

Caboclos of Nazareth: Improvisation and Renovation in *Maracatu
de Baque Solto* of Pernambuco

by

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Abstract

Keywords: *cultura popular*, traditionalism, improvised poetry, authenticity and cultural revival, Northeast Brazil and Pernambuco, maracatu

This dissertation looks at an expressive musical-poetic form that has developed over the last hundred years, *maracatu de baque solto* of Pernambuco, but which has only recently begun to receive critical attention. Featuring poetic duels between poet-singers (or *mestres*) of different groups, maracatu draws on a variety of regional musical genres while also engaging creatively with mass-mediated cultural production. Maracatus organize performances in their local neighborhoods, present in neighboring towns and cities during Carnival, and participate in large festival productions. Based on three years of ethnographic and historical fieldwork in and around the town of Nazaré da Mata from 2009 to 2012, the dissertation looks at different understandings of authenticity and the dynamic relationship between modernity and tradition as articulated differently within maracatu and by its intermediaries. In exploring how the expressive genre of maracatu continues to develop, I examine how cultural identities and practices can shift, calcify, or transform over time in relation to socioeconomic change, political developments, or interaction with other social groups. Since its “discovery” by elite artists, researchers, and funding institutions, the emphasis on maracatu’s rural identity and origins on the sugar plantations has often minimized or obscured its subsequent development by generations of working-class practitioners in the urban and semi-urban peripheries since the rural exodus of the middle twentieth century. Institutional frameworks created by folklore research and elite intellectual production

about popular culture have shaped the ways in which maracatu eventually achieved recognition among a broader public in Pernambuco as well as other regions of Brazil.

My research touches upon the strengths and limits of *cultura popular* as a form of resistance by exploring how elite interventions and popular practices have become entwined. I develop the idea of *coronelismo cultural*, or “cultural boss-ism,” as a way of analyzing how maracatu has developed within the persisting structures of patronage and domination that are strongly rooted in the region’s history.

As maracatu is only sparsely represented in the academic literature, it is hoped that this dissertation will contribute to our understanding of similar expressive forms elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean.

.

Introduction

We sat around the small table in the garage that served as a headquarters for Maracatu Estrela Brilhante. I had come to meet their poet-singer, Mestre Barachinha, for the first time. I was staying at a hotel nearby, a mere ten minute walk, but I needed to call his cell phone for some orientation through the hilly, twisting streets. When I got there I found quite a few more people in the garage than just Barachinha: the entire directorate of the group was present as well as other members, neighbors, and friends. They were finishing up one of their occasional and informal directory meetings where organizational issues and future plans were discussed over barbeque and drinks, and they stuck around to meet the curious foreigner coming to ask questions about their passion. And they were curious about me as well. All of them greeted me warmly, some of them gregarious, and others a bit more guarded, feeling me out. “Well, what do you want to know?” asked Barachinha after we sat down. I glanced at a list of general questions I had jotted down in my notebook to try and start a conversation. There was a sense that they expected me to try and get everything I could from them all at once, and that they might not be seeing me again.

Barachinha answered my questions with the other *maracatuzeiros*, as they call themselves, chiming in on occasion. Some younger members appeared, took a seat along the periphery, and quietly listened. They told me about how maracatu originally came from the communities of cane cutters who worked on sugar plantations, or *engenhos*, and how the groups used to spend carnival walking the dirt roads that connected them. They told me about the different carnival personages and characters – the *arreimar*, Mateus, Catita, standard-bearer, the Dama do Paço, the *baianas*.



Figure 1: Mestre Barachinha (Manoel Carlos de França)

They told me how the King and Queen had not originally been part of *maracatu de baque solto* but had been forced upon them many decades ago by the Carnival Federation of Pernambuco, who sought to make rural maracatu conform to the example of a different carnival tradition, also called maracatu but based in Recife. Although there were no women present at the meeting, they told me how maracatu was previously closed to them and now welcomed women's participation. The figures of the *baianas* had once been played exclusively by men dressed as women, but today even the *caboclo de lança* could be a woman. These are the most central and visible personages of *maracatu de baque solto*, the afro-indigenous warriors who protect the group, adorned with ornately-sequined capes, a massive headdress of shredded strips of colored cellophane, painted

cow-bells suspended from a wooden frame covered in fabric, and six-foot long wooden lances draped with hundreds of cloth ribbons.

As the question and answer period wound down, people relaxed and began to talk about something more imminent and exciting – a party being thrown on the *engenho* headquarters of Nazaré’s oldest maracatu, Cambinda Brasileira, one of the few groups to still hold its events in the countryside. The celebration was meant to commemorate the founding of a Cultural Center, or *Ponto de Cultura*, on the site of their historic home base. The project was the culmination of several years’ worth of collaboration between the directorate, city officials, and a “cultural producer” who submitted the project to the appropriate state agencies for approval. Barachinha had arranged for one of the ubiquitous Volkswagen vans used for collective transportation in the interior, and everyone chipped in whatever money they could afford for it to take us to the eastern edge of the town, and down the thirteen kilometers of precarious unpaved road leading to the *engenho*. I marveled at the rolling green hills of an August ripe with sugarcane so close to the heart of town. After a while we arrived at the small settlement of Ciculé, a tiny village that had traditionally housed the plantation workers. At first I thought this was our final destination, but I was told the *sede* or headquarters was still a ways distant.

We arrived there shortly: a modest house with quite a few people hanging around it, alongside an open structure with a thatched roof that I later learned was built specifically for the use of the Ponto de Cultura. There seemed to be plenty of people already, but it was only a fraction of the massive crowd that began to form during the next hour. It seemed our timing was auspicious as cars and vans and even a bus began to arrive, bringing old friends of the maracatu, cultural tourists from the capital, and a media presence of cameramen and photographers. As the oldest continuously active maracatu in Pernambuco, Cambinda Brasileira had become quite renowned,

an institution akin to the great samba schools of Rio de Janeiro in that many legendary figures had passed through it. Famous but long-gone *caboclos de lança* whose personalized style was still talked about, or esteemed mestre-poets who had gone on to sing for other maracatus. I would get to know some of them – Antônio Alves, Cosmo Antônio, and Barachinha himself, among others – and they all recounted their time singing for Cambinda as a badge of honor.

The maracatu at that time was still presided over by a matriarch, Dona Joaninha, who had taken it over from her husband. She would pass away in the coming year, and would leave the management of the maracatu in the hands of *mestre-caboclo* Zé de Carro, who on that day was preparing to lead the procession from her house down the lane to the *terreiro* or site where the maracatu performs.

The procession readied itself. In it were many people I would come to know in the three years to come, future friends and acquaintances. The ubiquitous musicians were there, like trumpeter Roberto, always joking and often grandstanding with his instrument when he'd had a few drinks, and his frequent band mate Galego, who was quiet and soft-spoken and never without his hat. Both of their fathers were *maracatuzeiros*. They seemed ready to get things moving and only waited for word from the directorate to do so. Roberto rallied the percussionists together with his trumpet, military roll-call style, and they gathered around the mestre-poet and his respondent. Other people began grouping together in an approximation of the *cortejo* or royal procession seen during carnival – the royal court of king, queen, standard bearers, the “miolo” of baianas, and the battalion of *caboclos*, the warrior figures that protect the group. But this ceremony and celebration went without costumes, and in place of a banner or *estandarte* was a sheath of sugar cane plucked from the surrounding fields, bent into an arc and hoisted above the group. Mestre Antônio Roberto blew his whistle to further emphasize that things were about to get underway. Antônio would soon



Figure 2: Maracatu Cambinda Brasileira on Engenho Cumbe, August 2009



Figure 3: The end of a *manobra* (top) and Mestre Antônio Roberto (bottom), 2009

leave Cambinda Brasileira and give up maracatu entirely to tend to his bar, appropriately called the Bar de Poeta, and occasionally performing as a *violeiro* or guitarist-poet who sings in *repentista* duels. At that time, I was unaware of his identity as one of the most respected *mestre-poets* in the region.

The singer-poets or *mestres* sometimes play pivotal roles in the formal organization of a maracatu, although most operate on a contract basis and may sing for a handful of different groups during the course of their careers. During an actual performance, however, they are the leader around which everyone rallies, the face of the maracatu in *sambada* duels against other groups, and their ambassador at carnival presentations and the many open rehearsals throughout the year.

Antônio Roberto blew another call on the whistle, followed immediately by the brass and percussion kicking into gear, and the group began to move out into the road.¹ The procession of over a hundred people, including the percussion *terno* and the horn players, was flanked by a few dozen spectators as it made its way up to the *sede* where a much larger crowd awaiting their arrival. As the *mestre* blew a trill of scattered sixteenth notes followed by a single prolonged blast – the signal to stop – the group paused, the *caboclos* and *baianas* crouching on the ground as if frozen in a game of musical chairs while the *mestre* sang some verses that I could barely hear. Those close to him repeated back the last phrase of the stanza, and when he came to the end of the final phrase everyone raised themselves back up and the procession began anew. As it made its way down the lane bordered on one side by the tall cane, another signal of the whistle prompted the *caboclos* to begin their *evoluções*, the fast rotation of two concentric rings of people, one moving clockwise and the other counterclockwise. A TV cameraman and sound technician followed closely, and the maracatuzeiros seemed to effortlessly avoid smashing into them, almost as if they weren't there at all.

Soon they arrived at the broad yard of their headquarters with the jack-fruit tree at its entrance, and the elaborate *manobra* unfolded. The *manobra* is a choreographed maneuvering of the entire group from one point to another, crisscrossing the entire area multiple times with *evoluções* orbiting the king, queen, and mestre-poet in the center like electrons around the nucleus of an atom, and it was executed adeptly on that day under the guidance of Zé de Carro. In the towns it is common to see the procession break out into a *manobra* at any major crossroads in the

¹ The musicians in maracatu consist of percussion, horn players, the singer-poet (*mestre*) and his respondent (*contra-mestre*). A high and low snare drum (*caixa* and *tarol*), a tom drum (*bombo*), a cylindrical metal shaker filled with beads (*mineiro*), a double-bell instrument called a *gonguê* (similar to the *agogô* of samba music), and a friction drum (*cuica*, more commonly called a *poica*, after “porco” or pig, whose grunt resembles the sound) make up the percussion. The horns players are typically brass instruments, comprised of several trumpets and a trombone, with the occasional and rare addition of reed instruments like a saxophone or clarinet.

path to their performance space, as if sealing and protecting the group from the unpredictable energies that lurk there. As someone pointed out to me over a year later, Zé de Carro frequently led the group through six such crossings of the maracatu's own space, tracing with their footprints an outline of the Seal of Solomon, as he did on that afternoon. The symbol, like many scattered throughout the world of maracatu, is an important one in *catimbó*. *Catimbó* is a system of religious beliefs and ritual practices that combines elements of folk Catholicism, *umbanda*, spiritism, and *jurema*.² It is often based around sessions and consultations between clients and spirit mediums, who dispense folk medicine cures, perform ritual purifications, or act as messengers for requests of earthly intervention from the spirit world. The word is most commonly used among maracatuzeiros in a generic sense, however, and can have a slightly pejorative connotation, much like the word *macumba* refers to an actual religion in Rio de Janeiro but is also used to refer to “witchcraft.”

The mestre-poet and the band settled in front of the *sede* and the song poetry began. I understood very little of it. Afternoon bled into night, and the celebration continued until the sky began to lighten. My new friends who were still there made sure I got back to my hotel where I laid on the bed, overwhelmed, reflecting on how little I comprehended of everything I had just experienced. I managed to sleep for around three hours, getting up in time to catch the bus back to Recife. I realized that if I ever hoped to grasp something of maracatu beyond the most superficial of levels, I would need to move to Nazaré da Mata.

² *Umbanda* is the most widespread syncretic religion in Brazil, combining elements of Afro-brazilian traditions, European spiritism, and Christianity. Spiritism is derived from the system of psychic investigation devised by the nineteenth-century Frenchman Allan Kardec, but has more adherents in Brazil than any other country. *Jurema* is a northeastern neo-indigenous religion named after the tree (*mimosa hostilis*) whose bark is used in its sacramental drink. Both *jurema* and *catimbó* bear some relation to indigenous shamanic traditions such as *pajelança* that spread throughout the northeast from the Amazon region.



Figure 4: Map of the Mata Norte region (undated, Arquivo Público Estadual de Pernambuco, Recife)

Maracatu and Nazaré in context

The vibrant street culture and ubiquity of live music and dance is an obvious first impression made on many visitors to Brazil. Samba on the sidewalks of Rio or capoeira in Salvador are common sights and sounds, and not just staged for the tourists: they have formed a part of social life there for generations. Maracatu de baque solto (sometimes called “rural” maracatu) is less widely known, in part because it exists only in the coastal sugar-producing region of Pernambuco north of the city of Recife called the Mata Norte. Although it has a strong carnival tradition, its backbone is found at the all-night performances that emphasize the poetic prowess of its singers through their mostly improvised verse. These events include the *sambadas* or contests of intense verbal sparring, a battle of wits and wordplay between two established singer-poets from different maracatu groups, as well as looser, more open “rehearsals” (or *ensaios*) held once or twice a year by a given maracatu in the neighborhood they call home, when visiting singers are also called upon by the hosts to display their skill throughout the night. The instrumentation is made up of brass and percussion played at a breathtaking pace, but which careens to a halt every time the singer signals that he is ready to launch into complicated a cappella stanzas, performed within a demanding structure of rhyme and meter for a discerning audience, dozens or hundreds of fanatics attentive to every detail, ready to howl with derision if a singer slips up and cheer when he belts out a clever and well-made verse. A *sambada* contest ends only at the break of dawn, the first rays of the sun revealing which mestre-poet has emerged victorious. These unique events normally only occur on Saturday nights, beginning in the traditional sugar harvest month of September and continuing until carnival, at which point the groups take a break before slowly starting the cycle all over again.

As such, although rural maracatu has developed over the last hundred years in the Mata Norte, and although a handful of “outsiders” (musicians, poets, and dancers based in Recife or São Paulo, for example) have had sustained relationships with the maracatu community, until my work it had not been studied with the benefit of prolonged immersive fieldwork. Based on three years of ethnographic and historical fieldwork in and around the town of Nazaré da Mata from 2009 to 2012, this dissertation looks at the different understandings of “authenticity” and the dynamic relationship between modernity and tradition as articulated differently within maracatu and by its intermediaries. In exploring how the expressive genre of maracatu continues to develop, I examine how cultural identities can shift, calcify, or transform over time in relation to socioeconomic change, political developments, and interaction with other social groups. Since its recent “discovery,” the emphasis on maracatu’s rural identity and origins on the sugar plantations has cloaked its subsequent development by generations of working-class practitioners in the urban and semi-urban peripheries since the rural exodus of the middle twentieth century. Institutional frameworks created by folklore research and elite intellectual production about *cultura popular* have shaped the ways in which maracatu eventually achieved recognition among a broader public in Pernambuco as well as other regions of Brazil. Conversely, the creators of *cultura popular* have sometimes reappropriated the language of social science in ways that vary from its original imposition by outsiders.

Relatively unknown outside its place of origin until the late 1980s, maracatu is now celebrated as a symbol of identity and cultural tradition in the state of Pernambuco. It has experienced an exponential growth over the last three decades, at least in terms of formal organization. In the 1980s only a handful of maracatus existed in the city of Nazaré da Mata. During the time of my fieldwork, between 2009 and 2012, there were twenty-two registered

groups. Yet as an art form associated with the rural poor and working class, it continues to develop in a liminal space of socioeconomic disparity and discrimination, even while receiving recognition and legitimation from other sectors of society. Only recently has interest in maracatu significantly spread beyond its social base into a broader public, championed by subsections of the fine arts and intellectual communities of Recife, drawing the attention of tourists, and embraced by state funding agencies as a symbol of regional identity. Today maracatu groups are sometimes presented with opportunities to perform in other parts of Brazil, or to present at festivals in Senegal or France, but for most of its existence maracatu was shunned by the Brazilian middle class and cultural elite, dismissed as the weekend diversion of poor uncultured sugarcane cutters and illiterates – people “without culture.”

This has also been the case with other manifestations of Brazilian *cultura popular* (or popular culture generally understood to be non-commercial in nature) such as samba and capoeira, both of which were subsequently embraced, transformed, and even exported as symbols of *brasilidade*, a sense of national identity. They became fashionable with the intelligentsia in specific time periods – the 1920s and 30s for samba, the 1950s and 60s for capoeira – and although they existed in different regions of the country, the forms practiced in particular cities (Rio and Salvador, respectively) became hegemonic. The music and dance style *frevo* passed through a similar process of legitimation: associated with disorder and violence in its earliest incarnations, and later touted as the official symbol of Recife’s carnival. The musical genre *forró*, an amalgam of regional dance styles from the Northeast, was alternately celebrated, stigmatized, then celebrated again by national elites while the working-class *nordestinos* (people from the northeast, or Nordeste) who had migrated en masse to the southeast and even into the Amazon in search of steady work were - and continue to be - the objects of appalling discrimination in their adopted

homes. In Recife, urban *maracatu nação* began receiving more national attention in the wake of Salvador's cultural renaissance of the 1980s, when the explosion of the group Olodum brought Afro-Brazilian music and religion to global audiences and the *afoxé* and *blocos afros* groups received national accolades. However, it was not until the 1990s that rural maracatu began attracting any accolades from outside the Mata Norte region: commentaries published in Recife's newspapers during the first half of the twentieth century frequently expressed disgust and offense at the maracatu groups founded by migrants from the interior, who for many years did not participate in the city's official carnival and scandalized the delicate sensibilities of Recife's intelligentsia when they did.

Marshall Berman argues that the development of the idea of authenticity required the experiences of discontent and anxiety found in the modern metropolis.³ The "discovery" of maracatu by Pernambuco's urban "artistic class" as a quintessentially authentic expression of *cultura popular* happened in tandem with its "elevation" in prestige and recognition by a subset of artists and intellectuals linked to erudite institutions.⁴ For such urban-based artists, appropriating "authentic" art created by the dispossessed is one way of distinguishing oneself, of asserting one's individuality in an environment perceived as tending towards sameness and conformity. This also applies to the celebration of so-called "primitive" or "outsider" art – the folk art of our times – as much as it applies to the cultural production of the rural poor.⁵ "Authenticity" is not a subject often talked about by *maracatuzeiros*. But this is not necessary, because they *embody* authenticity. Tensions in the sphere of cultural production reflect Brazilian society more broadly: the merits of

³ Berman, Marshall. 2009 (1970). *The politics of authenticity: radical individualism and the emergence of modern society*. New York: Verso.

⁴ "Artistic class" is a common phrase in Brazil and not an invention of my own. It refers to an array of professional artists, not necessarily with formal training, but distinct from those who produce "mass culture."

⁵ Fine, Gary Alan. 2004. *Everyday genius: self-taught art and the culture of authenticity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

“fine art” possess a kind of social capital and status that cannot be claimed by those who create “popular art” or *cultura popular*, who are relegated to an artisan-like role in the cultural economy.⁶ Maracatuzeiros have been singled out for praise and recognition as individual artists, but only very recently, and bound by a distinct set of limitations.

The task of appropriation is further facilitated by the “cultural sector” in Pernambuco, a term which refers to professionals working in the arts and cultural programming, engaged in the planning of and staging of events, curating exhibits, or the management of NGO’s related to arts and culture. Largely college-educated and upper-middle class in background, this social group does not necessarily constitute an economic elite, but do act as cultural and artistic gatekeepers. With an increase in the number of training programs oriented toward cultural tourism and event production (dubbed “cultural producers” in the nomenclature of the state), this managerial class attempts to mediate the experience of authenticity for a variety of publics. Throughout this dissertation, the phrase “cultural elite” is used to designate both the artistic class (those with professional training who create and perform) and the cultural sector (those who manage the artistic production of others) as a kind of social block who share overlapping interests, and to some extent an ideology.⁷ The cultural elite is contrasted with those artists and performers who create *cultura popular* but have historically lacked social and cultural capital, and who have thus been disproportionately dependent on the mediation of others. I say “disproportionate” because, as Howard Becker demonstrates, all art is mediated through complex webs of economic exchange, collective activity, and collaborations.⁸ Nevertheless, and in spite of progressive initiatives like

⁶ Levine, Lawrence W. 1988. *Highbrow/lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁷ There are, of course, fairly frequent squabbles and power struggles between professional artists and this managerial class in Pernambuco just like anywhere else.

⁸ Becker, Howard S. 2008. *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

the *Pontos de Cultura* (cultural centers) program that were intended to address that gap, the *cultura popular* artist in Pernambuco continues to depend on patronage to a profound degree.

