-themes by samba schools became almost natural.

Among the numerous cultural events in Brazil, Carnival stands out as a place for expressing identity elements of black people in the national culture. It must be emphasized here that, for black people, in terms of identity, there is inseparability between culture and religion. The elements of African ancestry, expressed through religious experience, become foundational elements in the universe of composing samba-songs. By means of plot-themes of Orishas, a certain imagery about God becomes clear – a God who is born from daily life in the black community and he goes to the avenue for three days of revelry, to dance samba with his people.

## **2 African religiosity on the avenue**

On Intendente Magalhães avenue, Carnival does not have the splendor we watch on TV about Rio Carnival held at the sambadrome. Schools from the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro do not have vast resources as those parading on Marquês de Sapucaí. Carnival is organized by the Association of Samba Schools of the City of Rio de Janeiro (AESCRJ). This, in partnership with Escola Superior de Propaganda e

Marketing (ESPM), organizes a course for jurors, who are selected by means of pre-established criteria and analysis of curricula. In the course, guidance on each issue to be considered by the jury is provided, what has to be valued in each variable, what has to be penalized. Also, there is information about the behavior expected from a team of jurors during the parade. In the end of the course, jurors are grouped into booths. The number of booths is defined according to the number of issues to be judged. In each booth there is a juror for each issue.

Holding a parade on the street is a task that requires much preparation time. It involves a huge amount of people, unmatched dedication, and hard work. Samba-songs are chosen within this preparation period. Each year, the composers' section of schools is devoted to preparing and choosing a samba, in order to "do well on the avenue".

In this "do well on the avenue" there is the key element that this article highlights. Doing well implies a good samba-song. A good samba is that sung and danced by the whole school. In an instant it is received, embraced, and sung by the crowd on the avenue. It has to be a joyful samba. Carnival is a time of joy, partying. It is not stated anywhere that this samba requires elements of religiosity. However, the amount of samba-songs addressing or portraying the elements of African religiosity is noteworthy. In the course for jurors, the guideline with regard to samba-song highlights:

[...] the literary interpretation of plot-theme has the function of conveying the contents of this plot-theme on parade. The lyrics may be descriptive or interpretive, and its role is telling the plot-theme without, necessarily, focusing on details, but having, implicitly, an idea of the main items of the plot-theme. Penalize schools that do not comply with the criteria (AESCRI, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Guideline prepared by AESCRI, indicating the procedures of jurors to assess the issue samba-song in 2012.

As a result, jurors must value at the time of computing their grades, which range from 7 to 10, also considering the decimal fractions:

[...] suitability of lyrics to the plot-theme, poetic richness, its beauty, good taste, objectivity, clarity, and precision, the good relationship between lyrics and melody, melodic richness, beauty, and good taste of its musical design, the ability of its musical harmony to facilitate singing and dancing of paraders. Failure to comply should be penalized (AESCRJ 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

Uplifting joy is the school's role when entering the avenue. Many composers understand that this joy that Carnival provides can be presented better by using a characteristic of Brazilian culture: the component of religiosity.

It is usual in cultures having an African matrix, prior to an important event, to “settle accounts” with the transcendent. In other words, we do not leave home without dispatching the door. We do not start a religious ceremony without dispatching Eshu. This is a principle that leads to the conviction that whatever is done will be done right. In this sense, Carnival is a big event, an important milestone in people's life, especially for that school. The awareness of Africanness observed in the symbolic universe of composers of samba-songs ends up acting as a guiding element of the lyrics that will be composed. In a way, this is a harbinger that the school will be protected by spiritual forces when walking on the avenue. There are three days of joy, but for this to be complete, we cannot neglect the protection of Orishas. In a context of high concentration of people from so many places, so many looks, so many different interests, so many requirements, good energies need to be preserved. Thus, we open our analysis of Carnival lyrics with the song *É Hoje*, sung by many artists of Brazilian popular music, among them Caetano Veloso.

My joy crossed the sea and anchored on the catwalk. It had a fascinating landing on the biggest show on earth. Will I be the owner of this party? A king in the midst of so many humble people. I came down the mountain, full of

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<sup>4</sup> Guideline prepared by AESCRJ, indicating the procedures of jurors to assess the issue samba-song in 2012.



euphoria to parade. The whole world awaits. Today laugh is gonna cry. I took my samba to *mãe de santo* pray. Against the evil eye I carry my *patuá*<sup>5</sup>.

The song's poetic construction makes joy a boat and the catwalk becomes its safe harbor to anchor, but before reaching the avenue, this samba was prayed by a *mãe de santo*. The evil eye cannot ruin joy, the party. Against this evil there is *patuá*.

In 2011, Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Engenho da Rainha paraded on Intendente Magalhães with a samba-song whose Orisha is Oxossi.

With the sound of “atabaques” to Oxossi/ And slaves singing against pain/ An inspiration that Portela went to fetch/ So that strong drumming comes from its drum (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 19)<sup>6</sup>.

Samba is a tribute to Portela, a school having as godmother Our Lady of the Conception and as godfather Saint Sebastian. These saints from Catholicism have traits similar to those of Oshun and Oxossi in the religious traditions having an African matrix. Samba scholars claim that “the peculiar characteristics of Portela’s drumming section were inspired by the beats of ‘atabaques’ to Oxossi” (AESCRJ 2011, p. 19).

In turn, Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Rosa de Ouro brings to the avenue a plot-theme, *A Chave do Mistério*, which portrays the power of Orishas as a flame that emanates and heats the people and, at the same time, it is hope for a new world in the universe of African matrices, regarding religiosity, we occasionally find Orishas merged with *caboclos*. These are more revered in Umbanda and they have a close relation to the elements of Indian religion. The ethnic and religious mixture that took place in Brazil is apparent in the plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos da Vila Rica:

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<sup>5</sup> Available at: <<http://letras.mus.br/caetano-veloso/44721/>>. Accessed on: Feb. 20, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Chorus of the samba-song by the samba school Acadêmicos do Engenho da Rainha. Musical composition by Binho Sá, Pedro Binho, and João do Peixe.

I am a lodestar *caboclo* for the famous Orishas/ Son of black, white, a bit of everything/ I am a mixture of the most beautiful African ancestors (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 105)<sup>7</sup>.

The plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos da Ponte is much more forceful with regard to addressing Orishas. The plot-theme title is *Orixás*. The whole lyrics of this samba-song is an exaltation of African deities:

Excuse me, dad Oxalá/ To enter this yard/ From the captive black Brazil is your gonging/ A tribute to the Orishas that today Ponte enriches by prayers of its singing/ Atotô Obaluaê, Atotô Babá/ Atotô Obluaê, Atotô Babá/ Deceit to thy saint that the request is serviced/ It cures pain and *quebranto* and brings back a lost love/ A boat to greet mama Oshun, Yemanjá/ Taking perfumes and flowers to ocean waves/ Take *fumo de rolo* to Ossãe/ Ô saluba Nanã, Nanã Batuque (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 119)<sup>8</sup>.

Bahia is sung as the cradle of African culture and the land of Orishas by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Acadêmicos da Abolição. This is another interesting mark to understand the place occupied by the religiosity having an African matrix in the daily life of Brazilian people. What happens in Rio de Janeiro is intimately, inextricably, related to Bahia. The practitioners of religions with an African matrix are very proud to talk about their religious affiliations connected to houses in Bahia.

Echoed the drum in the land of magic/ The faith radiating from a happy people, a mixture of races and religions/ Cradle of African culture, it has poetry by the moonlight/ Save Bahia, strength and energy, with the blessing of Orishas/ To wash Bom Fim, I came with faith, shook my head, was guided by Candomblé/ I blessed my body to dive into the waters of Yemanjá/ My samba is gonna shine by the light of dad Oxalá (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 198)<sup>9</sup>.

The wealth of details concerning religiosity in this samba-song attests the place occupied by Orishas in the daily life of a *carnavalesco*. Singing Bahia as a cultural

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<sup>7</sup> Plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos da Vila Rica. Musical composition by André Cabeça, Dudu Linhares, Marcelo Menezes, and Ronaldo Lemos.