The relatively late arrival of intellectuals and researchers (and on their tails, the preservationists and cultural programmers) in relation to other manifestations of *cultura popular* has in many ways put the maracatus in a much stronger position to negotiate the terms of their own inclusion in a way that was not possible fifty or even twenty years ago. The problematic instances throughout the twentieth century when states took a self-serving interest in the culture of “the people” are too numerous to list here. But case studies from outside of Brazil, particularly in the realm of music, demonstrate how culture can be objectified in particular ways that involve a very selective reading of local and regional histories, flattening out nuances and erasing inconvenient struggles involving class, race, or gender. In cases where the living and contemporary nature of a style of music or other expressive form becomes linked to sentiments of nationalism, regionalism, or modernity, a process of “cultural objectification” takes place wherein a set of practices are reified and crystalized into orthodoxies.⁹

Comparative studies of folklore movements have shown how documentation about “traditional society” is constructed as much through its exclusions as by observation and collection, often at the service of political projects that span the ideological spectrum. Songs or dances that deviated from an idealized standard were often recorded in research notes but left out of the final published work. Dissident voices – among the researchers as much as those researched – were filtered out. Evidence that contemporary popular culture exerted any kind of influence on

⁹ Handler, Richard. 1988. *Nationalism and the politics of culture in Quebec*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

the collected material – for example Music Hall songs in England, jazz in the US, or tango in Argentina – was considered grounds for marginalization, proof that it was of recent provenance and hence inauthentic. Traditional societies were defined by their isolation from or resistance to the influence of modern, industrialized life and its attendant social ills. The puzzling and mysterious figure of the *caboclo de lança*, whose costumes include tennis shoes and mirrored aviator sunglasses as well as their colorful, heavy, and laboriously-designed capes and lances, must surely have evoked conflicting sentiments in the first Brazilian traditionalists to encounter them in the first half of the twentieth century.

In contrast to the foundational folklore literature, more dynamic and plural conceptions of tradition and *cultura popular* anchor many of the cultural incentives programs begun under Gilberto Gil (Minister of Culture from 2003 to 2008). Despite this, tropes that developed about *cultura popular* among the Romanticist (1830-1870), Modernist (1920s-30s), and Folklore Movements (1950s-70s) still persist. A fixation on origins, and arguments about authenticity and legitimacy, are still found in discussions surrounding the place of *cultura popular* in contemporary Brazil. The creation of new institutional opportunities for *cultura popular* has also facilitated opportunism, with an increase in the number of middle class “cultural entrepreneurs” working in the intersections of policy, education, and event production.

For most of Brazilian history, the ambiguity of *cultura popular* has allowed counter-hegemonic traditions of storytelling, religious practice, and values to develop and flourish, enveloped by sanctioned, “official” cultural practices: for example, the famous syncretisms of African religious practice nestled alongside Catholic orthodoxy.¹⁰ Today, enmeshed in a network of institutionalized cultural inclusion promulgated by arts councils and intermediaries, that same

¹⁰ Rowe, William and Vivian Schelling. 1991. *Memory and modernity: popular culture in Latin America*. New York: Verso

quality of ambiguity gives refuge to a universalizing tendency in which local culture becomes “our” culture. “Culture” is no longer a relational term but an all-encompassing discourse fused to identity.¹¹ The folklorists’ missionary impetus of salvage and protection has yielded to the inclusive populism of “cultural projects” and managers. The line between celebration and cooptation can be crossed easily and even imperceptibly, allowing well-positioned entrepreneurs and self-styled historians of *cultura popular* to state that “we are all caboclos now, tossing our imaginary lances into the air, combining traditions, and recreating our culture.”¹²

A condensation of the region’s complex and dynamic history facilitates the recasting of the past in a nostalgic framework by elites, a nostalgia challenged by acts of remembering by non-elites that emphasize the struggles of rural workers and the relative merits of their present situation as a partially-urbanized proletariat. The parsing out of this history and its bearing on “the story of maracatu” is the main theme of the first chapter. The obstacles that maracatu faced to be recognized as a legitimate form of cultural expression in broader regional and national contexts, examined in my second chapter, and the deeply local ways of negotiating power and relationships through poetic exchanges explored in the third, make its present-day celebration as a marker of a broader Pernambucan identity all the more remarkable. The fourth chapter examines the notion of cultural mediation through the different performance contexts that maracatuzeiros navigate within and outside of their communities. The artistic class and other professional mediators situated in the

¹¹ Strathern, Marilyn. 1995. “The Nice Thing About Culture Is That Everyone Has It.” In *Shifting contexts: transformations in anthropological knowledge*. New York: Routledge.

¹² Vicente, Severino. 2005. “Introdução” in *Batuque book maracatu : baque virado e baque solto*. Santos, Climério de Oliveira, Resende Tarcísio Soares. Recife: self-published

The books of Severino Vicente are a prime example of an impoverished neo-Freyrian vision often used in written treatments of maracatu, approaching and representing it with a distinctly paternalistic tone, a lack of specificity, and an absence of citations. Vicente, whose family runs a “cultural production” company, has published the books on his own imprint subsidized by the wide variety of the state cultural infrastructure described in chapter six.

“cultural sector” have appropriated the “authenticity” of maracatuzeiros for their own projects, while policing the boundaries of what constitutes *cultura popular*.¹³ Maracatus, for their part, have reappropriated that notion of authenticity and spliced it with a variety of their own appropriations from elite and “erudite” art, mass media, and their own system of aesthetics and ethics. The final chapter describes three successive carnivals I spent accompanying the same group, Maracatu Estrela Brilhante of Nazaré da Mata, as they performed in the small and medium-sized towns of the interior in addition to presenting in the midst of Recife’s frantic celebrations. The increasing and problematic reliance on a combination of state institutions and “cultural entrepreneurs” in order to carry off a successful carnival and survive from year to year is also analyzed and interlaced with that narrative.

This dissertation seeks to explore the relationship between historical memory, the political economy of sugar, the work of contemporary practitioners of *cultura popular*, and the self-serving elite appropriations of their creative labor. Taking a cue from maracatu’s own hybridity, I also take a hybrid approach to situating rural maracatu within modern Brazil. I draw upon authors who have explored the intersections of performance and cultural policy; of oral poetry, improvisation, and ethos; and touch lightly on carnival traditions and hierarchy. I make use of critiques of the primitive, the popular, and the exotic in artistic production, consumption, and representation, and the role of intellectual elites in interventionist projects of folklore collecting, preservation, and revival. Lastly, I join others who have examined the dynamic between “tradition” and “modernity” as a field of contestation, focusing on the agency of subaltern people as they attempt to creatively engage with power on their terms.

¹³ The term “cultural sector” is used in this dissertation in the same sense that it is used in Pernambuco: to refer to groups of trained professionals working in the arts, engaged in the planning of and staging of events, curating exhibits, or the management of NGO’s related to arts and culture. cultural

An outline of the chapters

The dissertation begins by looking at how the story of maracatu's development on the sugar plantations is remembered in layered, contradictory ways that foreground ambivalent relationships to the past. The emphasis of that story differs depending on whether it is being told by maracatuzeiros or by the artistic and cultural elites of Pernambuco's middle and upper classes – which include a variety of positions: for example the “artistic class,” researchers into popular culture, or a new class of cultural entrepreneur living off of state-subsidized arts incentives. The first chapter balances these acts of remembering with a look at the political economy of sugar production since the late nineteenth century, the consolidation of land by the *usinas*, and the related rural exodus as factors in a nascent maracatu de baque solto. It is based on archival research, oral history, and ethnographic engagement with the older generation of practitioners.

“Rural” maracatu took shape precisely when this region was experiencing an increase in urbanization, as the *usina* system of industrialized sugar production supplanted the older plantations or *engenhos*. Many rural workers were edged off their plots of land or opted to seek better fortunes in cities, some of them emigrating to Recife. They brought with them their habits and customs, their ways of socialization and leisure activities, and their ritualized, ludic forms of celebrating carnival. This influx of new arrivals settled in the periphery of Recife, and some of them founded groups of maracatu. Many migrants would eventually come back to Nazaré da Mata and its environs. It is a familiar pattern in the historiographical literature about northeastern Brazil following the dismantling of the slaveholding regime after abolition, and reflected in the realist “sugar cycle” novels of regionalist author José Lins do Rego. Like the protagonist Ricardo in one of those novels, many of these people returned to Nazaré with a new set of experiences of the

world beyond the plantation. The circulation of experiences and ideas from rural space to urban periphery and back again, and the impact that these traveling discourses and practices may have had on the development of the expressive culture found in maracatu, is suggested in this chapter as a potential avenue for new research.

The narrative about maracatu's wild and unruly past, repeated by maracatuzeiros and the handfuls of journalists and scholars who have written about it, reiterates a civilizing discourse of modernity tempered with recollections of more rebellious times. Although these stories can be animated and told with relish, they are not straightforwardly nostalgic: those old enough to remember a "simpler" maracatu, when acrimonious rivalries could blossom into physical conflict, have no desire to turn back the clock. The images of rusticity – of celebrating and performing by gaslight in remote areas, or traveling by foot between *engenhos* during carnival, carrying a document from their *patrão* or boss to protect against trouble with police – are remembrances of impoverishment and dependency, and not an idyllic pre-modern rural life. I seek to untangle in a tentative way how these tempered *saudades* may work differently when deployed by those who practice maracatu rather than those who write about it. To what degree are such representations a reflection of the cultural hegemony of the slavocratic, elite families that controlled this region so dependent on sugar? To what degree can the nuances of maracatuzeiros' own stories about the violence, disorder, and crude or rustic qualities in maracatu's past be read as a challenge to that hegemony, pitched at a register below the threshold of the elite's ability to hear it?

As Raymond Williams argued about England, there is no pure rural society located in the past and possessing the characteristics celebrated in romantic, idyllic, and harmonious depictions found in most of the literature that followed in the aftermath of industrialization. Williams examined the different approaches to the countryside ranging from the aesthetics of nineteenth-

century pastoral poetry to the novels of the early industrial age. For our purposes the regionalist and realist literatures of the first half of twentieth-century Brazil served much the same function as other varieties of romantic, masculinized pastoral, with the additional weight of a past tainted by slavery. In their critique or outright rejection of modernity, this elite artistic production crystalized conventional understandings of “rural” and “folk” society whose echoes resound even today.¹⁴ The stories propagated by cultural elites about contemporary decadence and traditions under siege reflect more about a particular construction of modernity and its confrontation with those who do not fit neatly into it, rather than the perspectives or values of those who “make” *cultura popular*. For the rural artist, poet, or musician, ideas about a moral economy belonging to a peasant past can constitute a critique of power and class relations, a partial refusal of elite constructions of history. As Williams cautioned his readers to reject the romantic notion of a sharp break, wherein one social order was abruptly replaced by another during the Industrial Revolution, so the stories told by older maracatuzeiros draw attention to the existence of a rural class structure that was deeply embedded in regional history, where the destabilizing effects of land loss, unemployment, and hunger have been part of everyday life for generations.

Gareth Green applies a distinction between two different types of nostalgia competing for discursive space in defining the past, one of them “hegemonic” and the other “resistant,” in an analysis of Trinidadian carnival.¹⁵ There he finds that the nostalgic assessment of past carnivals by cultural brokers - intellectuals and planners tied to state-sponsored commemorations – is

¹⁴ Williams, Raymond. 1973. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press

¹⁵ Green, Gareth L. 2007. Authenticity, Commerce, and Nostalgia in the Trinidad Carnival. In *Trinidad carnival: the cultural politics of a transnational festival*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press. Green borrows his idea of a “hegemonic nostalgia” from Kathleen Stuart (1988).

counterbalanced by the more bittersweet and often painful memories of masqueraders and steelband musicians. Both narratives share certain characteristics in the way they evoke pre-commoditized cultural expression and idealized communities, but differ in their respective emphasis and conclusions about Carnival and its place in the nation. In maracatu, such a distinction between nostalgias articulated from different social positions can be broadened to include not only the ludic spectacle of Carnival, but also interpretations of regional history, class relations, and artistic developments. The nuances of these dynamic relationships are often delicately handled by the *mestres* and others situated inside maracatu, who act as a different type of cultural broker when articulating variations and intermixtures of these positions for different audiences. A “hegemonic nostalgia” that fixes rural cultural expression into canonical forms can only exist – like any form of hegemony – with at least some active participation, however partial or incomplete, of the people creating those expressions. The complicity of a maracatuzeiro in his own domination in some instances does not negate his resistance in others.

The appropriation of maracatu by a variety of outsiders has helped make this *brincadeira* into a multivalent symbol, constantly shifting its emphasis. As Barachinha has said to me when deploying this word, *brincadeira* – signifying free, unrestricted play, also commonly used to denote participating in carnival: “We’re playing, but it’s serious.” When appropriated by state agencies and individuals closely tied to them, maracatu often becomes an apolitical symbol situated in a realm of myth rather than history. These appropriations can confuse and conflate the maracatuzeiros’ lament for a vanished countryside with a nostalgia or “defense of the old rural order” in which everyone knew their place.¹⁶ The powerful imagery of a complex, beautiful expressive form produced by people who own little more than the shirts on their backs is employed

¹⁶ Williams, 1973, p. 196

by both the dominant and the dominated, but for different reasons and framed in different terms. There are many useful myths in maracatu, and they are mobilized in many disparate but frequently overlapping agendas.

For example, consider the romantic and picturesque framing of rural life – and its counterpart, a deep unease and anxiety about the changes brought by modernity - found in artistic production beginning with the nativist Romantics like the novelist José de Alencar, and extending to twentieth-century regionalists like José Lins do Rego. Apart from cadres of art historians or literary critics, their work might be supposed to have little relevance to contemporary artists except as interlocutors for counterpoint and departure. Yet those older works embody tropes that are voiced and contested from a variety of ideological positions in the present that continue to juxtapose city life to rural existence. They produced echoes found in the vanguard of independent Brazilian films or in the records and DVDs produced by popularizers of regional culture like Antônio Nóbrega or Siba Veloso, although the themes may be represented in very different ways. These echoes of the romantic vision of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about rural life still resonate in the promotional materials produced by state agencies invoking “folkloric” expressive forms and *cultura popular*, materials that serve as both pedagogic tools and political propaganda.

A great many of these depictions of life in the countryside construct a narrative about the rural past that, while not necessarily free of class conflict, in which people are generally assumed to lack political consciousness. The denial of conflict in the context of a regime of slavery and its aftermath would, of course, be ludicrous. It is equally wrong to portray or imply that those who suffered exploitation did so passively and with acceptance of their fate: decades-worth of the historiographical literature on slavery and its aftermath in the Americas has invalidated any such

illusions. A number of historical figures have passed into myth as symbols of the rejection of the rural order: Antônio Conselheiro, leader of the Canudos rebellion, and Lampião, the bandit of the backlands, are both regularly celebrated in heroic terms in Pernambucan *cultura popular*. Since the 1990s the figure of the mysterious *caboclo de lança* has begun to fill a similar slot.

In the Northeast's more recent history, any notion of passivity in the Mata Norte dominated by sugarcane production has also been refuted by a large and growing body of historical scholarship that testifies to the multiple levels of mobilization and organization around issues of workers' rights and access to land.¹⁷ Maracatu poetry is not as overtly and explicitly political as more recent genres in Brazil like the *blocos afros* or hip hop, or strains of Caribbean genres of *kaiso*, *calypso*, or *soca* that combine satire and critique with their love of wordplay. Maracatu's mestre-poets often articulate trenchant criticisms of the power structures that have created the poverty and inequality so associated with the region, but their approach can often be subtle, perhaps a technique developed across a century of improvising verse within earshot of the agrarian elites whose own word was law.¹⁸ Moreover, the poetry also places a high value on individualism, both in stylistic terms and in an ethos of self-reliance, and expresses much concern with righteous living and morals in ways normally associated with a socially-conservative worldview. These traits make them poor candidates for ideologues on the Left who would seek to romanticize these representatives of a rural proletariat as firemen in the engine room of revolutionary change.

Perhaps this is why a survey of archival and pedagogical material pertaining to the MCP (Movimento de Cultura Popular) of the early 1960s turned up no mention of maracatu de baque solto. The MCP was an aggregate of social initiatives launched by Recife-based intellectuals,

¹⁷ See Rogers (2010), Dabat (2007) and Pereira (1997)

¹⁸ For a parallel in the context of the antebellum southern United States see Abrahams (1992)

artists, and educators oriented toward cultivating class consciousness and political participation among the urban and rural poor in Pernambuco, which drew upon *cultura popular* as a pedagogical tool.¹⁹ As I transitioned from my original research project, I searched the holdings of the DOPS secret police archives on the MCP for any evidence that its militants had engaged with maracatu poets, or even been aware of them.²⁰ I found photos of a traditional *ciranda* ring, a genre related to maracatu and sharing many of the same artists and audience, where the audience-participants join hands and dance in a slow circle as a poet-singer leads them. There were notebooks and classroom materials for popular literacy programs utilizing *cordel* poetry, and using imagery and vocabulary from the sugar *engenhos* and *usinas* as educational resources. Some police reports indicated that urban, *nação*-style maracatu was suspected of “infiltration” by leftist militants. But rural *maracatu de baque solto* was curiously absent, much as it was during the folkloric mapping project of Mario de Andrade in the 1930s, or the variety of cultural preservation and revitalization efforts that followed it.²¹

In my second chapter, I ask how rural maracatu managed to elude the interests and literary production of twentieth-century intellectuals by tracing the historical development of *cultura popular* as a unit of analysis. The limitations inherent in that early conceptualization of *cultura popular* led intellectuals to misidentify, misunderstand, or denigrate forms of cultural expression that exhibited too much hybridity or deviation from an orthodox understanding of authenticity.

¹⁹ Although based in Recife, the MCP worked extensively in the countryside of the Zona da Mata to the north and south of Recife.

²⁰ The Department of Political and Social Order was in charge of political repression and keeping tabs on decent from the 1930s until the 1980s. .

²¹ There are at least two important considerations here that require remarks. It should be noted that the DOPS archives in Recife were at that time being internally requisitioned for new cataloging and preservation efforts, leaving open the possibility that not all the material I requested was made available. Secondly, an unknown amount of documentation regarding activist and militant groups like the MCP were destroyed in the immediate wake of the 1964 military coup.

As demonstrated in the first chapter, when rural workers in the first half of the twentieth century were dislocated from the countryside, they brought their festive practices, religious rituals, and forms of leisure with them, just as they also encountered new varieties of all of these in their new home. Some of these migrants founded maracatus or reassembled groups to which they had belonged in the rural countryside.

However, Recife was already home to many groups of *maracatu nação*, an older type of ritualized cultural expression that was more Africanized, tied closely to the religious cults of *xangô*, a northeastern religion closely related to its more famous cousin, the *candomblé* of Bahia. Their music of the rural maracatus did not utilize the large wood and rope drums of *maracatu nação*, but rather a small “orchestra” comprised of a handful of percussion instruments and brass instruments, particularly the trombone. Before it received the moniker of “rural maracatu” in the 1960s, this style was known as “orchestra maracatu” or “trombone maracatu” to set it apart from the larger, more established *nação* style. With the exception of musicologist Guerra-Peixe, the intellectuals of Recife seem to have been perplexed by this maracatu of the interior, and many reacted strongly with open condemnation. It is perhaps not a coincidence that it was a composer and musicologist who first recognized rural maracatu as deserving more attention than it had been given: the majority of folkloric research in Pernambuco up to that time was based either on a fixation with origins or on literary models that left scholars with a “theoretical deafness” to any contributions represented by such a hybrid form of expression.²²

These prejudices and folkloric stereotypes of early researchers - still readily observable in media depictions, tourist information, and many books intended for a general public - have

²² The phrase “theoretical deafness” is borrowed from Askew (2002), who uses it to describe how the reliance on print media in theories of nationalism created theoretical orthodoxies, ignoring performative genres such as music.

perpetuated the idea of an idealized, homogenous community in the Mata Norte that renders invisible the creativity of individual artists. Such ideas have a long intellectual pedigree running through Johann Herder, Emile Durkheim, and others influenced by them like Robert Redfield, who put “folk culture” in diametric opposition to civilization, as characteristic of small and isolated communities that are “traditional, spontaneous, uncritical, and personal” in nature.²³ As Renato Ortiz points out, intellectuals working in this vein looked upon *cultura popular* as if it were a geological formation, where their customs, legends, and ballads are frozen like so many Tylorian survivals preserved in amber, practiced by isolated guardians of the nation’s collective memory. The present-day activities of the creators of the “folkloric,” their migrations to the city in search of work, or their insertion into the national society, are themes that fall outside the definition of the object of study.²⁴

An important correlate of such naturalistic depictions of “the folk” has been the notion that unless organized efforts at preservation and propagation of folk art forms are instituted, then they are threatened and doomed to disappearance and extinction in their encounter with modernity. For at least a hundred years, intellectuals have been proclaiming the imminent end of traditional *folguedos* (popular recreations) in Pernambuco, from *frevo* to *caboclinhos* to both styles of maracatu. And indeed all of these have had periods of decline, followed by periods of resurgence in which the interventions of urban intellectuals certainly played a role. In the 1950s, folklorist Edison Carneiro predicted that where the economic base of a community diversified, traditional *folguedos populares* would be suppressed and substituted with national rather than local pastimes.²⁵ Such a dire pronouncement, while overstated, is at least partially justified for Nazaré

²³ Redfield, Robert. 1947 “The Folk Society.” *American Journal of Sociology* 52(4):293-308.