<sup>8</sup> Samba-song by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos da Ponte. Musical composition by Wallace Coelho Alamo. Performed by Ogui do Cavaco.

<sup>9</sup> Plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Acadêmicos da Abolição. Musical composition by Nalva Scafura, Lapisinho, J. Rabelo, and Zequinha. Performed by Fabrício.

cradle means praising the privileged space of faith expression and manifestation in the religion of Orishas.

In reports related to the history of black people within the slavery period, Orishas appear in the form of supplication. They are those who provide the black person with strength to resist evil and wickedness in the slavery system. The black person relies on Oxalá, in prayer, begging to relieve pain. This understanding becomes clear in the lyrics of the plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Imperial de Nova Iguaçu:

Black man was brought by strength of the whip/ Of dominating white man/  
To dad Oxalá black man asked in prayer/ To relieve his pain/ *Lei Áurea* has  
been signed/ Has freedom already dawned? (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 296)<sup>10</sup>.

Bringing to the avenue a plot-theme about Orishas means, somehow, to bring back to life the dimension of Africanness in Rio Carnival. Singing Africa, showing Africa, is a longing of many *carnavalescos*. We may claim that black people are primarily responsible for the existence of Rio Carnival as we know it today. It is the way how black people dance samba, with their swing and artistic inventions, the driving spring of the sections that make up a samba school. People enjoy the steps of *mestres-salas* and *porta-bandeiras*, the swing of dancers, the drum roll harmonizing the rhythm and the time signature of parade through the drumming section, as well as the elegance of *baianas*, the proud and glory of any samba school. This way of understanding the contributions of Africa through black people that is resumed by the samba-song by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos de Vaz Lobos. Here, we may highlight:

Africa! I am Vaz Lobo traveling/ And seeing the world as it is/ As my drums  
roll/ I evoke all the strength of Yabás/ Ladies of time/ Goddesses of nature/  
Mother of our destinies/ Yaôs and Ogans, Yalorixás, Laruê to start/ Making

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<sup>10</sup> Lyrics of the plot-theme by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Imperial de Nova Iguaçu. Musical composition by Crispim, Paulinho TZ, and Zezé. Performed by Alex Tuiti.

mankind aware/ Saluba Nanã, to bring back to life the mangroves Oraíêi/ Tell in cowrie-shells the future they bring/ By preserving the fountains and springs/ Ewá, beauty shines/ Transformation of flora and animals/ Make my singing happier and make me more beautiful/ In the sky I see the signs/ Obá Xirê, the land can't take it no more... Eparrê Oyá/ It is fire and wind, natural secrets/ As we can see, a community incorporates Africa, analyzes the world, and evokes the power of the Orishas, aiming to reconstruct harmony between human beings and nature (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 437)<sup>11</sup>.

Other samba schools will devote smaller spaces in their plot-themes to portray the Orishas; however, in each plot, the very intimate connection between Carnival and religiosity with an African matrix becomes clear. That is the case of Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Infantes da Piedade, where the samba-song says:

Sailing on the seas the royal family glimpsed the paradise! Birthplace of samba and the Carnival that King Sun lit, where the rufous-bellied thrush trills, I hear the siren's song: mama Yemanjá. Okê-Orô! Hunter king from the forests (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 370)<sup>12</sup>.

A small space in the plot, but very interesting due to the way how Orishas emerge is apparent in Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Boêmios de Inhaúma. Dancing Carnival, for this school, is something done protected by Iansan, Shango, and Oshun: "With the protection of Iansan, Shango, Oshun. It is a day of revelry, let us dance samba" (AESCRJ, 2011, p. 379)<sup>13</sup>.

Odoiá! Yemanjá, queen of the sea! This is a very usual expression in the understanding of Brazilian society. It is related to the New Year's Eve in Rio de Janeiro. Going to the sea, on the sands of Copacabana, at New Year's Eve and throw flowers into the sea was a festival of religious nature of cultures having an African matrix. Over time, this festival has taken new shapes and it was even included in the tour schedule of Rio de Janeiro City and gained international proportions. Nowadays,

<sup>11</sup> Samba-song by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Unidos de Vaz Lobos. Musical composition by Monami, Celso Tristeza, Vanzinho de Bento Ribeiro, and Alex Carioca. Performed by Nando Alegria, Alessandro Português, and Adriano de Bento Ribeiro.

<sup>12</sup> Samba-song by the samba school Infantes da Piedade. Musical composition by João Luiz, André Atração, Xandinho, Walter Machado, Nando Jabaquara, and Cris Lis. Performed by Leildo Claudino Line.

<sup>13</sup> Samba-song by the samba school Boêmios de Inhaúma. Musical composition by Fabian Costa. Performed by Wando.

the fireworks on the sands of Copacabana became an international party. The cultural appropriation or even cultural dispossession led this festival to lose, at the level of manifestation, its religious nature; although, at the level of significance, the practitioners of religions with an African matrix keep protecting the primary meaning. Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Arame de Ricardo, in its plot, alludes to queen of the sea in the song:

A large illuminated lighthouse/ So fascinating guide us to high seas (Odoiá)/  
A mystery that made us cry when we lost the parchment with all ancient  
wisdom/ Burn the witches in the fire of betrayal (dad kaô) (AESCRJ, 2011, p.  
409)<sup>14</sup>.

In 2012, a large group of schools that paraded on Intendente Magalhães continued the process of representation of African religiosity in Rio Carnival. Mocidade Unida de Jacarepaguá focuses on the exaltation of a warrior who becomes king and then become Orisha. The parade is structured in the light of Shango's struggle to conquer justice, preserving the ideals of his ancestors. The school's *carnavalesco* understands this way:

[...] the divinity who today watches over us from heaven, who does justice  
with his power is the same who guides and blesses our Carnival.  
[...] I heard the calling, after winning I moved, in the sky I became an Orisha/  
Axé to my warrior people/ I am vigilante, the mission has no end/ Faith,  
struggle, and hope/ It is the bonanza that is to come/ In the land of Oyo a  
King was born/ King of justice and freedom/ It is Mocidade that cries today/  
Peace, unity, victory, and happiness (AESCRJ, 2012, p. 173)<sup>15</sup>.

Boca de Siri is the name of a samba school that paraded on Intendente Magalhães avenue in 2012 with a samba-song exalting woman. It is worth noticing that in the development of plot the element of African religiosity erupts once more by associating with this woman a queen. In this particular case, the queen of waters –

<sup>14</sup> Samba-song by the samba school Arame de Ricardo. Musical composition by Bené da Pompéia, Marcio França. Performed by Nelson Pilão.

<sup>15</sup> Samba-song by Mocidade Unida de Jacarepaguá. Musical composition by Alexandre Alegria, Fernando de Paula, Ruterdan, Telmo Augusto, and Wanderley Senna. Performed by Bolete.

Yemanjá. That is why the lyrics of the samba-song states: “Come Queen of the Waters/ I am gonna throw flowers in the sea/ Goddess of mythology/ You knew how to love” (AESCRJ, 2012, p. 257)<sup>16</sup>.

Orisha Shango is also sung in the plot by the samba school Mocidade Independente de Inhaúma, whose plot emphasizes humility, identity, and root as indispensable attributes to feel like belonging to the family in a yard. In this space, ruled by Shango, boosted by the spirits, beat of *atabaques*, *surdos*, and tan-tans, *Jorginho do Império* was born, a key theme in the school’s plot. The lyrics of this samba emphasize: “Mocidade is joy/ Lit by Shango/ Protector of the Emperor’s son” (AESCRJ, 2012, p. 257)<sup>17</sup> – in this case, *Jorginho do Império* – “Glory of the national folklore/ I bring culture to this Carnival” (AESCRJ, 2012, p. 265)<sup>18</sup>. There is an understanding that *Jorginho do Império* is a glory of Brazilian folklore. His life, his contribution to the world of samba and Carnival is part of the culture and, thus, worthy of being shown on the avenue. However, this does not take place without Shango’s enlightenment and protection.