²⁴ Ortiz, Renato. 1992. *Românticos e folcloristas: cultura popular*. São Paulo: Olho d’Água. 25-27

²⁵ Carneiro, Edison, 1965. *Dinâmica do folclore*. Rio de Janeiro: Editôra Civilização Brasileira. 97-99

da Mata and the surrounding area. Institutionalized attempts at preservation, however, are inclined to emphasize certain cultural practices and values at the expense of others, and promote selective interpretations of what is “authentic.”²⁶ The heavy presence of cultural incentives in a small city like Nazaré requires analytical diligence from those of us concerned about the calcification of orthodoxies.

Projects aimed at the salvage, revival, or preservation of folk art forms have frequently argued that without assistance from outsiders the techniques and forms of traditional expression are in danger of being lost forever through the community’s lack of interest in its own history, their lives polluted by the influences of mass media and consumerism. Hence institutional interventions implicitly take credit for the ability of these cultural practices to avoid extinction. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that maracatu has experienced a renaissance of interest and efflorescence of creativity that dovetails with an increase in its valorization by outsiders and a broader interest in regional *cultura popular* that has drawn investment and capital into its promotion. And maracatu participants have been able to harness not only those material resources, but the rhetorical strategies and discourses for their own purposes. This tension highlights the ambivalence of recognition, a recurring theme with which this dissertation struggles. Valorization in the broader society should not be celebrated uncritically, but neither can it be dismissed or explained away as merely the effect of manipulations by a cultural or ideological elite.

When engaged in by actual maracatuzeiros, talking about tradition and the need to defend and value it also becomes a tool for policing their own boundaries against outsiders, and assuring that only those deeply ensconced in the world of maracatu have certain kinds of access and

²⁶ Whisnant, David E. 1983. *All that is native & fine: the politics of culture in an American region*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Williams, Daryle. 2001. *Culture wars in Brazil: the first Vargas regime, 1930-1945*. Durham: Duke University Press.

authority. As Goldwasser showed for the Mangueira samba school, specialized forms of understanding and knowledge were required to execute a successful carnival that placed an emphasis on virtuosity within a clearly-defined tradition, reinforcing and maintaining a link with a specific location (the *morro* or favela) and a social base.²⁷ The invisibility of maracatu to intellectuals and their “deafness” to its voices until the last few decades has allowed maracatuzeiros to shape their own narrative within the limits of the dominant ideology. Is this autonomy relative to the degree and kind of elite interest? As maracatu becomes a more useful cultural symbol for regional political elites, it must be asked when and how the voices of maracatuzeiros are at risk of being subsumed in a variety of cooptations.

Throughout the twentieth century, the resuscitation of ailing cultural practices by outsiders ultimately pressed them into the service of middle and upper-class elites for which they performed a variety of functions. These were often attempts to stave off the changes in taste and consumptive practices of subaltern populations, changes driven by technological innovations such as live radio and the availability of phonograph records. In the Anglophone world, the popularity of “traditional English folk music” was being supplanted by a preference for Music Hall show tunes,²⁸ just as Tin Pan Alley, Dixieland jazz, and the new “hillbilly music” became popular with rural southern whites in the United States.²⁹ Electric blues supplanted acoustic “folk” blues in the destinations where southern blacks migrated during and after the Second World War, industrialized cities that all produced distinctive styles. Black audiences as well as artists preferred these new sounds to the rustic, older sound with its echoes of plantation life and Jim Crow, a trajectory that would

²⁷ Goldwasser, 1975, p. 171-182

²⁸ Boyes, Georgina. 1993. *The imagined village: culture, ideology, and the English folk revival*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

²⁹ Whisnant, David. 1983. *All that is native & fine: the politics of culture in an American region*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

continue when new genres like R&B, soul, and funk music also spoke more saliently to the experiences of the communities that performed and enjoyed them.

There were, however, also scores of “folk” and “roots” artists who began to receive wider attention and an unexpected career boost from the folk revivals, provided that they also tailor their performances to a new audience of college-educated whites. Maracatu presents an intriguing counterpoint to these examples because it has benefitted from being ignored by the Brazilian cultural elite until quite recently. Its practice has changed across the generations, sometimes through invention born of necessity, and largely without interference by those who seek to save “the people” from themselves by crystalizing their traditions. However, these case studies from the Anglophone world are also apt comparisons because they involve the dynamic interactions between dominant and subordinated groups within the same national borders, groups which lived in proximity but were separated by the boundaries of race and class, of “exotics at home.”³⁰

Brazil’s coastal, cosmopolitan elites have undertaken similar “missionary” endeavors among those who live in the “other Brazil,” a world of heroic but anonymous perseverance in the face of suffering – or, as Gilberto Freyre would have it, “heroic suffering.”³¹ Such projects of rescue, recovery, and preservation are a form of self-discovery among elites who are seeking to uncover the “authentic soul” of the Brazilian people. They rationalize their assumption of the task of interpretation and re-presentation of *cultura popular* by drawing upon nationalist mythology (for example, the “mixture of the three races”), employing metaphors of kinship, and asserting empathy as a methodology. There is often a presumption of intimacy based on similar geographic origins rather than social ones. The logic might follow a reasoning that says, “Because my

³⁰ The phrase is borrowed from Micaela Di Leonardo’s (1998) *Exotics at home: anthropologies, others, American modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³¹ This wording appears in his Regionalist Manifesto, discussed on pages 211-212

grandfather came from the interior, I can relate to what these people are saying and doing in their *cultura popular*.” The fact that this grandfather may have owned a plantation rather than worked on one, or had lighter skin those creating the culture being celebrated or appropriated, is trumped by a “shared” rural past.

Hermano Vianna argues that this “cultural empathy” was a crucial component of the utopian vision of modernist intellectuals like Freyre, through which he attempted to “transcend social distances and reunite the mansions and the shanties” in his rapprochement with the popular culture of the underclass, in addition to touting the affective kinship ties between Master and Slave as a foundation for national identity.³² Although many of his writings appear to be a rejection of modernity, what Freyre specifically objected to was a certain kind of modernist worldview inherited from the Eurocentric nineteenth century which had left his country with an inferiority complex. His conception of modernity and the desire to ground it in an “authentically Brazilian” identity was not fundamentally different from that held by the São Paulo intellectuals with whom he disagreed; but while they sought to “cannibalize” the cultural material found in the encounters between the highbrow art of Europe and the African or Amerindian folk traditions of Brazil in a very urban experimentalism, Freyre sought to modernize the idyllic pastoral of a rural oligarchy.

Strong sentiments of regional identity among elites were at the root of some folklore collecting in both Brazil³³ and the United States where, in the minds of the collectors, the insularity of geography trumped the gulf in the subjectivities of race or class.³⁴ The degree to which rural maracatu was regarded as an illegitimate and uncharacteristic form of cultural expression until the

³² Vianna, Hermano. 1999. *The mystery of samba: popular music & national identity in Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p.65

³³ Oliven, Ruben G. 1996. *Tradition matters: modern Gaúcho identity in Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁴ Hirsch, Jerrold. 1992. "Modernity, Nostalgia, and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax." *The Journal of American Folklore* 105(416): 183-207.

1980s shielded it from such paternalistic stewardship, allowing it to develop and refine itself in relative autonomy, maintaining its participatory nature while other forms of Northeastern *cultura popular* were increasingly enclosed in the spectacle of presentations and festivals.

In spite of some pressure towards such a direction, there was never a codification of what constituted “real” rural maracatu. The absence of minority voices from such codifications has been commented on at length by Patrick Mullen in the context of the “folk revival” and Black American music.³⁵ He draws attention to the often over-looked fact that song collector John Lomax had two black research assistants who held dramatically different views about key aspects of the material they documented.³⁶ Whereas they viewed technological innovations like the Victrola as potential enablers of creativity, for Lomax they represented “the passing of the old world and the death of the folk.”³⁷ The popular understanding of the nature of “folk” music could have been significantly different had their perspectives been given serious consideration during the period when a “canon” was formed about what the term meant.

The dynamic between hegemonic boundaries and creative resistance to them is also explored in the third chapter, which looks at two ethnographic case studies of *sambada* song contests where identity, honor, and relationships of power are expressed in improvised poetic exchanges. In recent years there has been more of an inclination on the part of outsider observers to take the poetic exchanges of maracatu seriously, as part of an art form intimately tied to regional history and related to a subset of other northeastern traditions. When placing the *sambada* of maracatu alongside the *desafio* duels of *repentistas* and *emboladores*, the chapbook *literatura de*

³⁵ Mullen, Patrick B. 2008. *The Man Who Adores the Negro: Race and American Folklore*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. p. 106-110

³⁶ One of them was John Wesley Work of Fisk University, an academic who was largely written out of most retelling of the Lomax family’s adventures.

³⁷ Mullen, *ibid.*

cordel that was originally intended for public recitation, the groups of *caboclinhos* and *blocos rurais*, or the open-air comic drama of *cavalo-marinho* and *bumba-meu-boi*, it becomes apparent that these genres belong to a constellation of Northeastern expressive forms that share common features. They tend to bridge “traditional” material with contemporary, often globalized themes and place particular emphasis on the creative use of language in popular or “vernacular” poetry.³⁸ Genres that rely upon theatrical framings, like the *cavalo-marinho*, can be viewed as multivocal performances that both critique and implicitly reinforce the historically-entrenched relationships of patronage and dependency found in Brazil’s rural countryside.³⁹ To what degree must the performance aspects of maracatu be examined in light of unequal power relationships or as a contested cultural good in capitalist production, and to what degree do they represent subtle and strategic manipulations of elite attitudes that form “a countervailing influence [that] manages to denaturalize domination”?⁴⁰ Do the poetic improvisations at *ensaios* and *sambadas*, which can appropriate the language of the rural boss or *coronel* as well as critique the social structure, challenge the assumed and ascribed privileges of the elites? Can they continue to do so when performed in the town square rather than the neighborhood corner?

One could argue that the poetry of maracatu, with its heavily regional flavor and references, its “rustic” form and “improper” grammar, makes it difficult to penetrate and is therefore one of the regional art forms least susceptible to cooptation by outside groups with their own agenda.

³⁸ For a good introduction to most of the genres mentioned here, containing both general and technical information, see the edited volumes by Pimentel and Corrêa 2008. *Na ponta do verso : poesia de improviso no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Associação Cultural Caburé; For a recent study that triangulates the maracatu sambada with the repentistas (singer-guitarists who engage in verbal duels, found in much of northeast Brazil) and the chapbook *literature de cordel* that is still recited and sung in the interior, see Amorim, 2008. *No visgo do improviso, ou, A peleja virtual entre cibercultura e tradição : comunicação e mídia digital nas poéticas de oralidade*. São Paulo: EDUC.

³⁹ Murphy 1994; Rowe and Schelling 1991

⁴⁰ García Canclini, Néstor. 1993. *Transforming modernity: popular culture in Mexico*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press; Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press: 79

And indeed that is the case: with the exception of one Recife artist, Siba Veloso, who did extensive ethnomusicological research and lived in Nazaré da Mata for several years while learning the maracatu style from well-established *mestre-poets*, there are no artists from outside the community who are attempting to appropriate the actual poetic structure and commercially releasing music oriented to middle-class audiences. A more interesting point is that some of the sentiments expressed in the content of maracatu poetry would be out of place or problematic in urban or cosmopolitan settings for other reasons. While some of the carefully crafted verses that mestres sing at formal carnival performances or in recording studios express values compatible with those of a progressive-minded, college-educated audience that typically consumes “folk” music alongside MPB or independent artists, there are also aspects found in more “unscripted” contexts that would be likely to make those audiences uncomfortable – tendencies toward sexism, patriarchy and homophobia, for instance, or socially conservative opinions about contemporary criminality or lawlessness.

In looking at particular examples of *sambadas* and *ensaios*, we can approach an understanding of how this performance genre operates at multiple levels of social relations. I encountered three aspects in many *sambadas* that I attended that I believe to be particularly salient, all of which have a historical relationship to *cantoria de viola*, a style that was introduced into the Mata Norte from further inland.⁴¹ *Cantoria* is performed by singer-guitarists performing in duos, called *violeiros* or simply *cantadores* (in other parts of Brazil they are known as *repentistas*). The first hinges around the practice of besting your opponent through a combination of clever and well-composed insults about them and boasts about oneself, a style called *malcriação* or rudeness. The

⁴¹ There are far more than three aspects in common between the two traditions: these are merely the ones focused on here. One crucial modality in *cantoria*, which usually opens up a performance, is *louvação* or praise, where the singers give compliments to those present, the host of the event, and figures in the community. This modality is also widely used in maracatu.

second element, also found in *cantoria* where it is called *sabedoria* or the “knowledge modality,” is when a wide range of subject matter is tackled by the poets. This knowledge can encompass current geopolitical events, national and regional historical figures, or more local knowledge pertaining to the story of maracatu. The third and final aspect is the poetic sensibility, mastery of the rules, and love of wordplay that provides the context for the first two. Anyone can playfully (or seriously) insult another person, or recite lists of authoritative facts. It is another matter to improvise a structured sung verse where the second line rhymes with the third, the fourth and fifth with the first, the sixth/seventh and eighth/ninth lines with each other, and the tenth line with the original line.⁴² Moreover to do so creatively and with a degree of originality, while adhering to this structural complexity, is what differentiates the *poet* from the singer in maracatu.

In the fourth and fifth chapters I examine my informants’ experiences as mediators between different publics, and their attempts to negotiate space within elite appropriations of *cultura popular* through their own complex, hybrid reappropriations. It describes presentations, performances, and productions in São Paulo, Recife, and Nazaré da Mata. The prolific use of the terms “erudite,” “elite,” and “popular” is not intended to reify them as natural categories, but in order to reflect actual usage by participants in and around the contemporary scene of “cultural” productions. “Erudite” and “elite” are used in this dissertation to describe forms of cultural expression rooted in formal transmission via institutions like universities or conservatories, whose practitioners’ work is regularly exhibited in theaters, concert halls, or museums. The term “erudite” may be less common in 2015, but is (rather suprisingly) not yet obsolete in certain quarters in Pernambuco, and the connotations of superiority and cultural uplift bleed over into discussions about artistic production where the term “elite” serves as a surrogate. The word

⁴² This structure of ABBAACCDDC is commonly known as “sambe em dez linhas” or ten-line samba.

“popular” is used in reference to those forms of cultural expression that have, by and large, been developed and sustained outside of those institutional contexts. Although few critics or academics would explicitly speak of “high” and “low” culture in the pluralistic twenty-first century, an artistic pecking order does exist, and naturalized hierarchical concepts are embedded in many of the conversations about *cultura popular* in Pernambuco. The work of “popular,” untrained artists has become sacralized and permitted into the temples of Culture, as representations of “authentic” selfhood and creativity, but only within the boundaries defined by erudite artists. Both are treated as eternally-enduring categories rather than social and historical constructions.⁴³ This popular/erudite division seems particularly outmoded in a time when such categories have proven themselves to be porous and unstable, wedded to a Eurocentric bias and therefore of limited utility in an era of globalization. As Marcos Napolitano writes regarding the unsuitability of these categories for analysis of popular music in Latin America, the researcher

... must look to transcend these dichotomies and sacred hierarchies of music ... not to “elevate” and “defend” popular music by way of erudite music, but in order to analyze the internal strategies and dynamics in the definition of each one, according to the historical and social reality in question.⁴⁴

Napolitano’s observation succinctly illustrates why I will insist on employing the categories “erudite” and “popular” throughout this dissertation as a means to counter what remains of their reification.

Interventions based on the defense and elevation of *cultura popular* by intellectuals have had a tremendous influence on the formation of cultural policy and the trajectory that *maracatu de*

⁴³ Levine, Lawrence. 1988. *Highbrow/lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁴⁴ Napolitano, Marcos. 2002. *História e música: história cultural da música popular*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Autêntica, p.14

baque solto has followed in the last quarter century, in ways that are often ahistorical and deterritorialized.⁴⁵ A high/low division of cultural expression may have become theoretically empty and obsolete, but it is one which still influences the thoughts and actions of many of those involved in maracatu, from the grassroots participants to those involved in cultural programming and policy. Somewhat paradoxically, some attempts to deny the existence of a cultural hierarchy by placing all regional expressive forms under the same umbrella as “our culture,” for example in the postures struck by former Secretary of Culture Ariano Suassuna, have been ideologically motivated to collapse those categories in an attempt to efface power dynamics and inequality at the service of a conservative cultural nationalism.

These appearances of maracatu in the new social contexts mobilize cultural identity in different ways, both from within the maracatu community and from outsiders with a variety of motivations. The use and abuse of regional cultural forms by intellectuals, politicians, and “fine” artists is of course not exclusive to northeast Brazil. But the importance of the Nordeste region in creating a national imaginary – whether in a discourse of suffering and underdevelopment, as a timeless space of traditional values and authenticity, or in promoting a positive image of cultural inclusion for the twenty-first century – makes it a fruitful place to examine the issues salient to elite appropriations of “the popular.” The coastal strip of the Mata Norte, long saturated by sugar production, emphasizes different aspects of that imaginary than the arid *sertão* backlands with its aura of rugged individualism. The story of maracatu, steeped in tradition, ritual, and elaborate pageantry, provides a multivalent icon and powerful symbol of that story for a growing number of people hailing from a variety of socioeconomic and ideological backgrounds.

⁴⁵ For the notion of “deterritorialization” in relation to *cultura popular* and folklore, see García Canclini, Nestor. 1995. *Hybrid cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

It is useful as an exercise to imagine the engagement with *cultura popular* by these two abstract groupings of social actors – the elite and the popular – as moving along parallel trajectories. The last few generations of maracatuzeiros have elaborated their aesthetics through increasingly complex poetic structures and an ornate plasticity of costume design and ornamentation. The tradition has been, in their words, modernized. At the same time, a handful of urban, classically-trained artists have “discovered” maracatu since the 1980s, and incorporated and appropriated some of its style and iconography in their own constructions of a rooted, regional authenticity. The imagery of parallel developments is flawed but productive: it is suggestive of processes taking place independently and in isolation of each other, without intersections. This is not how any communities, artistic or otherwise, work in the real world. However, the developments within maracatu have been driven by a set of dynamics and historical conditions that are different from those that have motivated the elite’s interest in it. The world of erudite artistic production has its own dynamics and shifting agendas in relation to *cultura popular* since at least the nineteenth century, in which the popular artists’ own situation or perspective have typically not factored as significant. Although today the two artistic worlds may overlap more than they are segregated, popular artists’ reliance on other types of work for a precarious financial stability, and their assumption of a humble demeanor as “simple people” when seeking recognition by those who make “legitimate” art, suggests the endurance of a hierarchical, two-tiered structure in which they have made only halting and conditional gains.

When does valorization and support by elites give way to co-optation, the neutralizing or dissipation of content, and the changing of form to accommodate the agendas of elites or of tourists? Maracatuzeiros are actively engaged at every level of these processes, aware and often critical of their exploitative aspects as well as the opportunities to advance their own careers. They

distinguish between different types of presentations and styles of performance, deploying their own notions of authenticity that do not necessarily mirror those of the country's dominant class. Reputations within the maracatu community often reflect how skillfully an individual can walk the tightrope between accommodating outsiders in the interest of promoting maracatu, and staying true to its "essence."

The final chapter recounts three successive carnivals spent with the same maracatu, Estrela Brilhante, and the everyday, year-long business of sustaining them. Interwoven into this narrative are considerations of the problematic role played by cultural "entrepreneurs" and patrons of *cultura popular* tied to political regimes. The chapter is in many ways intended as a corrective and counterbalance to the many romantic accounts of maracatu during carnival that currently circulate. Ranging from short segments on television, newspaper reports, and coffee-table volumes of photography and purple prose, such accounts – when not utterly ignoring the material circumstances and temporal commitments in which these carnival spectacles take place – vastly simplify the story to a variant of poor people overcoming limitations by their own resourcefulness. In truth an entire assemblage of resource-rich state structures and private-public institutions have now so thoroughly embedded themselves into carnival that ignoring their "aid" is no longer an option for any group which wishes to flourish from year to year. What appears to some observers as merely benevolent aid does not, naturally, come without strings attached, and such strings as these are famously capable of securing subaltern groups in the webs of paternalistic, "benevolent" patronage associated with the modern Brazilian state.

The transformation of maracatu from an assemblage of practices belonging to marginalized and stigmatized people and into a celebrated but standardized symbol belonging to all of

Pernambuco is a process that, on the surface, is almost a classical example of Gramscian hegemony. The degree to which maracatu was allowed entrance to civil society, whether by participation in officially-sanctioned carnival events or a place at the table of “legitimate” *cultura popular*, was contingent on its containment (via the registration and regulation of maracatus as civic organizations), the curbing of heterodoxy (by facilitating a unified, monophonic account of its history), and the renouncement of an allegedly violent history in favor of a symbolic ferocity (adopting codes of conduct and punitive measures). There are obvious parallels to the creation of Rio de Janeiro’s samba schools in the early twentieth-century here, but rather than being created by decree and legislative order, the maracatus since the 1980s have participated in these processes as partners - albeit unequal ones - and in some cases initiated the processes themselves, as in the creation of the domineering Association of Maracatus de Baque Solto of Pernambuco. The degree to which the maracatus’ can discover and exploit the cracks in this cultural hegemony and exercise their own agency within these limits and restrictions is in many ways the overarching question of this dissertation.

Methodology

I came to study maracatu in a roundabout, almost accidental way that requires a narrative digression to explain. My initial research project was about a very different topic. I arrived in Pernambuco in 2009 prepared to undertake fieldwork concerning agrarian reform, social movements, and *cultura popular* based on two preliminary field visits in 2006 and 2007. Those initial field visits had actually begun in a social movement’s national headquarters in São Paulo, but my dual interests in the historical antecedents of their movement and in Northeastern Brazil led me to Pernambuco.

One of my original ideas had been to research how traditional or “folkloric” forms of *cultura popular* were being employed on the agrarian reform settlements, either through pedagogical activities organized by the leadership reminiscent of the 1960’s Popular Culture Movement (MCP) activities in the countryside, or through carnival associations and other groups founded by settlement residents. In spite of several productive visits during the preliminary stage of this work, however, when I finally arrived in Pernambuco to conduct long-term fieldwork, both the political circumstances and internal dynamics of the movement had changed enough that I decided it would be nearly impossible to get the sort of fine-grain ethnographic detail I was seeking. The urban activists’ disinterest or lack of knowledge about *cultura popular* groups in the Mata Norte region had, however, driven me to a new realization: that it might not be possible (particularly as a non-Brazilian) to really begin to understand Pernambuco’s richly-textured *cultura popular* in specifically politicized contexts without first dealing with it in its more quotidian forms, as practiced by thousands of people who may or may not have affiliations with controversial social movements. When my personal friendships in Recife began to open up new pathways and possibilities to engage with “popular” artists practicing in the interior, I put my original project on hold, and soon abandoned it altogether. I resolved to focus on *maracatu de baque solto*, perhaps because it challenged the ways I had been thinking about popular culture. Like many an urban dweller, I was intrigued by its aura of mystery. I also felt that to understand it, I would need to work from the inside out, shedding my theoretical baggage and allowing the maracatus to explain what they do on their own terms.

The colorful presentations that maracatu groups gave when passing through the city during carnival seemed opaque to the point of impenetrability, and the small amount of literature on the subject tended to describe maracatu as a laundry-list of folkloric traits, as one sample in a regional

catalog of *cultura popular* genres. My attraction grew almost in proportion to my Recife friends' inability to explain much about it, and in some cases their admitted befuddlement. Through these I was introduced to Siba Veloso, formerly of the group Mestre Ambrósio and then largely residing in São Paulo. He in turn had provided me with the contact information for Manoel Carlos de França, aka Mestre Barachinha, and informed him that I would be getting in touch to set up a meeting, described at the beginning of this introduction. That first experience and a few others like it provided an acute sense of how most maracatuzeiros utterly changed their comportment and way of speaking when meeting with new outsiders. I moved to Nazaré as soon as I was able to find a place to live there and wrap up loose ends in Recife. A period of adjustment to the tempo of the town followed. Formal interviews were eschewed for much of the research in favor of simply getting to know people; the majority of my recorded interviews, for example, were conducted after I had already lived in Nazaré for almost a year.

As with anyone attempting ethnography, one of my first problems to solve was how I was going to participate in this community and make myself useful. Although I did have a background in music as a practicing musician, songwriter, and audio engineer, I had no formal musical training, and no experience playing the brass or percussion instruments that comprised the instrumental backbone of maracatu. I had no aptitude for dance or costume design. What I could offer were some technical skills and a commitment to understanding the place of this participatory expressive form that involved so much ritualized pageantry, performance, and improvisation. Early on, I observed what seemed to me an unusual degree of exploitation of the maracatus for the instrumental ends of powerful outside interests: the plastering of images of *caboclos de lança* on billboards or the international terminal at the airport, or the staging of political events with a maracatu thrown in for picturesque, folkloric window dressing. I noted the resentful sentiments,

expressed with varying degrees of subtlety or open indignation, that outsiders were always coming around, filming them or taking their photos - that would appear later on television or in newspapers, magazines, or books - with hardly so much as a verbal “thank you” given in return. In 2009, many of the maracatus possessed very little evidence of their own activities beyond the memories and stories told at the abundant informal socialization that seemed to be based around maracatu friendships, and where maracatu formed the topic of conversation more often than not. Beyond the sense of injustice that it elicited, this absence of material documentation became increasingly important to me for two other reasons: the relative absence of maracatu from written historical documentation prior to the 1990s, and the increase in professionalization that has given a significant advantage to those groups that had access to recordings, photos, or DVDs to promote their activities.

I resolved to be the maracatus’ documentarian. I took photographs and made audio recordings of their performances and presentations and distributed them to members of the group afterwards. The maracatuzeiros often offered me money for these materials, perhaps accustomed to the practice of several local “entrepreneurs” who were known to similarly document events and then charge them for copies of the recordings. I refused their offers, explaining that I was already being paid by a far-away institution to live there and study what maracatu was all about. It made no sense to charge them money for something that was already theirs.

Although only an amateur enthusiast, I found the role of “staff photographer” quite gratifying, and was glad to see some of these materials going up on walls in peoples’ homes or in the portfolios of the maracatus. Many began asking for video, and I bought a video camera to try and accommodate them. Documenting large maracatu presentations with a single camera proved to be a daunting task and, although I kept trying, there were only a few recordings that truly

satisfied us. As I settled into Nazaré and began to accompany the post-carnival cycle of the maracatus, I began to put more focus on faithfully capturing the audio of the improvised verse performances. My approach to recording the events became slightly more elaborate as I began utilizing 4-track recording which I would then mix and edit at home for a sound that more realistically approximated the experience of standing in the middle of one of these chaotic, dynamic, and unfailingly lively events.

There is no formal analysis of maracatu as a genre of music and no notation of melodies or rhythms, and a scholar approaching from a more strictly musicological orientation would likely find some aspects of maracatu worthy of more attention than they receive here. The visual components such as costume design and *artesanato*, to which maracatus devote so much of their time in the months leading up to carnival, receives little attention here, nor does the kinesthetic aspect of dance. Those topics receive ample coverage in the few as-yet unpublished theses on maracatu produced in Brazil.⁴⁶ In keeping with a sociohistorical treatment of the topic, I instead devoted a lot of time to the more mundane aspects of contemporary maracatu that can appear rather dull, at least on the surface: attending the monthly meetings of the politically-entrenched Maracatu Association of Pernambuco, or accompanying groups from Nazaré as they traveled to perform in small and large cities throughout the state in the long waits between carnivals.

I made a deliberate effort to prevent carrying over preconceptions from my initial project, to not force maracatu into ready-made theoretical boxes. As already mentioned, I mostly deferred formal interviews until the second half of my time living in Nazaré. This allowed me to follow a “non-directive approach” to my project born of “the confluence of principle, personal predilection,

⁴⁶ For example Kubrusly (2007)

and circumstance.”⁴⁷ Like Lila Abu-Lughod, as I spent more time in Nazaré I came to appreciate the degree to which the maracatus had been “studied” with survey-like methods by people who came and went, and how such people were often told tall tales by the maracatuzeiros for their own amusement. Also like Abu-Lughod, I opted to shape my research around the topics and themes that emerged organically and over time during informal socialization, discovering what the maracatus themselves found most vital and important about the art form to which they have devoted so much of their lives. As anyone who has read earlier drafts of this work can attest, this initially gave my writing an “inside-outness” as I slowly broadened my scope beyond that universe to find common theoretical threads that resonated with the processes and phenomena I experienced and observed in the field. I was not working from any core literature going in to maracatu, and have been allowed the intellectual and institutional freedom to cast a wide net.

With almost nothing published in English on this subject, I am tasked with attempting to describe and analyze a form of cultural expression and the people who create it for an audience that I must presume has no familiarity with it. I aim to describe what it is, where it happens, and why people devote so much time to it, while avoiding the butterfly-collecting style of presentation common to the coffee-table history and lite-folklore pieces that comprise the bulk of published material in Brazil, a style that dictates framing the material like an exhibit with a placard reading “THIS is maracatu.” As I’ve argued above, rural maracatu has in fact benefited in concrete ways from a lack of academic attention. Yet I hope that the present treatment might prove useful to future scholars who wish to elaborate a dialogue about not only maracatu but the place of regional identity and popular culture in Brazil and elsewhere.

⁴⁷ Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled sentiments: honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.23-24

Whenever someone writes an ethnography or history regarding a group that has been prevented from speaking for itself or being heard, questions of representation arise. Decades of earnest soul searching and sometimes solipsistic navel-gazing have produced valuable reappraisals and the questioning of intellectual canons regarding the dangers of presuming to speak “for the people.” There would be a certain irony in appropriating and abusing the creative labor and invention of the maracatus by misrepresenting my own interpretations as theirs. As obvious and unnecessary as it seems to state this in 2015, it should be emphasized that I alone bear the responsibility for the critiques and assertions throughout this work. I hope that someday, in some fashion, my maracatuzeiro friends will have the opportunity to respond. I have done my best to listen attentively to everyone I met in the field, including to their omissions and pointed silences. I do not pretend to speak for them, but I do avail myself of the privilege to say some things they cannot or will not, as someone who stands outside of the richly-textured web of patronage, alliances, and creativity that is the endlessly fascinating and frustrating Mata Norte of Pernambuco.

Chapter 1:

Maracatu In The Past: a civilizing discourse

Introduction

Excerpt from *Maracatu No Passado / Maracatu In The Past*
(Mestre Antônio Roberto)

Maracatu como valia
Em algum tempo passado
Não era tão divulgado
Como está sendo hoje em dia
Divulgação não havia
Para maracatu rural
Mas hoje em todo local
Virou página de manchete
No rádio e na internet
Televisão e jornal

Em alguns anos atrás
Maracatu se encontrava
Com outros sempre brigava
Mas hoje não brigam mais
Acharam um caminho de paz
E de muita boa vontade
Porque hoje na verdade
O que vale é fantasia
Talento e sabedoria
Perfeição e qualidade

Quem é maracatuzeiro
Do passado se recorda
Bombo amarrado de corda
Carbureto no terreiro
No farol de um candeeiro
Até manhecer o dia
Mas hoje é com energia

Maracatu as a worthwhile thing
In a time long ago
Wasn't as well-known and publicized
As it is today
There was no publicity
For maracatu rural
But today everywhere you go
It's making front-page news
On the radio and the internet
On television and in newspapers

Some years ago
When one maracatu met another
They would always fight
But today they fight no longer
They have found the road of peace
And of much goodwill
Because today, in truth
What matters is costumes
Talent and knowledge
Perfection and quality

He who calls himself a *maracatuzeiro*
Of the old school will remember
Drums secured with rope
Coal lamps in the yard
By the light of a lantern
Until the dawn breaks
But today it's done with energy

Tudo é eletrificado
Com carro de som ligado
Isso é tecnologia

Everything is electrified
With the sound-car turned on
This is technology

Maracatu de outrora
Passava por desespero
O brinquedo do terreiro
Brigava com o de fora
Só que está sendo agora
Muito mais civilizado.
Depois de modernizado
Ninguém briga com ninguém
Que a modernidade vem
Dando apagão no passado

Maracatu of another era
Passed through desperate times
The crowd in the plaza
Fought with the other groups
But now it is being
Much more civilized
After being modernized
Nobody fights with anyone else
So that modernity comes
Extinguishing the past. ¹

In its complete form, the maracatu composition excerpted above traces out a kind of master narrative that runs through many of the conversations I have had with maracatuzeiros about their lives. The song and the narratives maracatuzeiros often tell about themselves emphasize the transformation of maracatu from a weekend diversion and rustic carnival tradition characterized by disorder, ignorance, and violence into a thing of refinement and beauty, respected throughout and beyond Pernambuco. The rivalries and fights between maracatu groups have given way to professionalization and cooperation. The perception of maracatu by outsiders has gone from one focused on “culture loss” and miscegenation in the earliest known accounts, or from being seen as an opaque and impenetrable “men’s secret society” in the 1960s by the folklorist and

¹ Recorded for the CD collection “Poetas da Mata Norte.” It is worth noting that the word “terreiro” here and in most maracatu poetry is used in its meaning of a public but localized space, rather than its religious sense pertaining to Afro-Brazilian ceremony. In particular one of many definitions given in the *Dicionário Aurélio* is appropriate: “Largo ao ar livre onde há folguedos e cantos ao desafio / Plaza or open-air space where festive gatherings and song competitions are held.” Additionally, the variety of Portuguese terminology for ludic celebrations, either organized or spontaneous, is in stark contrast to the stoicism of the English language. Terms like *folgado*, *folia*, *brinquedo*, and *brincadeira* have nuances with no precise translation in English renderings that reduce them to “celebration” or “party.” Therefore I take some poetic license of my own in my translations in an attempt to communicate the tone of the original in a given context.

anthropologist Katarina Real, to the present-day celebration of maracatu as an example of the perseverance of tradition in adverse circumstances. Maracatus are now accustomed to the presence of photographers and film crews, arriving during carnival or at other times of the year, and of cultural tourists and foreign researchers asking questions. Whereas outsiders and intellectuals often emphasize the continued existence of maracatu as a bulwark against the toxic effects of mass culture, the maracatuzeiros tend to place more emphasis on what they see as the evolution and refinement of an art form. After being asked about the poetic content and subject matter of maracatu in his youth, Mestre Dedinha of Araçoiaba said:

The mestre of that time didn't sing anything worthwhile, he was illiterate. When maracatu began it was an ugly business, a poorly-made thing. Today it's more beautiful. Because long ago maracatu was only on the *engenho*, out there with the coal-fired lamps, but not today: today you show up at the maracatu and there's a sound system, the street is all lit up, and the mayor is welcoming you, the city councilman, it's the community at large and it's the culture. Today it's beautiful. Long ago it wasn't.

The several generations of maracatu looked at in the chapters that follow display a variety of changes still in process that involve the intersections of artistic creation, local history, and broader regional and national cultural policies. The narratives heard from the generation discussed here, from men aged sixty or older at the time of fieldwork, tend to highlight maracatus' "pre-modern" traits of a long-gone era in very material terms, such as the lack of electricity and transportation on foot during carnival, or the rustic simplicity of costumes and instruments. Such stories also invariably emphasize the potentially volatile, violent nature of maracatu, and the frequency of fighting between groups, a practice now prohibited. The maracatu groups were significantly smaller than they are today: a maracatu of thirty persons would have been considered large on the *engenhos* of the 1960s. Their membership was made up of people with no expectation

of financial gain, who “*brincava por amor*,” participated for the love of it. Generally these were people living on the same *engenho* or the immediate surrounding area.² Today maracatu is performed more often in urban settings than in rural ones, for mixed audiences who may or may not have a connection to or interest in its original context. Furthermore, *maracatu de baque solto* had been an exclusively male phenomenon, with men occupying the feminine roles (such as the *baianas*) during carnaval. Today both women and young children are common participants, a fact often used to illustrate the degree to which maracatu has become more “civilized.”

The trope of civilization in maracatu is multivalent, encompassing different connotations even within the tales told by the same individual. The more inclusive nature of maracatu shows that the atmosphere is lighter and more social than it had been in the old days, a family-friendly party. But the maracatuzeiros’ stories can also imply that the age of the warrior or *guerreiro* is a thing of the past, an apparition receding down the dirt roads where they used to travel for miles on foot during carnival. Along with civilization and modernity, with technology and handshakes from the mayor, came a loss of toughness and autonomy in the ways they socialized and celebrated away from the watchful eyes of the *engenho* bosses. The gradations of meaning attached to modernity and civilization used by the maracatuzeiros when talking about their own history have different emphases and undertones depending on when and to whom they are being invoked. This colors the accounts presented to me as an outsider when my interlocutor is inspired to tell me “the story of maracatu.” But the category of “outsider” also includes people from Recife or even other Nazarenos, friends of maracatuzeiros who exhibit varying degrees of interest or apathy to this peculiar tradition that has brought their town a kind of fame throughout the state of Pernambuco. Many didactic stories about origins and changes to customs and tradition over time are also told

² Mestres and musicians seemed somewhat more mobile in this regard, often traveling short distances to perform.

informally, around tables at the local bar, or in places like the garage that served as the headquarters and workshop for Estrela Brilhante until 2011 – places where anyone in the community is free to come and converse. This is where a sense of the history of maracatu is passed down by those who practice it, with those in their teens and twenties listening respectfully to their elders’ pontifications and colorful antidotes. Besides the prolific, improvised poetry of the *mestre-poets*, these informal spaces have been where maracatuzeiros have the most control over the representation of what they do, why they do it, and what it means.

The older generation is eager to regale the younger listener with stories of the crude costumes and the harsh conditions they endured, traversing mile after mile on foot during carnival as they performed at one plantation after another. A frequent remark is that the spoiled *caboclos* of today who travel on buses would not endure such conditions for even an hour, let alone three days of carnival. In maracatu, the term *caboclo* is not used in the anthropological sense of an Amazonian peasantry nor primarily in the sociological sense of an actual ethnic group, but rather as a symbol and myth.³ It is understood less as the assimilated Indian depicted in popular romantic literature from the nineteenth century, and more like the conception found in the cults of umbanda and xangô, popular religions with Afro-Brazilian and indigenous roots, where the *caboclo* is “the wild hunter, a living prototype of all that would not allow itself to be enslaved, and a symbol of nobility and freedom, assuming the role of defender of the earth.”⁴ Indeed, many *caboclos de lança* seek the protection of Oxóssi, the orixa of the forests and of hunting. Even more prominent is their frequent devotion to Ogum, syncretically linked to St. George, patron of warriors.

3 In the interior, it is also used as an informal and affective form of address, somewhat like “man” or “dude” in English.

4 Lody, Raul Giovanni. 1977. “Samba de caboclo”. In *Cadernos de Folclore* 17. Rio de Janeiro: Mistério de Educação e Cultura / Comissão de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro



NA TRILHA DO FUTURO

Os lancetros de maracatus deram as boas-vindas ao governador Eduardo Campos quando ele se encaminhava à Assembleia Legislativa, na manhã deste sábado, para a cerimônia de posse do seu segundo mandato. Em um rápido discurso, ele fez um balanço dos primeiros quatro anos de gestão e destacou as grandes obras que vão gerar muitos empregos no estado. POISSA/AGF

“O FUTURO JÁ CHEGOU”

Em seu discurso ao assumir o segundo mandato como governador de Pernambuco, Eduardo Campos enaltece o avô Miguel Arraes, agradece a Lula, se diz confiante em Dilma e lista como desafios melhorar educação, saúde e gastos públicos. 39 p



FESTA Eduardo, a primeira-dama e os filhos foram recebidos na Assembleia por lancetros

Figure 5: Caboclos de lança form an honor guard for Governor Eduardo Campos at the inauguration of his second term on New Years Day, 2011. Front page photos from Diário de Pernambuco (top) and the Jornal do Comércio (bottom)

The subtext of such “warrior stories” is also that these men lived lives of hardship and difficulty, and that this hardship informed the energy they expended in the *loucura* or craziness that is maracatu. The details of those hard times are rarely made explicit in a spontaneous way. Whether they are held back because they are painful to recall or because the teller does not think his audience would be interested is difficult to determine. For the first months of my fieldwork, my informants seemed inclined to think I was only interested in maracatu *qua* maracatu, perhaps in some cases conditioned by previous researchers whose presence spanned a few days or a handful of weekend visits. Friends and new acquaintances seemed confused why a foreigner would come all that distance to ask them about the mundane details of their past. Only after spending several months living in Nazaré (and not commuting from Recife, as I had begun) did I receive less recalcitrant responses.

In order to understand the transformations of form and content in maracatu over the last half century, a look at the life histories of their protagonists and how their own circumstances changed provides much-needed context. Such a context has often been marginalized in published accounts of maracatu. Even when biographical details are relayed and snatches of interviews transcribed, the circumstances in which these men and women lived and worked is glossed over and presented as part of an anonymous, idealized type: the hard-working, long-suffering sugar cane cutter. Such a representation is not so much erroneous as it is unsubtle, lacking the nuance to provide a historical understanding worthy of the people who lived it, and leaving us with a limited set of tools with which to understand maracatu as it is practiced today. A narrative telling how maracatu was created in the sugar cane fields of the plantations must be augmented by also considering how it was developed and maintained by a working class in the towns and cities. The gradual disappearance of older practices are, paradoxically, both celebrated as signs of modernity

and conceived of as evidence of the need to preserve maracatu from external threats. Pronouncements on a past proclivity for violence and a current inclination towards peacefulness and cooperation should be elaborated by asking how the symbolism attached to violence and unruliness is understood contextually, while considering the contemporary symbolic emphasis placed on civility in Brazil's ongoing struggle to integrate the margins of its society.

Rural Exodus and the Making of “The Land of Maracatu”

“One of the things people don't really talk much about is that ‘rural maracatu’ isn't rural any longer,” said my friend Tony, a thirty-five year old *caboclo de lança* and respected artisan of sequined cloaks (*golas*) and banners (*bandeiras* or *estandartes*). Tony's observation of the present state of maracatu reflects a process of urbanization that had begun as early as the 1930s with periodic surges in the 1950s and 1970s, as increasing numbers of rural workers in the Mata Norte left the plantations to live in the towns. While they may have had greater or lesser degrees of knowledge and experience with the broader area outside their own *engenhos*, now they found themselves living in much closer proximity to others who had been scattered throughout the villages and *povoados* (small clusters of homes) of the countryside. They all brought with them similar life experiences from that rural world, and some of them also brought their ludic experiences with regional carnival traditions like *caboclinhos*, *ciranda*, *boi*, *pastoril*, and maracatu.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Brazil experienced a “rural exodus” as the country shifted away from an agrarian-based economy. Of the various factors preceding and contributing to that exodus, several will be singled out here for consideration: the dissolution of

the institution of slavery without any pretense of land reform at the end of the nineteenth century; the concentration of land; the domination of sugar plantations by the land-hungry *usinas* or sugar mills; and the displacement of rural workers, sharecroppers and others who had lost their usufruct rights.