*Baianas* are trademarks in all samba schools. This is a requirement to be judged, the Section of *Baianas*. Interestingly, the samba school Matriz de São João de Meriti, by bringing to the avenue a plot titled *Cor é Luz, Cor é Vida, Cor que Ilumina a Vida*, uses colors for making the skirts of *baianas*, emphasizing the understanding that *baianas* symbolize Candomblé and their clothes the colors of Orishas.

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<sup>16</sup> Samba-song by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Boca de Siri. Musical composition by Laércio, Naldo, PC do Repique, Maurício do Pandeiro, Toti, and Fernando Lima. Performed by Jefão.

<sup>17</sup> Samba-song by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Boca de Siri. Musical composition by Laércio, Naldo, PC do Repique, Maurício do Pandeiro, Toti, and Fernando Lima. Performed by Jefão.

<sup>18</sup> Plot by the samba school Mocidade Independente de Inhaúma. Musical composition by Bruno, Edson Gato, Di Paula, and Di Mauá. Performed by Di Paula and Di Mauá.

Finally, the plot by the samba school Imperial de Nova Iguaçu, *Da Coroa da Criação a um Grito de Liberdade* (AESCRJ, 2012, p. 234)<sup>19</sup>, is entirely constructed by telling realities of African religiosity. In the first stanza, it highlights:

Axé, mama Africa/ Cradle of our ancestors/ To create the world/ Olorun sent Obatala/ By disobeying Orumilá/ He was punished by the guardian/ Oduduwa fulfill his mission.

This is the myth of world creation in Yoruba culture. The task of creating comes from Olorun. In the second stanza, it presents the creation of land and the animals:

Helmeted guineafowl/ And the white dove/ Created land and gleaming air breaking dawn/ I saw the chameleon walking/ When Obatala woke/ Olodumare gave him a new mission/ To create living beings/ He made man, the most perfect creation.

Thus, the Carnival brought to avenue involves a plea to resume the harmony of creation, whose key role is taken by man, the most perfect of all the works of creation.

### Final remarks

The richness of the theme presented here makes clear that it is still possible to extract much from the material under analysis. Each piece of lyrics is full of a symbolism that induces to a latent religiosity in the universe of Afro-Brazilian culture, whose manifestations are eventually inhibited by social relations marked by intolerance and prejudice.

It is worth noticing in this context of Rio Carnival, but not only in it, that many aspects of the religiosity with an African matrix are marginalized in daily Brazilian social life. In many spaces, it has become forbidden to talk about this reality. Religious

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<sup>19</sup> Plot by the samba school Imperial de Nova Iguaçu. Musical composition by Binho Imperial, Alves, Crispim, Zezé, and Naldo Careca. Performed by Naldo Careca and Zezé.

intolerance against segments having African matrices confirms such statements. However, within the Carnival period, nothing bothers anyone. In contrast, if there were no dances by black women and men – and many of them have the same style of those that take place in the yards, including drums with the same beats –, there would not be Carnival as such a big and noble spectacle. What is regarded as forbidden in daily life seems to find a social truce and falls within social acceptability. The most obvious example is the way the Orishas are seen in plots by various schools, as well as the way how such plots are seen by those participating in schools, by the general public, and even by jurors concerning this issue.

It becomes clear in our analyses that the way how black people experience their religiosities are highlighted at the most important moments of their lives. Carnival is one of these moments for black people. Many characteristic elements of identity and human dignity affirmation may be expressed there. Black spirituality is an African religious heritage. Black people's faith has features characterizing their relation to African ancestry. This is observed in black people's understanding, something which makes that their conception of sacred immersed in life emerges during festivities as in any other space of human living and coexistence. The rhythm, the sound of drums, in the drumming sections of Carnival, constitute suitable environments for the parade or dance of Orishas, a reality that composers, *sambistas*, and *carnavalescos* have understood very well in Brazilian culture.



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