Although the region had dominated Brazil's sugar production for much of its colonial history, by the nineteenth century Northeastern sugar production had entered a period of decline in Brazil's export-oriented economy. Overshadowed first by the rush on gold and minerals in the interior state of Minas Gerais, and subsequently by coffee production in the south, Pernambuco's sugar industry had begun to lag far behind the output of producers in the southeast like those in Rio de Janeiro state. Cane sugar prices on the world market fell as the Cuban varieties of cane came to prominence and as beet sugar began to claim a share of European consumption.

Although the development of Brazilian sugar production was dependent on large-scale agriculture and the ability to secure a sufficiently large labor force, it was never entirely dominated by huge plantations and slave labor.⁵ Studies of the colonial period have demonstrated that slaves coexisted with wage laborers on plantations, but that these two legal categories do little on their own to illuminate the plantation's social world. Slaves were able to keep their own garden plots and sell their surplus in town markets, occasionally saving enough to purchase their own manumission, while wage laborers were subject to similar kinds of coercion and control as slaves.⁶ Although smallholders were numerically insignificant until the nineteenth century, a variety of land tenure relationships existed around the fringes and within the interstices of the plantation

⁵ The iconic and influential expression of the large plantation and slavery as the cornerstone of Brazilian society is Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala*. The broad influence of his thought is explored further in chapter two.

⁶ Schwartz, Stuart B. 1985. *Sugar plantations in the formation of Brazilian society: Bahia, 1550-1835*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

model, and many peasants employed slaves on their own farms. The rural class structure was further diversified with subcategories of people who would be considered peasants in European terminology: for example *agregados*, *arrendeiros*, *lavradores*, *meeiros*, and *foreiros* all had particular kinds of relationships to the land they lived on and obligations to the owners of *engenhos*, who claimed so many days of service per week or a certain portion of their harvested cane as rent.

Like elsewhere in the northeast, in the first half of the nineteenth century Pernambucan sugar estates made use of both slaves and free labor. The travel writings of Englishman Henry Koster describe wage laborers comprised of seasonal migrant *caboclo* workers and manumitted ex-slaves on the plantations he managed in Jaguaribe and Itamaracá.⁷ The prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1850 foreshadowed the changes to come. As production costs began to outrun the price of sugar on the market, the traditional reliance on slave labor became unfeasible. Many slaves were sold to coffee plantations in the south, as it became more economical for Pernambucan plantations to use mixed wage and slave labor. By 1850 the free population already outnumbered the slave population throughout Pernambuco's towns and municípios.⁸ By 1872, slaves in the area around Recife comprised less than 24% of the total population.⁹ A sizeable percentage of Pernambuco's labor force was free, and a decade before abolition sugar planters already demonstrated a preference for the payment of low, depressed wages over the use of slaves.¹⁰ When abolition finally did come in 1888, its impact on the Pernambucan sugar economy was negligible. Without denying the symbolic importance of legal freedom, in purely material

⁷ Koster, Henry. 1816. *Travels in Brazil*. Reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966.

⁸ Levine, Robert M. 1978. *Pernambuco in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

⁹ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), 2010. "Evolução da divisão territorial do Brasil 1872-2010: população escrava."

¹⁰ Levine, Robert "Pernambuco in the Old Republic"; Eisenberg, Peter

terms ex-slaves found themselves in a more precarious condition after abolition, which also freed the planters from the expenses of feeding and housing their laborers. Although freedmen often did leave and look for work in Recife, a great number stayed on or near the same *engenhos* as workers, where they usually ended up purchasing many of their household necessities from the *barracão* or company store owned by the *engenhos* or *usinas*.¹¹

The near impossibility of obtaining land by ex-slaves and their descendants maintained and exacerbated their difficulties. Since colonization, Brazil's land tenure arrangements have been characterized by a remarkable degree of land concentration, and ties by marriage among the sugar aristocracy meant that a handful of families and individuals wielded disproportionate power in any given region.¹² In Nazaré da Mata in 1857, sixty percent of sugar production was under the control of only six families.¹³ By the twentieth century the skewed nature of land tenure can be easily seen in the disparity between *latifundia* (large landholdings typically in excess of 500 hectares or 1200 acres) and *minifundia*, defined by the Brazilian Land Statute of 1964 as smallholdings insufficient to meet the needs of a family farm.¹⁴ In 1950, one percent of families in Northeast Brazil controlled 50.6% of all land, while 64.3% of sharecroppers and laborers owned no land whatsoever.¹⁵ Coupled with the higher population density in the region, these figures demonstrate

¹¹ A famous fictionalized account set in the generation after abolition that portrays a circular migration from an *engenho* to the capital city, and back again to the *engenho* after finding conditions unbearable, is found in the novel *O Moleque Ricardo* by José Lins do Rego (1936)

¹² Expanses of land larger than major European countries were parceled out by the Crown under the system of personal grants, *donatarias* and *sesmarias*, with priority given to any resourceful individual with capital who wished to begin a sugar mill operation. Land was often accumulated and hoarded by mill owners, who applied for additional grants using the names of family members. Such immense space was not easily administrated, and many landholders added to their holdings through squatting (*posse da terra*) or fraud using falsified documents (*grilagem*) in the absence of land surveys or titles. Wealth and prestige were measured in land, which was often left fallow and uncultivated for agricultural reasons, but also in response to fluctuating markets or for purposes of market speculation. .

¹³ Eisenberg, Peter L. 1974. *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco: Modernization without Change, 1840-1910*. Berkeley: University of California Press

¹⁴ See the *Estatuto da Terra, LEI N° 4.504, DE 30 DE NOVEMBRO DE 1964*, accessed at http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/L4504.htm

¹⁵ Figueiroa cited in Andrade (1980) p .38

a greater degree of land concentration and inequality in the Northeast than the rest of the nation.¹⁶ In the 1970s the demographic portrait is slightly less dramatic though by no means equitable. A larger number of smallholdings occupied a significant majority of the total raw number of registered landholdings, but amounted to an insignificant percentage of the actual total land area, which was still dominated by slightly more than 2% of the population.¹⁷ Hence while the sugar industry underwent significant transformations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, land concentration remained a constant factor and a problem only exacerbated by the eventual modernization of the industry.

The first attempts at industrializing the process of sugar production was with the foreign-owned and operated *engenhos centrais* or refineries, with one being built in 1876 in the area administered from Nazaré and another built in 1882.¹⁸ This wave of *engenhos centrais* failed due to a collusion of oscillating sugar prices, conflict with the traditional planter class who supplied their raw material, outdated equipment imported from former colonial territories, and the unwillingness of their foreign backers to further invest in what appeared to be a failed enterprise. The key difference between the *engenhos centrais* (or *centrales* in Spanish American terminology) and later *usinas* was that an *engenho central* was established solely to mill and process sugarcane and bought its raw material from planters, whereas an *usina* had an agricultural component, cultivating its own cane in addition to buying from suppliers.¹⁹ The government responded to the failure of the *centrais* or central mills by granting the *usinas* subsidies, the result of lobbying by

¹⁶ Then national statistics on the proportion of latifundia versus minifundia throughout the nation in this era are found in Leal (1949) and Andrade (1980)

¹⁷ Andrade, Manuel Correia de. 1980. *Land and People of Northeast Brazil*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press

¹⁸ Peres, Gaspar. 1991 (1915) *A indústria assucareira em Pernambuco*. Recife: CEPE, p.60

¹⁹ Rocha, Tadeu. 1974. "A evolução da agroindústria do açúcar em Pernambuco e a sindicalização dos trabalhadores rurais após a abolição da escravatura." In *História Social Da Agro-Indústria Canavieira*. 31-53. Recife: Instituto de Açúcar e Alcool, 1974.

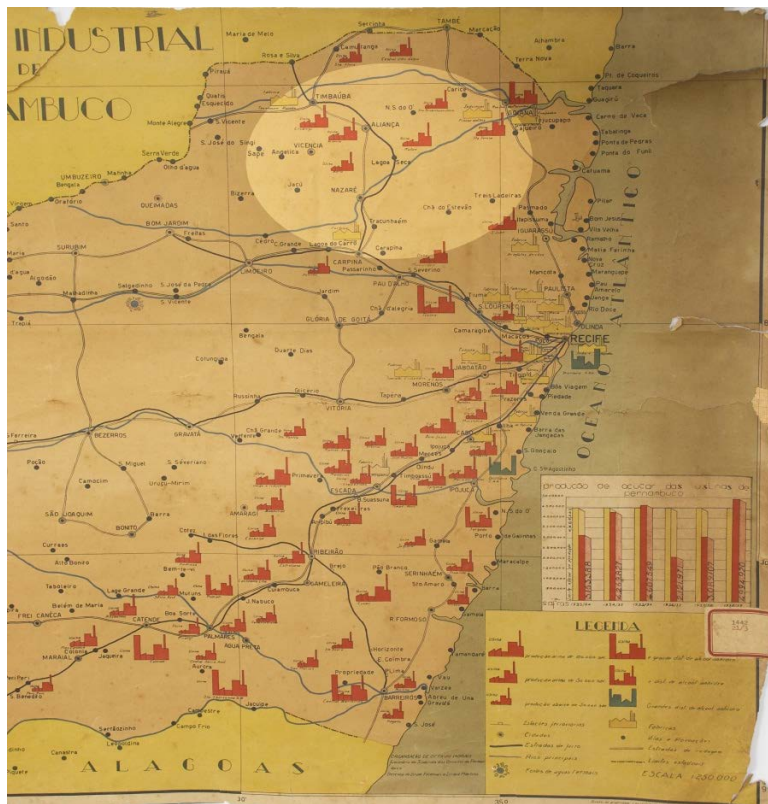


Figure 6: Portion of a map showing the distribution of sugar usinas in the mid 1960s. The area around Nazaré is highlighted. Source: Arquivo Público Estadual de Pernambuco. Mapoteca 12, Gaveta 1, #1510, 1965

interest groups of local planters. As the traditional *engenhos*, with their milling powered by steam or animals, were not able to compete with the *usinas*, many shut down their mills and became strictly cane suppliers or *forneedores*. Although formally still belonging to the traditional owner or *dono do engenho*, these plantations (sometimes called “*fogo morto*,” or extinguished fire), in reality became largely under the control of the *usinas*. One of the consequences of this change was that the *moradores de engenho*, the workers who had lived on plantation property for generations, began to lose their traditional usufruct rights. Under the old plantation regime, these workers were allotted a small parcel of land (or *roça*) for their own use on which they could work a few days a week to grow subsistence crops, the surplus of which they could sell in the weekly markets in town. Under the new regime determined to maximize every inch of their land with a

monoculture of sugarcane, usinas demanded that the moradores plant their fields with cane for the mill. In addition, the established pattern of patron-client relationships was disrupted. The *dono do engenho* capable of arbitrary punishment and sadistic cruelty was also at turns the “*bom patrão*” or benevolent patron, who could intervene on his tenants’ behalf when necessary and often served as godparent to their children. The *usina*, by contrast, was characterized by impersonal exploitation.

The process by which the smaller plantations gave way to the *usinas* in Pernambuco began in the Mata Sul, the coastal strip running south from Recife to the Alagoas border, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Usina development did not pick up momentum in the Mata Norte, which runs from Recife north to the border of Paraíba, until the twentieth century.²⁰ In many municipalities the mass closure of *engenhos* did not begin in earnest until the 1950s.²¹ Nazaré, which gained recognition as an autonomous administrative unit in 1834, boasted 187 sugar *engenhos* twenty years later, the most of any municipality in the state.²² By the second decade of the twentieth century, a handful of notable *usinas* were operating in and around the area of Nazaré, such as the *usinas* Aliança, Matari, Petribú, and Santa Theresa, all of which played a role in the lives of my older informants. Yet in 1914, Nazaré still possessed 147 *engenhos*. During the next decade, the building of *usinas* would escalate dramatically: 17 *usinas* were constructed in the

²⁰ One of the unresolved questions about maracatus origins is why it only appeared in the Mata Norte, between Recife and the Paraíba border, but not the Mata Sul. The distribution of usinas by the mid-20th century (see fig.2) shows a marked concentration in the southern half of Pernambuco and a more diffused distribution in the north. Topography has something to do with this: the southern half of the state is flatter, allowing for quicker and more efficient harvesting (and eventually, mechanization), which made the region more appealing for investment into *usinas*, whereas the hilly terrain of the Mata Norte requires more on manual labor. Hence many *engenhos* in the north appear to have continued operating longer than their counterparts in the south. The role of these material conditions on the development of maracatu have been noted and speculated upon by writers such as Roberto Benjamin, but never systematically explored. The best sources are the work of geographer Manuel Corrêa de Andrade (1980, 1989, 2001)

²¹ Lacerda de Melo, Mário. 1961. *As migrações para Recife (volume 1): estudo geográfico*. Recife: Ministério da Educação e Cultura. p. 96

²² Pedrosa, Mons. Petronilo. 1983. *Nazaré, Terra e Gente*. Recife: Centro de Estudo de História Municipal

Mata Norte area during the 1920s.²³ Over the next half century these *usinas* would absorb more and more of the smaller traditional *engenhos bangüê*, while the world economic crisis would contribute to the closure of many of these same *usinas* and significant levels of unemployment. The conditions were being established for the first wave of large rural to urban migration in the 1930s as rural workers were pushed off the land.

The process was still taking place well into the 1970s. The exponential growth of maracatus founded in Nazaré that began in the 1980s was in many ways a direct result of this rural exodus. Rural workers took their experiences with maracatu groups on the plantations and reinvented them in the city, founding new groups with legal identities as civil organizations. While violent expulsions from *engenho* lands are well documented for the period of 1950-60, particularly in the Mata Sul and fueling the growth of the Ligas Camponesas or Peasant Leagues, in the cases of my informants in Nazaré their dislocation from the countryside tended to be more indirect. The passage of the Rural Land Statute in 1963 had begun to regulate labor relations in the countryside, extending the labor laws enacted under Vargas to rural workers for the first time, and instituting a system of work cards, or *carteiras assinadas* to document their employment. This standardized the work regime on sugar plantations and entitled workers to certain benefits. The planter class, however, responded petulantly in a variety of ways. Usinas and engenhos fired a great number of workers, especially any who attempted to avail themselves of the new legislation, for example through seeking back wages or filing complaints about infractions of the labor code. They began to rely more on temporary work gangs (i.e. day laborers without work cards) recruited through

²³ Andrade, Manuel Correia de. 2001. *História das usinas de açúcar de Pernambuco*. Recife: Editora UFPE. 67-74

empreiteiros or contractors. They also began forcing workers off the *engenhos*, frequently through violence and intimidation, and into the small towns and cities.²⁴

Biu Rosi, a key member of the directorate of Estrela Brilhante and formerly a percussionist, narrated a story that depicts tougher or worsening conditions across the generations. Growing up on Engenho Santa Fé, he states that his grandfather was “well-off,” planting cotton that he sold to a nearby storehouse and owning a few head of cattle, horses, some chickens and pigs.²⁵ They grew manioc and ground it into flour at the *casa de farinha* or mill on the *engenho*, and sold it in the town markets or from the back of a truck alongside the road. His father, on the other hand, only knew sugar cane, and worked at planting and cutting cane his entire life. Biu worked on the *engenho* from a young age, clearing land, cutting cane, loading freight trucks, or as a *cambiteiro* transporting cane and other material with a donkey. In 1965 his father lost their house and plot of land, receiving in return for his years of service a quantity of building materials and a small plot or *terreno* in town on which to build a new house. This was precisely at the time when the *usinas* and the *engenhos* supplying them with cane (their *fornecehores*) were expanding rapidly in the Mata Norte, planting every last square foot of land with cane. The value of their new *terreno* and house at the edge of Nazaré was more than likely far below the value of the land where they had been living on the *engenho*. Without formal recognition of their usufruct rights, the only legal recourse for families like Biu’s was to attempt redress their losses in the courts for the breach of their service contract as recognized by the recent rural labor legislation. Biu told me this rarely

²⁴ Rogers, Thomas D. 2010. *The deepest wounds: a labor and environmental history of sugar in Northeast Brazil*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

²⁵ Since the colonial era, cotton cultivation had existed alongside sugar in the Pernambucan Zona da Mata and was occasionally championed as a viable alternative crop. It gained a significant boost during the U.S. War of Independence when England sought new suppliers for its textile industry, and briefly again during World War I. The hegemony of the *usinas* has essentially ended cotton cultivation, which now takes place almost exclusively in the agreste and sertão hinterland regions. (c.f. Andrade, Steve Stern, Tom Rogers)

happened, because those who attempted to do so were harassed, intimidated, or threatened by the landowners and the police beholden to them.

Biu remembers when there was only one other street in his neighborhood and the rest was still undeveloped countryside or *mata*. Unable to read or write, he picked up the skilled trade of *pedreiro* or mason while the area on the western side of highway BR 408 was developed with new houses and buildings. He went to work as an assistant to the *pedreiro* of Engenho Pedregulho (bordering Engenho Santa Fé) on whose disappropriated land the neighborhood now occupies. By 1967 his job already involved more responsibilities, moving up from bricklaying and simpler masonry to working closely with blueprints and laying foundations of buildings. Soon after, a cousin brought him to the Recife suburb of Janga to work in construction there, as well as in the neighborhoods of Torrões and Boa Viagem. During that period, Biu says he was paid more than other workers because he was off the books, with no work card. The workers lived and slept on the construction site itself, protecting themselves from the occasional rains with empty cement sacks they used as mattresses. Receiving their pay on Friday afternoons, they were forced to work until 11 a.m. on Saturdays, after which they could return home, in Biu's case traveling the 67 kilometers to Nazaré for a day and a half of rest before returning for work Monday morning.

Now that Biu is retired, I asked him if he had any desire to live in the countryside again. "Oh, living on the *engenho* is really great, but it's just not practical anymore," he answered. All except one of my informants expressed a kind of tempered nostalgia for the portion of their life lived on the *engenhos*. Pedro, a member of the directorate of Maracatu Cambidinha Brasileira (Araçoiaba), recalled living at the *engenho* community of Brindas as a time when all his family's basic necessities were easily met: they had their own *sítio* or plot of land for growing subsistence crops, and what was left over they brought to trade for goods at the nearby markets or *feiras* in

Itaquitinga or Tracunhaém. In his view, the only reason why anyone would go hungry during the days of living on the *engenhos* was because they were lazy and did not work their own plots of land for subsistence. However, other maracatuzeiros' histories show that this was not always the case.

Mestre Antônio Alves, whose first encounter with maracatu was in 1960, worked and lived on the same plantation for forty-four years at Engenho São Pedro. He married and stayed there with his family until 1994. In Antônio's case, even before losing their family plot or *roçado*, they no longer had time to cultivate it. In order to make ends meet it was necessary to be constantly working, as well as contracting out to other *engenhos*. Whereas previously the family could produce for their own consumption, now they were forced to buy basic necessities in town or at the company store. "We only left because there was no other way, since the *engenho* was private property," he told me. "After it changed hands to the *usina*, we were always out working, and we never had time to tend to our crops. I didn't like it, so I quit my job and got some money for my land, and moved to Nazaré. I've been here ever since, and I am very happy living here." Later in the conversation, he recalled that time in a more succinct manner, but with a different emphasis: "They sold the land to the *usina*, and kicked us out." As stated earlier, the use of violence or threats in the expulsion of *moradores* from their family plots of land is well documented since the 1950s and continues to occur. For example, *usinas* may send security guards to harass and intimidate residents whose land they want for



Figure 7: Mestre Antônio Alves at his home in 2011

planting cane. Ronaldo Souza of Maracatu Estrela Brilhante told me of a string of burglaries of workers' houses several years ago on a plantation surrounded by *usina* territory.

In the rural countryside, we don't have thieves. What is there to steal – corn meal, some chickens? These were 'false thieves', paid by the *usina* to scare people. Then a local politician comes around, saying he heard people were having problems, and offers them a *terreno* (land on a city street to build a small house). They get themselves a new house in town, the politician gets their vote, and the *usina* gets their land.

But as the above story of Antônio Alves also demonstrates, cane workers were often dispossessed of their land not so much through a direct expulsion as through coercion, experiencing a variety of pressures until the point where attempting to hang on was no longer a feasible or appealing option. As noted by Thomas Rogers, whether or not workers now living in cities are nostalgic about the "time of the *engenhos*" is related to how they left, and workers who were forced off the *engenhos*

often reframe the experience in terms of it being a matter of individual choice and volition rather than coercion and force.²⁶

Heleno Julio dos Santos, a percussionist for Estrela Brilhante who would also frequently performs with Mestre João Paulo of Leão Misterioso, entertains no fond nostalgic thoughts for his days on the *engenho*. He grew up as a child on a few different plantations, including Engenho Lagoa Dantas, the nucleus of Nazaré described by Koster as having a bustling market in the 1810s.²⁷ He worked in sugar cane from the time he was a child, and when he married and had children he moved into a house of his own at nearby Engenho Coqueiro between the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Nazaré, working in the cane during this transition period of the 1960s through the 1980s. He told me about working all week and then going to the *barracão* or company store on Saturdays to buy bread, manioc flour, sugar and other staples. Whatever he purchased there would be deducted from his weekly pay, and if the final tally did not seem quite right, there was little a person could do about it. The workers would joke that the owner of the *barracão*, who was also the owner of the *engenho*, would take everything from them if he could, including their wives.

On one memorable occasion, he left workers at the *barracão* while he went forty kilometers away to Carpina to buy supplies for the store. People waited, and continued waiting, but the owner did not return until seven in the evening. He had changed his plans about Carpina and went to Recife instead to take in a soccer game. They asked about the promised groceries. He told them he had brought nothing back to sell, and that they would have to come back the following day.

Heleno said that in those days the *usinas* would continue to mill cane well into the wet season, even up through June and the São João festivities. One afternoon, he was at his father's

²⁶ Rogers, *ibid.*, p. 173

²⁷ Koster, Henry. 1816. *Travels in Brazil*. Reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966.

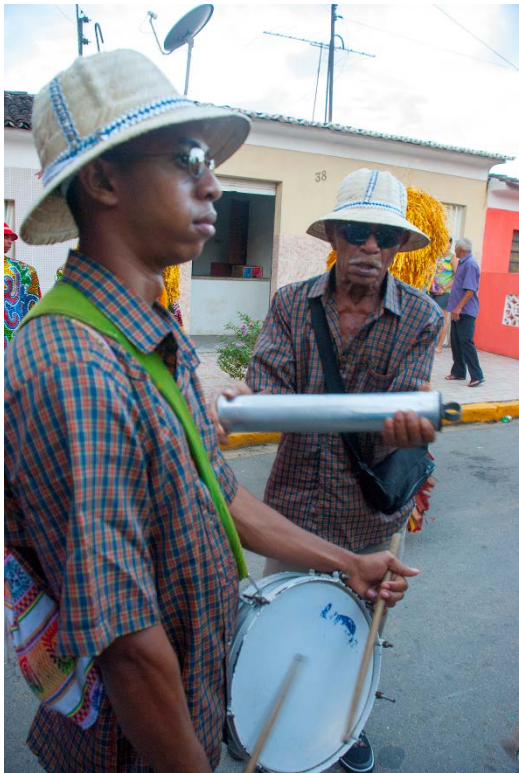


Figure 8: Lilo and his grandfather Heleno (top, bottom left), Biu Porfiro and Biu Rosi (bottom right) of Estrela Brilhante during carnival in 2012, Condado, Pernambuco

house on Engenho Coqueiro when a man passed by to draw water from the well down the road. He was a well-known *lavrador*, or sharecropper, who planted cane to be divided with the owner of Engenho Lagoa Dantas on whose land he lived.²⁸ The *lavrador* had a great deal of cane still left to cut, and he asked Heleno if he would like to make some extra money by working for him on his day off. He offered to throw in a home-cooked lunch as well. Heleno responded that he could in fact use the work and accepted the offer. When Saturday morning came, he went to the *barracão* and watched as they discounted his debts until there was hardly any pay left to spend on groceries. The store had no meat to sell that week. He bought a kilo of sugar and some bread and went home. For breakfast he helped himself to one bread roll and some coffee, left the rest for his family, and went out to work on his *lavrador* neighbor's smallholding. When he arrived there, he saw that he would be working alone since his neighbor's usual workers did not cut cane on Saturdays. At noon a young boy came with a plate of fava beans, stewed meat, and a jug of cold water, a luxurious meal compared to what he had at home. When he finished, the boy took the plate and left him with the rest of the water while he finished his work. Heleno worked until six in the evening and cut four hundred bundles of sugar cane.

He then went to the farmer's house to settle accounts for the day's work. The *lavrador*'s wife was preparing food in the kitchen, saw Heleno approach, and asked if he was hungry. She fixed him a plate of *macaxeira* or boiled manioc with stewed beef, and told him to sit outside in the shadows where the *lavrador* wouldn't see him. "He already gave you lunch," she told Heleno, "and he doesn't provide dinner too." Afterwards, Heleno came inside the house to settle their business. The *lavrador* asked his wife if she had given Heleno dinner, and she answered in the negative. "Here then," he said, feeling merciful, and offered Heleno a few pieces of hardened

²⁸ Engenho Lagoa Dantas is recognized as having the original *povoado* or settlement that became Nazaré da Mata. It can be found about a quarter mile from the current entrance to Nazaré on highway BR 408.

bread left over from their meal. Heleno accepted in spite of his stomach full of *macaxeira*, to keep up appearances. He took his pay, and headed into town on foot to find any kind of shop still open for business at that hour to buy groceries for his house, where he knew the cupboard was empty. He bought everything he could on the money he had earned, hoping it would be enough to make it through the week without having to buy a single thing from the company store on the *engenho*.

Listening to Heleno tell his story, I thought about how it contrasted with what Pedro told me about his idyllic time living on Engenho Bringas. I reflected how the characterization of those who suffered and struggled to get by on the *engenhos* as “lazy” was profoundly unfair. Yet in spite of his judgmental framing of the problem, Pedro’s statement touched on a somber truth: by not working their own garden plots, for whatever variety of reasons, *moradores* ended up perpetuating a cycle of debt and impoverishment that was difficult to break.

The breaking point for Heleno was not long in coming. By the late 1970s his labor was already being contracted out to Usina Barra and Usina Aliança, to which Engenho Coqueiro was now a cane supplier. Yet once again it was not directly the *usinas* per se but rather a conflict with the *feitor* or field supervisor of the *engenho* in 1979 that led to him ultimately leaving. “I lost twenty years of service to that *engenho*,” Heleno told me.

It was the administrator... We had a heated discussion, and he threatened to hit me, and I told him to go ahead. I said, ‘Look here, on this earth I only know one father, I’ve never known two fathers in this world. And another thing, I never disrespected anybody here, I respect people and treat people well. But am I supposed to pay for somebody else’s mistakes [on the job]?’

I wanted to talk to him about it somewhere else, where there weren’t so many people hanging around. I wanted to explain to him how you can complain to a person about something on your mind without being insulting to them. We can’t have a conversation? Isn’t that what it comes down to? We couldn’t have talked? But to stand

there criticizing me with insults? No, uh-uh. Not with me, you won't. If I am wrong about something, and you show up humiliating me and talking down to me, "You did this, and this, and this," do you think that's right? I have to consider that maybe I was wrong or made mistakes. But you open your mouth and right away threaten to beat me? Do I look like your son? I'm not your child, man.

For this I lost twenty years. And I said more, I said, "And another thing, I'm leaving here, I'm done. Because when I started here, I arrived as a human being, and I plan to leave like a human being."

He went to talk to his union representative about the problem and was told that if he quit, he was not entitled to any benefits or compensation.²⁹ "I quit and I'd quit again. I'll never go back there. Fine, let him keep it. He can get richer, while I stay poor, because I've never been rich." The vividness with which Heleno recounted these episodes to me, the degree to which events from thirty years ago had been etched into his memory, was stunning. He told how it was at this time that he moved into the house we were talking in right then, which he built himself in the neighborhood Paraíso, or Paradise, located on the western edge of Nazaré where the steep unpaved streets can only be navigated safely on foot. He continued for a time contracting as a cane cutter for Usina Aliança and Usina Barra, but soon managed to find a job in Recife for a large supermarket chain, Bom Preço. Although he spent most of the week away from home, this job offered him a little more security and better working conditions. He also traveled a little, with the job sending him to work periodically in the neighboring states of Ceará and Alagoas. "Everything good that happened in my life, happened after I moved here to Nazaré. I only wish I had done it sooner, because maybe I would have learned a trade or something useful."

²⁹ Since the 1960s, sugarcane workers in Pernambuco have been organized under the FETAPE union. (Federação dos Trabalhadores Agrícolas de Pernambuco). For more on labor relations in the Zona da Mata see Pereira (1997), Rufino (2007), and Rogers (2010).

Memories of these times of hardship and anguish on the *engenhos*, followed by marginality after the transition to living in the towns and cities, proliferate in the song-poetry of maracatu. In particular the mestre-poets age forty and above during the time of my fieldwork had all worked in the cane fields beginning at a young age, and eventually moved into the towns. Consider the following verses from Barachinha and João Paulo:

<i>Brasil onde engana</i>	<i>Brazil, you have wronged</i>
<i>Trabalhador camponês</i>	<i>The peasant worker</i>
<i>Que luta de seis a seis</i>	<i>That works from six to six</i>
<i>Limpendo, e cortando cana</i>	<i>Cleaning and cutting sugarcane</i>
<i>Para no fim de semana</i>	<i>So that at the end of the week</i>
<i>Ganhar cinquenta reais (2x)</i>	<i>He earns fifty reais (2x)</i>
<i>Pra dar pra comprar o gás</i>	<i>Just enough to buy the cooking gas</i>
<i>Pagar água e energia</i>	<i>Pay the water and electricity</i>
<i>Que o pobre vive hoje em dia</i>	<i>See how today the poor man lives</i>
<i>Sacrificado demais</i>	<i>So sacrificed</i>

“Problemas atuais,” Mestre Barachinha and Mestre Antonio Roberto, 2006

<i>Mais de cem anos passaram</i>	<i>More than a hundred years have passed</i>
<i>Que houve abolição</i>	<i>Since there was abolition</i>
<i>O fim de escravidão</i>	<i>The end of slavery</i>
<i>Mas quase nada mudaram</i>	<i>But almost nothing has changed</i>
<i>Por liberdade esperaram</i>	<i>They waited for freedom</i>
<i>A terra pra trabalhar nela (2x)</i>	<i>And land to work on. (2x)</i>
<i>Quem lutou parou na cela</i>	<i>Those who fought ended in a cell</i>
<i>Muito recebera bala</i>	<i>Many took a bullet</i>
<i>Trocar o tronco e a senzala</i>	<i>To exchange the whipping post and slave quarters</i>
<i>Pela cadeia ou favela</i>	<i>For the jail or a slum.</i>

- “Se Eu Pudesse Eu Não Via,” Mestre João Paulo de Maracatu Leão Misterioso, 2011

This poetry shows an acute sense of the tensions and contradictions found in regional and national histories of the countryside, incisively pinpointing in a handful of lines the essence of social processes that have required thousands of pages from professional historians. João Paulo

extrapolated on his verses in a conversation with me: without a genuine agrarian reform, he said, the condition of the people still working in sugar cane today is tantamount to slavery. These poets are singing from the position of men who have made it off those plantations, drawing upon their own life experiences in solidarity with those in their public who are still working in the fields. While the complicated feelings toward their rural past may not fit comfortably into a nostalgic framework, they also do not harbor any illusions about their “freedom” in the cities.

Urbanization, Limited Mobility and the Contraction of Space

Sérgio Leite Lopes has persuasively argued that the *usina* system introduced a more rigid class structure among workers themselves, as it created new opportunities for mobility into skilled labor and administrative positions within the *usina* hierarchy, as well as new distinctions between skilled and unskilled labor.³⁰ It is not unreasonable to assume that these new ways of relating to one another in the workplace also spilled over into the outlying *engenho* plantations that they contracted as suppliers, as suggested by Heleno’s story. Many of the skilled occupations on *usinas*, such as those involved in coordinating the *moagem* (milling) and refinement process, had existed at the local level of *engenhos* as well, albeit in a different form. These positions also provided a degree of limited mobility for some workers. There is some evidence that members of such a “rural middle class” played a role in the formation and sustenance of *maracatus*, investing some money in starting up a group and drawing on their status and daily contact with the community to attract members.

³⁰ Lopes, José Sérgio Leite. 1978. *O vapor do diabo: o trabalho dos operários do açúcar*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2nd Edition.



Figure 9: Mestre João Paulo, owner of Leão Misterioso and "The Pope of Maracatu" (top) and his cousin Mestre Barachinha (bottom)

Mestre Antônio Baracho of Nazaré had been a cane cutter before eventually working his way up through technical positions to become the *mestre de Açúcar* or “sugar master” in the boiling house of Engenho Santa Fé. He founded Maracatu Leão Brasileiro on that *engenho* and is one of the area’s most remembered poet-singers from his generation, in spite of having relocated to Recife in the 1960s where he founded another maracatu and sang *ciranda*, and passing away in the late 1970s. Several original founders of maracatus are said to have been *caminhoneiros* or truck drivers for the *usinas*, who put aside their earnings to invest in starting up the groups. This has also been the case with more recent founding of maracatus like Estrela Brilhante, founded in 2001 by Trigueiro, a truck driver for Usina Barra, or Leão da Mata Norte of Tracunhaém, founded by a married couple who had saved money in their respective jobs as a bus driver and a bar owner. Mestre Batista, the founder of the region’s most famous group of *cavalo-marinho* (the Pernambucan variant of *bumba-meu-boi*) near the town of Condado, also occupied this in-between socioeconomic space. Batista negotiated the hierarchy within the *usina* to work a variety of occupations to advance his social standing: he became an administrator and a *feitor* (the same kind of field supervisor who provoked Heleno into quitting), worked as a labor contractor for the *usina* (*empreiteiro*), was a small farmer who ground and sold cane to the *usina*, ran a side operation of raising and slaughtering cattle on small scale for the local market, and worked for ten years as a policeman.³¹

Migrants to Recife and its immediate suburbs may not have been able to rise up in the class system, but they brought their rural ways of spending leisure time in creating music and commemorating carnival and São João (Midsummer’s Eve). They also founded maracatus. At

³¹ Murphy, John Patrick. 1994. "Performing a Moral Vision: An Ethnography of Cavalo-Marinho, a Brazilian Musical Drama." PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1994.

least two of those groups, Almirante do Forte and Maracatu Indiano, were forced to transform themselves into the urban style of Maracatu Nação at the urging of the Carnival Federation of Pernambuco in order to participate in the city's official carnival parades and competitions.³² Cruzeiro do Forte was also founded by a migrant from Nazaré in 1928 in Casa Amarela, a working-class neighborhood in Recife. Today it is often criticized by *maracatuzeiros* from the interior for having a style more in line with urban *maracatu nação* than with rural *baque solto*.³³ Although there is documentation of these Recife carnival societies started by migrants from the interior, we know little about the potential influence of those experiences on people who went back. The phenomenon of circular migration from the interior to Recife and back again between the 1940s and the 1960s, and especially its influence on the artistic practices on those living in the area around Nazaré, appears to be understudied in the literature.

Maracatu becomes "rural maracatu" just as the countryside was shrinking, and it is suggestive that the relatively small number of people who were able to advance their socioeconomic station in life during this period may have played roles as intermediaries, mobilizing rural workers into carnival societies while positioning those groups in ways that engaged the broader public. New groups were formed in Recife by migrants who had previously participated in maracatu and related *brinquedos* or pass-times in the interior, while in the interior itself the movement of people pushed out of the countryside and into the towns resulted in further cross-fertilization of ideas and traditions.

The municipality of Nazare has been subdivided repeatedly since it first gained legal emancipation and autonomy from the town of Igarassú in 1833. Many of the *povoamentos* or

³² Benjamin, Roberto and Maria Alice Amorim, 2002. *Carnaval: cortejos e improvisos*. Recife: Prefeitura do Recife, Secretaria de Cultura, Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife.

³³ Rural maracatu has in fact been discriminated against in concrete ways over its differences from the better-known, older *maracatu nação*. The different genealogies of these two genres is explored further in Chapter 2.

settlements linked to area *engenhos*, and which are now towns in their own right, had previously been districts under Nazaré's administration, giving the city's contemporary renown and self-identification as "the Land of Maracatu" a fairly solid historical basis. Settlements that broke off from Nazaré and became separate towns include Buenos Aires, Vicência, Aliança, Carpina, and Tracunhaém. The growth of these districts into town centers reflects the trend towards an outflow of rural migrants leaving their land on the *engenhos*. Although the shifting municipal boundaries create difficulties for demographic analysis, some general propositions about migration and urbanization can be made using census data.

Nazaré saw an exponential increase in urbanization during the middle of the twentieth century. Following the official census figures, the municipality of Nazaré shifted from being 83% rural in 1940 (the first census to distinguish between rural and urban), to just under 40% by 1980. Similar rates of urbanization were reported for the nearby towns of Vicência and Aliança, while Carpina to the southwest and Goiana to the northeast – two cities which are today considerably larger than Nazaré – were classified in 1950 as almost evenly split between rural and urban.³⁴ A significant number of Nazarenos were also relocating to Recife. Towns like Nazaré, São Lourenço, Timbaúba, and Paudalho were the main sources in the Mata Norte of an influx of labor into Recife, with Nazaré demonstrating an index of eleven per one thousand inhabitants migrating annually at this time.³⁵ The main motivation for migration into Recife was employment, as the small towns were unprepared to sufficiently accommodate new displaced arrivals from the countryside looking for work.³⁶

³⁴ Lacerda de Melo, Mário. 1961. *As migrações para o Recife (Volume 1): estudo geográfico*. Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais. Vol. 1, Recife: Ministério da Educação e Cultura

³⁵ *ibid*

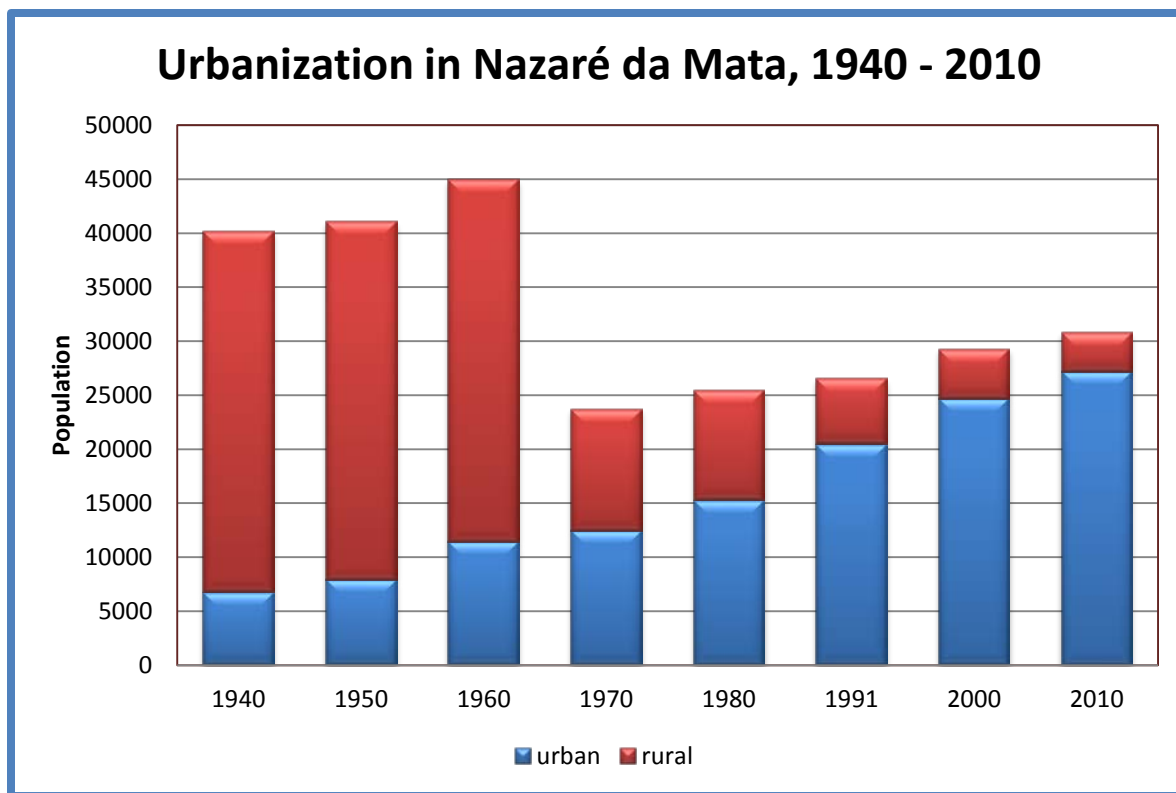
³⁶ Cruz, Levy. 1961. *As migrações para o Recife (Volume 4): caracterização social*. Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais. Recife: Ministério da Educação e Cultura

The collected census data on migration gives an incomplete portrait when we consider the difficulty of tracking the movements of those engaged in part time or occasional labor, including clandestine and undocumented workers.³⁷ A majority of my informants aged sixty and older had spent at least a portion of this period as manual laborers in Recife during the week, with some type of accommodation on or near their job site. They maintained a permanent residence in the interior, even if they only saw their home in Nazaré one or two days on the weekends. In addition, most if not all of these informants were employed without official work cards, as clandestine workers. Although these older informants are describing work experiences that span the 1960s to the 1980s, this pattern of spending the majority of their time in Recife while “residing” in a town in the interior continues today among many in the maracatu community. It is not an unreasonable assumption that the pattern also existed to some degree prior to the 1960s. The actual number of Nazarenos who had either moved to Recife or were spending a significant amount of their time there, particularly former agricultural workers with no work papers, is likely to have been higher than the official data suggests.

The documentary record prior to the 1960s has very little to offer regarding rural maracatu in the municipality. Of the two newspapers that existed in Nazaré, *A Gazeta* and *A Voz de Nazaré*, only the latter makes any mention of the tradition in the 1930s.³⁸ It is mentioned briefly in the annual pre-carnival column, in one issue where it is referred to generically along with other popular carnival clubs, *blocos*, and *caboclinhos* in anticipation for the “innumerable” entertainments that

³⁷ Census data clearly shows an inversion of the rural and urban populations, as shown in Figure 10. The dramatic drop between 1960 and 1970 is due to Lei Estadual no. 4951 which turned the districts of Tracunhaém and Buenos Aires into autonomous municipalities in 1963, drastically diminishing Nazaré’s territory and moving forty-six sugar engenhos out of its administrative area (Pedrosa: 1983).

³⁸ The *Gazeta* was a semi-official publication of the Catholic diocese that essentially ignored popular carnival activities in general. Thus it is unsurprising to find no mention of maracatu in its pages.



Total 1940	Urban	Rural	Total 1950	Urban	Rural	Total 1960	Urban	Rural	Total 1970	Urban	Rural
40,208	6,752	33,456	41,086	7,949	33,137	44,943	11,440	33,503	23,742	12,432	11,310

Total 1980	Urban	Rural	Total 1991	Urban	Rural	Total 2000	Urban	Rural	Total 2010	Urban	Rural
25,448	15,282	10,166	26,539	20,485	6,054	29,254	24,704	4,550	30,782	27,177	3,605

Source: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), 2013

Figure 10: Urbanization in Nazaré da Mata, 1940-2010.

will pass through the town's main plaza during carnival. While maracatu receives a nonspecific reference in passing, the comedic theatre group of *pastoril* receives two paragraphs identifying all the actors and musicians by name.³⁹ The following week, a group of *caboclinhos* are identified by their owner, a *boi de carnaval* had its personages identified by member, and one maracatu is identified by its *mestre*. It is apparent from these reports that *cultura popular* was something that interested the residents of the town in a broad sense at that time, including those who were literate and read the town's newspapers, but maracatu was just one among many manifestations of rural expressive culture – Nazaré had not yet become “The Land of Maracatu.”

No reference is made to the regal names known to have been common by the 1950s - such as those prefixed with *leão*, *estrela*, or *cambinda* – but are rather attached to the names of individuals or places.⁴⁰ It is in acts of naming that these groups differentiate themselves not only from each other but from the plurality of carnival groups and expressions of *cultura popular* that had similar roots, such as those which artist and scholar Mario de Andrade identified as an aggregate of “dramatic dances,” theatrical and ritualized forms originating in the colonial period.⁴¹ Through successive waves of migration to Recife and back again, individuals who had come into contact with migrants from elsewhere in the interior or with other segments of the urban poor would have brought back new ideas that were incorporated into their *cultura popular* activities. Since elements of other types of recreation and *cultura popular* practiced by migrants from the interior (different styles of “folk” religiosity, musical instruments, and carnival personages and figures) are known to have been incorporated into *maracatu rural*, the same may hold true for the style of naming their groups. The majestic names of urban *maracatu nação*, often referencing

³⁹ January 19, 1935. “Columna carnavalesca.” A Voz de Nazareth. Nazaré da Mata.

⁴⁰ January 26, 1935, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Further discussion of Andrade and the “dramatic dance” concept is found in chapter two, pages 73-78

animals foreign to Brazil and mischaracterized as “totemistic” by Andrade, have their origins in the coronation ceremonies of the Kings of The Congo, a slave practice conducted in various regions of Brazil in which lineages or clans of African leadership were ritually recognized.⁴²

At least two rural maracatus in the region around Nazaré seem to have had formal names by the 1930s – Cambinda Brasileira of Engenho Cumbe (Nazaré) and Cambidinha Brasileira of Engenho São Pedro (Araçoiaba). However, my interviews with *mestres*, musicians, and *caboclos* with recollections of maracatu from the 1950s to the 1970s demonstrate that most people identified a maracatu by its location on a particular *engenho* or its identification with a particular *mestre* or owner. When asked, these informants might respond that a given maracatu “had no name.” In some cases, groups might have called themselves by a name that never proliferated through common usage. Such is the case with the maracatu founded by Mestre Baracho, which had the formal name of Leão Brasileiro but today is remembered more commonly as the maracatu “of Engenho Santa Fé” or “of Baracho.” The adoption of more poetic and even mystical names like “Shining Star” and “Mysterious Lion” are a way of transcending the specificities that tied maracatus to single individuals and places, with all the sedimented layers of remembrance they contained.

Although maracatu was created on the *engenhos*, the people creating it and giving it the form in which we would recognize it today were already mobile, leaving the countryside by necessity or choice and engaging with new ways of relating to the world and each other. All of my informants who contributed to this chapter participated in one or more manifestations of *cultura popular* prior to beginning in maracatu, such as *caboclinhos*, *ciranda*, *blocos rurais*, *fandango* or *bumba-meu-boi*. With the rich variety of *cultura popular* forms of expression

⁴² These coronation ceremonies are also discussed at length in chapter two.

available to them, how did maracatu come to occupy such a privileged space and become the pass-time of preference for so many? As maracatu has come to dominate the field in Nazaré, successive generations are less likely to have had experiences as direct participants in these other art forms. For maracatuzeiros over the age of forty, however, familiarity with these forms as well as past participation is still very common. The consolidation of maracatu as the dominant form of cultural expression among both the rural and urban poor in Nazaré is concurrent with the development of their identity as a group and social class in relation to the contexts in which they now performed it, in the borderline spaces and peripheries of the towns and cities.

Carnival in the time of the *engenhos*

Although suggestive of a cultural and class bias, it is perhaps not surprising that maracatu was nearly invisible to the carnival columnist at *Voz de Nazaré*. At that time and for several decades to come, maracatu was performed mostly on the sugar *engenhos* rather than in the towns, and many aspects of it must have appeared arcane and shrouded in mystery to anyone not living there. As noted above, maracatuzeiros emphasize a portrait of an exhausting carnival, three days spent traveling on foot from plantation to plantation and occasionally performing in the public square of a town.⁴³ The group would camp out in the flour mill or *casa de farinha* at whatever *engenho* they ended up at by nightfall, and if lucky they might receive some kind of meal from their hosts. Most of the time, however, the group went hungry, sometimes fishing or subsisting

⁴³ I was frustrated in my attempt to calculate an actual distance for a typical day of carnival in this era. The distances between municipalities using an old unpaved access road on the *engenhos* (*estrada de barro*) is in fact significantly shorter than the current paved roads and highways connecting the small towns, for which data is readily available. Nevertheless these sojourns on foot are still impressive for those familiar with the region.

on unripe mangos or oranges found along the way. The maracatus would go from door to door performing on the villas and *povoamentos* in the countryside, customarily asking for a small donation. One of the most famous personages of a maracatu is the Catita, a clownish figure played by a man in drag and in blackface who is supposed to be both an ex-slave and a “lost woman.” She is always seen carrying a baby doll and either a net or a basket, and runs out in front of the maracatu, yelling and making a scene to call attention to the group as they make their way down the road. While the maracatu was dancing and singing in front of the house, it was a normal occurrence for the Catita to sneak into the kitchen through the back door and steal whatever was lying around, sometimes including food still inside a frying pan, and leave with it all stashed away in her net. Some *caboclos* endured these sojourns with the aid of a stimulant and hallucinogenic beverage known as *azougue*, a mixture of cachaça infused with gunpowder. This practice has for the most part died out completely, considered by most *caboclos* as too dangerous and as something “old fashioned,” but is commemorated as a symbol of the ferocity and toughness of the past.

One practice that has persisted to the present day is the series of ritual taboos and preparations observed by the *caboclo* up to and during carnival. *Caboclos* were expected to observe a fifteen-day period of sexual abstinence before carnival, and guarded against any woman touching their costumes.⁴⁴ In the days immediately preceding carnival, the *caboclo* would cook his own food (very much still a gendered task in the northeast) because of ritual prohibitions on certain foods as well as the risk of spiritual contamination in allowing others to handle it. He would undergo a ceremony of ritual purification in a *terreiro* or temple of *umbanda*, *catimbó*, or *jurema*, for protection during the three days of carnival, when a person was considered particularly

⁴⁴ More than one older *caboclo* told me of the danger of simply coming into any contact, however remote, with a woman’s genitalia, for example by not allowing a woman to step across him if he was seated in the ground or in a chair because it would *enguiçar* or curse him.

open to the spirit world. Invoking the protection of a patron saint or orixá, he might be given a prayer (*oração*) or amulet (*patuá*) to recite or keep near his body. Warrior saints or orixás, especially Ogun / St. George, were and still are especially venerated.⁴⁵ Certain objects in the caboclo's costume may receive a cleansing through tobacco smoke or *defumação*. Some objects, like the white carnation (*cravo*) held between the teeth while marching, or the wooden lance, may be blessed or enchanted and stored in the sanctuary of a *pai* or *mãe de santo* for a period leading up to carnival. A taboo surrounds discussing the precise nature of the *cravo*, but in general terms it serves to reinforce the ritual sealing of the body against malicious or unpredictable energies.⁴⁶ Away from carnival the same function is served by a sprig of *arruda* or rue plant in the mouth, which is also used generally to ward off the evil eye. Some of the ornamentation of the carnival costume formerly served the same defensive purpose, such as the use of small round mirrors to reflect back negative energies onto anyone who bore ill will towards the *caboclo*. Once the body and spirit are sealed against disrupting and intrusive influences, the *caboclo* was not to bathe during the three days of carnival festivities so as not to risk "opening" the body to malign energies. This particular rule and many of the others are often ignored today.

The maracatus from the *engenhos* would come through the central plazas of the towns in the interior and present themselves at the *palanque* or staging area with the other carnival groups. However none of my interlocutors from the interior of the Mata Norte discussed in this chapter ever performed at Recife's carnival until the late 1980s. Those groups of maracatu de baque solto

⁴⁵ Bonald Neto, in a short 1976 article on a single maracatu located close to Recife, makes a generalized claim that all *caboclos de lança* are children of Ogun. Much of the material presented in that article is somewhat suspect. Ogun/St.George does in fact hold pride of place and is likely the most predominant entity, but other warrior-saints like Santo Expedito are also popular.

⁴⁶ Johnson, Paul C. 2002. *Secrets, gossip, and gods: the transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*. Oxford ; New York, Oxford University Press.

founded in Recife and its suburbs by migrants, however, struggled with discrimination, labeled as “inauthentic” and prohibited for a time in the 1970s from participating in the city’s carnival commemorations. These questions of authenticity, comparisons with the urban and more strongly African *maracatu nação*, and of traditions invented and maintained, are taken up again in the second chapter.

“Sem Briga, Sem Confusão / With no fighting and no confusion”

The time of maracatu on the *engenhos*, lasting through the 1960s and into the 70s, was famous for being punctuated by outbreaks of fighting during the sambadas and ensaios, or between rival groups during carnival. Maracatus are often metaphorically described as forming a type of army in the imagery of the sung poetry. The most common occurrence of conflict during carnival typically involved abrogating the ritual of crossing the banners or pennants (*bandeiras*) carried by each maracatu. In the days when maracatus traveled on foot from one *engenho* to another, it was customary to cross the *bandeiras* as a form of acknowledgement and signal of peace; to refuse to do so was a show of disrespect and a fight would likely ensue, with one of the objectives being to tear a hole in to rival group’s banner. The violence of such fights has passed on into myth, with one particular crossroads outside a chapel on Engenho Brindas having allegedly been the site of a great many such battles and even deaths. According to maracatu lore, the cemetery of this chapel is the resting place of *caboclos* who perished in these confrontations. My own impression, also expressed by some of my informants, is that these stories tend towards embellishment and

exaggeration, but form an important part of maracatu's own internal folklore system, in the sense used by Alan Dundes.⁴⁷ The warrior figure of the *caboclo de lança* is central to this self-representation.

Older generations also often recall such fights and violence not only to illustrate the fierce caboclo's bravura, but also to highlight how rough things could get on the *engenhos*, while younger maracatuzeiros will repeat them when talking about how life has changed for the better. In the 1990s the Maracatu Association of Pernambuco introduced sanctions against fighting between maracatu groups, expelling for two years any maracatu whose members violate these rules, during which time they cannot participate in officially-sponsored carnival events and after which they may return on a probationary footing.⁴⁸ In doing so, the Association has helped not only to temper some of the inter-group rivalries, but also brought maracatu further into the discourse of contemporary civil society. Similar to samba schools in Rio, rivalries between groups are now channeled into the orderly competition that occurs every carnival in Recife, where groups compete for classification into categories and receive *prêmios* or financial awards for top placement. Hence these stories of unruly, quarrelsome *caboclos* during the time of the *engenhos* serve as a performative way to invoke maracatu's untamed essence, remembering a time when the *guerreiro* answered to nobody and commemorated carnival in any way they saw fit, including brawling.

As might be expected, these maracatuzeiros did in fact have to answer for themselves if violence broke out on the *engenhos*. It was not uncommon for the owner of the *engenho* to break up a fight (or more precisely, command someone else to break it up). If the instigators were workers on his own *engenho*, he might personally hand one or both of them over to the local police

⁴⁷ Dundes, Alan. (1966). "The American Concept of Folklore." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3(3): 226-249.

⁴⁸ The degree to which "official" carnival has displaced more informal celebrations of it (see chapter six) means a de facto exclusion from carnival for groups that violate this rule.

station, telling the authorities to “lock him up for a few days or a week, when I need him again I’ll send someone to get him.” If one of the responsible parties was a worker on a different plantation, he would contact the owner of that *engenho* to come by and “have a conversation” about the situation.⁴⁹ Social control and punishment for disorder on the *engenhos* was handled between colleagues of the old sugar aristocracy well into the middle twentieth century, with the local police acting as an auxiliary to their power. Perhaps that partially explains why, when a fight would break out, someone would quickly make it a point to extinguish the coal-burning lamps or *carbureto* that lit the maracatu festivities, allowing the chaos to unfold in darkness.

The close relationship between the *engenho* elites and local authorities extended to the *usinas* as well, an unsurprising fact given how many *usineiros* have also held political office.⁵⁰ The owner of Usina São José outside of Carpina allegedly provided a *carta de fiança* to the coordinator of their local maracatu to carry during carnival, a letter stating that the owner of the plantation assumed responsibility for the maracatu. The letter was carried in the event the maracatu ran into any trouble while travelling to the different *engenhos* and towns during those three days of commemoration: the presumption being that on presenting the letter to a police officer or other authority figure just the name of the usina owner would liberate them from any hassles. This anecdote is a somewhat humorous example of the infamous Brazilian *jeitinho*, or way of working the system through personal influence or connections, but it is more symptomatic of the legacy of *coronelismo* or “bossism” that long dominated the interior of the country.⁵¹ The maracatu being supplied with an authoritative letter in this manner is also strikingly similar to the

⁴⁹ This anecdote was relayed to me by Heleno Julio

⁵⁰ Levine, Andrade, others

⁵¹ *Coronelismo*, so named because of an original link between the rural oligarchy and the National Guard, is generally understood as the network of patronage, political manipulation, and threats of coercion that allowed the landholders to maintain their traditional control over the territory of the interior in the face of attempts to reign them in during Brazil’s First Republic. The classic texts on the subject are Nunes Leal (1949) and Faoro (1957)

carta de alforria or liberation papers carried by manumitted slaves in the nineteenth century, who might be stopped at any time and asked to produce their documents for inspection.

When an altercation or fight would break out during carnival or during a *manobra* of the entire group on the *engenhos*, the *baianas* – a role filled by men dressed as women at that time – would be protected and defended by the warrior *caboclos de lança*. The role-playing or embodiment of the *baiana* figure was executed so thoroughly that these men would not defend themselves against the threat of violence, but rather needed to be shielded from harm. This opens to question the degree to which such clashes between groups were themselves a form of role-play, of ritualized violence. Yet the clashes were certainly real enough, and when occurring in the towns they would be broken up by the local police. Following the classic functionalist theory regarding how conflict can serve to maintain the social order, an argument could be made that these fights channeled the pent up aggressions of groups of men subjected to so many everyday indignities and exploitation, directing their violence horizontally at their peers rather than vertically at the overseers in open rebellion. The symbolism in the costumes of the *caboclos* – lances, hand-axes, bows and arrows – has even hyperbolically been called a reflection of the violence subjected onto the rural subaltern classes, and hence part of their repertoire of resistance.⁵² Other musical-poetic traditions in Haiti, New Orleans, Trinidad, and elsewhere in the African diaspora exhibit elements of rivalry and competition in aesthetic accomplishment and performance, and this competitive sentiment can also encompass a “battle over reputation and territory” that is potentially violent.⁵³ But these interpretive positions do not leave much room to consider alternate readings that are neither functionalist nor contingent on class struggle.

⁵² Medeiros, Roseana Borges de. 2005. *Maracatu Rural : luta de classes ou espetáculo?* Recife: Prefeitura do Recife, Secretaria de Cultura, Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife

⁵³ McAlister, Elizabeth A. 2002. *Rara! : Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

At the open rehearsals and *sambadas* of today's maracatu, *caboclos* carry large, whittled pieces of wood slightly larger than a walking cane to use in place of the heavier lance adorned with strips of fabric that are used during carnival. They swing these mock lances to and fro while the group makes its choreographed parade through the neighborhood, using them to symbolically clear the wilderness (*a mata*) and protect the tribe on its procession. When the group arrives at its destination, and the singer-poets settle in for the evening, the directorate gathers these improvised lances and puts them somewhere secure, often right at the feet of the band huddled around the *mestre* and *contra-mestre*. The *caboclos*, meanwhile, are engaged in an athletic type of dancing that is simultaneously evocative of the Brazilian dance / martial art of *capoeira*, a much less elaborate form of hip hop breakdancing, or a more amicable punk rock "mosh pit." Pantomimed fights take place between two or more *caboclos*, dancing in place with legs akimbo and arms thrust outward to ward off an opponent, who tries to break through the defenses and score an imaginary blow. These mock battles happen in a true spirit of play with much smiling and laughter, a cathartic release. It is typically men dancing with other men. Women, who make up a comparatively small percentage of participants, usually dance with other women. If someone falls, they are offered a hand getting back up. If someone is actually struck or knocked over, it is usually met with apologies and taken in stride. Although it would seem that frequent altercations might arise from such a highly physical form of play which also involves alcohol, fights and brawls are in actuality very rare.

Another type of latent violence beyond the potential for brawling was the threat of harm through magic or sorcery - *feitiço* or *catimbó*. Sebastião, a seventy-six year old carpenter and metalworker who was a *caboclo de lança* from the late 1950s until recently retiring, told me a striking story that has passed into legend among maracatuzeiros. This involved a colleague of his,

João de Monica from Engenho Ciculé who was also a caboclo de lança in the Maracatu Cambinda Brasileira. One day João de Monica was seated under a jack-fruit tree on the plantation when the wind picked up. After a particularly strong gust of wind, João vanished into thin air. When nobody could find him, his *patrão* or boss called on relatives and eventually reported him missing to the police. Over a year later João reappeared, but could not account for his whereabouts and, according to Sebastião, no longer had his wits about him. The consensus in the community was that some enemy had placed a curse on him. Friends brought João to a few healers and a *pai de santo* (including one associated with his maracatu) to break the spell, but they all refused him help for fear of contagion and of bringing about a similar fate for themselves.

Concern with protection from malevolent forces and negative energies was a frequent theme among maracatuzeiros in the past and remains so today. Those who take on the identity of the *caboclo de lança* enter a rarified world of risk and danger for which their earthly experience had already begun to prepare them. The spiritual and physical violence and battle must have been an exhilarating counterweight to the sense of dislocation and disorientation arising from the indignities of everyday life, as they assumed a mantle of power as colorful as the caboclo's sequined cape. A popular oration to Saint George reflects this well:

São Jorge, militar valoroso, que com a vossa lança abatestes e vencestes o dragão feroz, vinde em meu auxílio, nas tentações do demônio, nos perigos, nas dificuldades, nas aflições. Cobri-me com o vosso manto, ocultando-me dos meus inimigos, dos meus perseguidores. Protegido por vosso Manto, andarei por todos os caminhos, viajarei por todos os mares, de noite e de dia, e os meus inimigos não me verão, não me ouvirão, não me acompanharão. Sob a vossa proteção, não cairei, não derramarei o meu sangue, não me perderei. Assim como o Salvador esteve nove meses no seio de Nossa Senhora, assim eu estarei bem guardado e protegido, sob o vosso manto, tendo sempre São Jorge à minha frente armado de sua lança e do seu escudo. Amém.

São Jorge, valiant warrior who with your lance slew the fierce dragon, come to my assistance, against the temptations of the devil, against the dangers, the difficulties,

and the afflictions. Cover me with your mantle, hiding me from my enemies and from my persecutors. Protected by your mantle, I will walk on all paths, travel on all the seas, by night and by day, and my enemies will not see me, will not hear me, and will not follow me. Under your protection, I will not fall, I shall not spill my blood, nor will I lose my way. Like the Savior was for nine months carried inside Our Lady, thus I will be well guarded and protected, beneath your mantle, having always São Jorge in front of me armed with his lance and your shield. Amen.

The Specter of Stagnation

All of these *cultura popular* traditions that rural dwellers engaged in together alongside maracatu, like caboclinhos or *cavalo-marinho*, appear to have passed through periods of stagnation or decreased activity that may be related to the increased urbanization and changes in the rural environment where these creative activities originated. However, the dramatic statements of intellectuals about the “decadence” or disappearance of these traditions were generally overstated. A pattern of such statements exists in the folkloric and ethnographic literature referring to *cultura popular* manifestations such as the *frevo* and *maracatu nação* of Recife and its suburbs, to the rural or semi-rural groups discussed here. In the days when cinema first arrived to the sugar-cultivating region, one agronomist remarked that the traditional “old distractions” of *bumba-meu-boi*, *cavalo-marinho*, and *pastoril* showed no sign of abating.⁵⁴ Alarmist sentiments of endangerment help to mobilize and justify interventionist cultural policies aimed at “salvaging,” preserving, or rehabilitating art forms viewed as being threatened with extinction. The use of this rhetoric regarding maracatu is particularly awkward in light of the evidence that maracatu is very much a

⁵⁴ Peres, Gaspar. 1991 (1915). *A indústria assucareira em Pernambuco*. Recife: CEPE, p.47

product of modernity, and has not only survived but flourished in the changed landscapes of the countryside and small towns of the Mata Norte.

Nonetheless, these interventionist projects have often resulted in a revival of interest among the targeted communities, and increased the financial resources and opportunities for creating and sustaining cultural groups. Today Pernambuco is famous throughout Brazil for the vibrancy of its *cultura popular*, and especially for Recife and Olinda's relatively uncommercialized street carnival with its abundance of folkloric and contemporary groups offering an interactive and immersive carnival experience. That fame is also the source of one of the dynamic tensions that have shaped nearly all forms of Brazilian *cultura popular*: the containment and tailoring of "tradition" for an external audience increases in direct proportion to the amount of resources and attention received through state subsidies and other forms of patronage.⁵⁵ The interventionist policies of preservation and incentives have placed *cultura popular* in a different relationship to local and regional political and economic forces, transforming certain practices in the process, and promoting certain stereotypes about maracatu. When framed against the socioeconomic changes in the lives of rural workers, and their complicated and nuanced ways of relating to the past, these policies can also be viewed as encouraging forms of adaptation and assimilation to a dominant discourse about civilization and modernity.

Just as they are found in the song by Antonio Roberto that begins this chapter, the maracatuzeiros own stories about the "time of the engenhos" highlights the violence, disorder, and crude or rustic qualities in maracatu's past. The stories propagated by cultural elites about cultural decadence and traditions under siege reflect more about a particular construction of modernity and

⁵⁵ Care must be taken not to ignore the fact that the maracatu's own local, "internal" audience has changed in significant ways and that its form has also been "tailored" to accommodate its own constituencies. This is a core theme in chapter four.

its confrontation with those who do not fit neatly into it, and not necessarily the perspectives or values of those who “make” *cultura popular*. It is difficult to disentangle the influence that revitalization movements and incentives to cultural production have on the outlook of the *maracatuzeiros* themselves regarding abstractions such as modernity, civility, or technology and globalization. The communities from which maracatu sprang and continues to propagate have quite plainly been engaged with all of these processes for many generations. Maracatuzeiro discourse may at times mirror this elite orientation or run parallel to it, but their own internal mythology also emphasizes their tenacity and ferocity in an often hostile and dangerous world, in ways that are often elusive and unpredictable.

Conclusion: *guerreiros* and guardians

The existence of permanent or transitory migration between Recife and the towns of the interior, and the increased urbanization of those towns themselves during this same period is relevant to maracatu for several reasons. It challenges certain claims contained in representations of maracatu de baque solto created by outsiders. In stories that appear in the media every carnival season, in books of photography, and in informal works produced by people with ties to academia, maracatuzeiros are represented as the guardians of a tradition against an encroaching modernity. The maracatuzeiros of a half century ago were not inexperienced with urban life as these representations often suggest, to say nothing of their present-day descendants. The data on migration supplements my field interviews in suggesting that the rural workers practicing *maracatu de baque solto* at mid-century were already experiencing a significant degree of urbanization in their own communities in or around Nazaré, as well as frequent contact with the

city of Recife, at just the time when the term “rural maracatu” was created as a category.⁵⁶ Today in the interior, it is most commonly referred to simply as maracatu by its practitioners, with no qualifiers, and indeed one younger member of Estrela Brilhante with whom I spent three carnivals was not sure whether their style was “baque solto” or “baque virado” after one of their Recife presentations. The once-frequent conflation by outsiders between the urban tradition called “maracatu nação” and their own can also reinforce *maracatuzeiros* insistence on the distinctiveness of their own practices and their ties to a rural past. After decades of invisibility, of having been ignored or marginalized or confused with the other “distractions” of poor people, the contemporary practitioners of maracatu embrace the rural identity and its association with a particular history rooted in the culture of sugar production.

Rurality, then, becomes a separate designation just as that rural space is contracting. Although it may have been imposed from the outside, it is rearticulated from within. The rural identity encompassing the trope of “guardian of tradition” has been constructed in dynamic interaction with people from other places and different class backgrounds. It has proved to be a useful modality in the capture of resources not only for folkloric cultural productions but for financing the groups’ activities for their local publics. Still, many other facets of this identity have been fashioned out of the prejudices and biases of the small middle and upper class elites in towns like Nazaré, and of a different set of biases possessed by cultural mediators such as of folklorists, journalists, or “cultural entrepreneurs.”⁵⁷ For Brazilian elites, the rural underclass swelling the

⁵⁶ We can pinpoint precisely when that term came into usage: with the work of American anthropologist Katarina Real, who worked in Recife studying the great variety of “folkloric” carnival manifestations in the 1960s, published her monograph in 1967, and became the director of the Pernambuco Commission on Folklore. Before then, maracatu from the interior was referred to only as *maracatu de orquestra*, *maracatu do trombone*, or *maracatu de baque solto*, when it was distinguished at all from its urban counterpart. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ I use this term in place of a literal translation of “cultural producers,” a relatively new term in Brazil for those who coordinate and administer projects and events in the cultural sector.

boundaries of the towns and cities during the twentieth century represented a social problem, living links to a history they would have preferred to forget. For much of the twentieth century the rural poor were considered through the optics of social control: subjected to the campaigns of state agencies concerned with physical or mental health and hygiene, or as subjects for analysis in research concerning the links between migration, unemployment, and criminality. The way they spent their leisure time on weekends or commemorated carnival was considered a nuisance rather than a tradition worthy of celebration and preservation. What has been happening with maracatu in the last few decades has strong parallels and historical antecedents in the ways that the *blocos sujos*, the samba schools, or the Afro-Brazilian religions were repressed and even criminalized before becoming acceptable as coopted symbols of identity.⁵⁸

While there are still many *maracatuzeiros* working in sugar cane fields – usually bused in by the *usinas* from their neighborhoods in town, contracted through *empreiteiros* – a maracatu group today is likely to have just as many members who work as bricklayers, as taxi or truck drivers, or as merchants at the weekly street fairs, as well as attracting occasional middle-class participants. None of these other occupations have the same cache or cultural currency as “cane cutter” to state-subsidized arts agencies in Pernambuco, and the notion that the majority of *maracatuzeiros* still work in sugar is propagated by countless press accounts, with information provided by cultural mediators. These mediators are found in the Association of Maracatus of Pernambuco and a few unaffiliated cultural entrepreneurs who organize events and productions. When governor Eduardo Campos paid a visit to the yearly carnival maracatu festival sponsored by the Association in the city of Aliança in 2013, the news reportage described maracatu as being

⁵⁸ See Johnson 2002, Vianna 1999, Araujo 1995, Sandroni 2002 for discussions of this cooptation

made by people who are “mostly sugar-cane cutters.”⁵⁹ A detailed demographic analysis of the 118 groups of maracatu in the state has not yet been conducted, and for the reasons laid out here such a project would likely be viewed as potentially jeopardizing maracatu’s position in the cultural marketplace.

But the fixation about a causal link between sugar and maracatu also implies something else: that the preservation of cultural tradition requires maintaining the status quo and class structure in which it was birthed. Any elite celebration of the creativity and mystery of a “rural” cultural form like maracatu, even if framed as resistance, can also be a means of mystification. In order to maintain legitimacy, cultural hegemony must allow for *some* contestation, but always with proscribed limits.⁶⁰ Envisioning a future with a radically different social order, a redistribution of wealth and land, or parity of participation in democratic governance – all touchstones of Northeastern peasant mobilization between the 1940s and 60s, and again from the 1980s to the present – would by this nostalgic logic also plant the seeds of culture loss.

The “backwardness” of peasants has been a key preoccupation since the racial pessimism of the nineteenth century, when some social theorists viewed miscegenation as a form of social pollution and a weight holding back the progress of the nation. The stigmatization and inequality of the *mestiço* populations of the interior fed notions of “two Brazils” when highlighted by dramatic events in “the backlands” like the standoff between the army and millenarian peasants at Canudos ending in a massacre. In the 1930s, Gilberto Freyre’s writings rearticulated the popularly held notion that “whitening” the country through race mixing held the key to the nation’s

⁵⁹ "Eduardo Campos Acompanha Maracatus Em Aliança." Diário de Pernambuco, February 12, 2013. Accessed at http://www.diariodepernambuco.com.br/app/outros/tags/carnaval/46,69,46,14/2013/02/12/interna_politica,423000/eduardo-campos-acompanha-maracatus-em-alianca.shtm

⁶⁰ Lears, T. Jackson. 1985. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities." The American Historical Review 90(3): 567-593.

redemption. He promoted the notion that the “mixture of the three races” was in fact the cornerstone of the Brazilian peoples’ unique character, their strengths as well as their weaknesses, while a wave of contemporary folklore studies into *cultura popular* contributed to a reappraisal of “the folk’s” contribution to the nation. A half century later, the relationship of elites to *cultura popular* again became salient as “the folk” were championed by both revolutionary and conservative political actors. In the post-dictatorship Pernambuco of the 1990s, when maracatu began to reap the results of an efflorescence and revitalization begun in the previous decade, the creators of *cultura popular* became the objects of curiosity and attention and found themselves in a strategic, if ambiguous, position of prestige. Maracatu’s origins, its development, and its future are continually contested and reconstructed. Rather than an either/or choice between a hegemonic or “resistant nostalgia,” the stories told by maracatuzeiros draw from both.⁶¹ When Mestre Antônio Roberto sings, “That modernity comes, extinguishing the past,” there is a sense of both lament and relief, of hardships that should not be preserved but also cannot be forgotten.

⁶¹ Green, Garth. L. 2007. Authenticity, Commerce, and Nostalgia in the Trinidad Carnival. [Trinidad carnival: the cultural politics of a transnational festival](#)

Chapter 2:

Institutions and the Categories of *Cultura Popular*

Introduction: the distancing of cousins, *nação* versus *baque solto*

How did rural maracatu, whose beginnings are now placed by contemporary research in the first decades of the twentieth century, evade scholarly attention for so long? What role has the work of folklorists and the analytical categories they propagated played in the reevaluation and popularization of it today? The northeast of Brazil had long been of particular interest to folklore researchers. How is it that modernist author Mário de Andrade - with his encyclopedic knowledge of *cultura popular*, his position as coordinator of the Mission for Folkloric Research to the Northeast in 1938, and all the resources at his disposal in the form of field researchers, correspondents, contacts in academia and the arts – did not make a single mention of *maracatu de baque solto* in any of his works? Today the Brazilian state, by way of institutions established for the preservation and propagation of *cultura popular* and immaterial patrimony, has officially validated popular memory through the recognition of two different maracatus founded in the second decade of the century in the Mata Norte region, and several more that were founded in Recife suburbs during the 1920 and 30s. What explains maracatu's absence from the early literature? What is the significance of its invisibility to the modernist vision that sought to ground a new aesthetic in “traditional” art forms? How does its “discovery” since the 1990s reflected changing conceptions and attitudes about mixture and hybridity in Brazilian culture?

Prior to recent research, the only references to an existing, vibrant practice of maracatu in the countryside were indirect, such as those which appear in the monograph of composer and musicologist César Guerra-Peixe.¹ This reflects more about an unfamiliarity and disinterest in the creativity of the rural poor by Recife's urban intellectuals more than it does empirical realities in the countryside. In contrast, an urban expressive form known as *maracatu nação* had become quite celebrated for its elaborate carnival procession and links to the Afro-Brazilian *xangô* religion. During the first half of the twentieth century, *maracatu nação* was second only to frevo as the most heralded and uniquely Pernambucan carnival tradition. The societies of “loose-beat” or *baque solto* maracatu formed by migrants from the interior were largely dismissed as an inferior degeneration. These groups were quite different in appearance and sound. They were without formal links to the *xangô* temples, but instead had roots in the more dispersed and informal practices of *catimbó* and *jurema*, neo-indigenous cults that share some elements with Umbanda. Was rural maracatu really a new, recent permutation of the older (or as some would have it, ancient) tradition of *nação* style maracatu, or a completely different cultural expression with similar roots, its similarities viewed as imitation, and its differences dismissed as novelty and corruption?

The origins of the word “maracatu,” found originally only in the northeast part of Brazil, are obscure. Mário de Andrade speculated that the term might be linked to the indigenous word *marará*, the shaker instrument of the same name in English. He also gave a different, more poetic hypothesis based on Tupi etymology, drawn from the words “marã” (fight, disorder) and “catu” (beautiful): “the beautiful war, the pretty fight, an ornamental fight, invoking the royal court,

¹ I say “indirect” here because Guerra-Peixe wrote only about the *baque solto* groups that he encountered in the peripheral neighborhoods of Recife, and not the countryside. c.f. Guerra-Peixe, César. 1955 (1980) *Maracatus do Recife*. Coleção Recife. 2a ed. São Paulo: Irmãos Vitale

festive but war-like. Because Maracatu also preserves the subtext of war.”² What is certain is that the “nação” or nation style of maracatu found in Recife is widely considered to have derived from the coronation ceremonies conducted by the black lay brotherhoods of Our Lady of the Rosary, dating back to the colonial era. The earliest known written account of a maracatu in the *baque solto* or rural style was published in a book about Recife by Gilberto Freyre in 1934, where its name was listed alongside others of the “nação” (nation) or *baque virado* style without making any distinctions among them.³ Anthropologists and sociologists who wrote extensively about Northeastern folklore and *cultura popular*, like Arthur Ramos and Roger Bastide, do not mention rural maracatu at all, nor does the folkloric work of Mário de Andrade or Luís da Câmara Cascudo⁴, nor the critical writings of modernist-regionalist poet Ascenso Ferreira.⁵ Bastide, a French transplant and sociologist working at the University of São Paulo from 1937 to 1954, misidentified a *caboclo de lança* of maracatu as being part of a *caboclinhos* group.⁶ A memoir about Recife by novelist Mário Sette, published a few years earlier than Freyre’s, contained several dramatic passages about *maracatu nação* but nothing to indicate he ever witnessed a rural-style maracatu.⁷ Artist Lula Cardoso Ayres photographed a man dressed in *caboclo de lança* attire in the 1940s, quite likely forming the basis for a 1942 painting, and inspiring a magazine article describing them as “indecipherable.”⁸ Newspapers, magazines, and scholarly writing still tended not to mention

² Andrade, Mário de. 2002. *Danças dramáticas do Brasil*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia, p. 479

³ Freyre, Gilberto. 1934 (1961) *Guia prático, histórico e sentimental da cidade do Recife*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, p. 39-40

⁴ Cascudo’s *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro*, first published in 1952 but subjected to numerous revisions until his death in the 1980s, contains exactly one sentence that mentions rural maracatu, at the end of the entry describing maracatu nação.

⁵ Apart from poetic output, which includes poems devoted to “nation” maracatu and the Afro-Indigenous catimbó religion, Ascenso Ferreira also wrote essays about *cultura popular* and folklore for magazines such as Recife’s *Contraponto*. See also his 1951 essay “O Maracatu” in *É de tororó – maracatu. Danças pernambucanas 1*. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria-Editôra da Casa do Estudante do Brasil

⁶ Bastide, Roger. 1945. *Imagens do nordeste místico em branco e preto*. Rio de Janeiro: O Cruzeiro

⁷ Sette, Mário. 1930 (1981) *Maxambombas e maracatús*. Recife: Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife.

⁸ Oliveira, Valdemar de. 1948 “Os Indecifráveis Tucháus” in *Contraponto Ano 2; Número 7*. Recife



Figure 11: Fotos taken by Lula Cardoso Aires and published in the magazine Contraponto in 1948

rural maracatu up through the 1950s. In the few published works that do mention it during that decade, *baque solto* typically appears as an afterthought, occupying at most a few paragraphs tacked at the end of longer pieces devoted to the strongly African *maracatu nação* and its place in Recife's carnival. As late as the 1970s, the language usually described *baque solto* as a "new" style of maracatu, and often applied terms such as "uncharacteristic" and "stylized," juxtaposing it with the "authentic maracatu" of urban, Afro-Brazilian *maracatu nação*.⁹ The traits that distinguished the rural style from the urban, such as the presence of brass instruments and the warrior figure of the *caboclo de lança*, were regarded as the pollution of a tradition.

For the city of Recife, where the population doubled at the beginning of the twentieth century, this marginalization of rural maracatu is directly related to hostile or ambivalent attitudes towards the migrants who practiced it. Their dislocation from the countryside, described in the previous chapter, happened in waves that surged in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. Several maracatus of the rural style had been pressured to change their groups into the urban "nação" style in order to participate in Recife's official carnival during the 1930s.¹⁰ With the passage of time, maracatu groups formed by recent migrants were eventually permitted to participate on the condition that they put a royal entourage or *cortejo* with a king, queen, soldiers, and attendants - a key feature of the *nação* style that had never been part of rural maracatu - at the center of their procession. This imposition by the Carnival Federation of Pernambuco is still recounted today with some bitterness whenever "the story of maracatu" is told by older *maracatuzeiros* in the interior. Even the designation of *rural maracatu* was an imposition from outside, applied to the groups by American

⁹ The complaints about this "new" style of maracatu persisted well into the 1960s, as Katarina Real cited newspaper editorials lamenting the "intrusion" of rural maracatus into Recife's carnival, in *O folclore no carnaval do Recife*. 1967 (1990) Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana

¹⁰ Real, Katarina. 1967 (1990) *O folclore no carnaval do Recife*. Recife: Editora Massangana; Benjamin, Roberto. 1976. *Maracatus Rurais*. Caderno do folclore. Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco

anthropologist Katarina Real who served on Recife's official governing body for carnival from 1960 to 1965, and who was assumed leadership of the state's Folklore Commission in 1967.¹¹ Musicologist and composer Guerra-Peixe used the more specific terms of *maracatu de orquestra* or *de trombone* ("orchestra" or trombone maracatu) or *maracatu de baque solto* in his 1955 monograph, and decades later in its second printing he objected strongly to Real's use of the qualifier "rural."¹²

That urge to differentiate the "rural" maracatu from the *nação* or "nation" variety was reflective of a desire to portray the latter as authentic and the former as derivative and degenerate during the first three quarters of the twentieth century. It is a form of distancing that is not limited only to space, but also involving time: the "rural" maracatus are more recent – and hence less authentic – than the "nation" or *nação* maracatus, which are conceived as emblematic of the cultural and religious syncretism of Afro-Brazilian traditions and with roots in the colonial period. The fact that the qualifier "rural" is sometimes used today by maracatuzeiros themselves does not negate the initial imposition from outsiders.

As will be shown here, *nação* maracatus were first persecuted and then celebrated for their perceived continuity with African traditions. The questions of whether to emphasize African retentions or New World creativity in the cultural life of slave communities and their descendants has driven animated and often contentious debate between scholars.¹³ My concern in this chapter is not with the empirical facts surrounding the origins of the two types of maracatu, but with the power that the discourse of African continuity possessed to delay the recognition of rural maracatu

¹¹ *ibid.* Her first use of the qualifier "rural" appears in the Department of Education and Culture publication from 1966, which provided the basis for her 1967 monograph.

¹² Guerra-Peixe, César. 1955 (1980) *Maracatus do Recife*. Coleção Recife. 2a ed. São Paulo: Irmãos Vitale

¹³ Price, Richard. 2001. "The Miracle of Creolization: a retrospective." NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 75(1/2): 35-64.

as a “legitimate” form of cultural expression in the twentieth century. This way of framing *nação* maracatu surged in the 1930s, parallel to similar celebrations of Africanisms in Rio and Bahia even as religions like candomblé and macumba were still criminalized, and then again in the 1980s, concurrent with the impact of social movements that sought the “re-Africanization of Brazilian culture.”¹⁴ The analytical, epistemic, or strategic value of that emphasis – for purposes such as anti-racist activism throughout the twentieth century¹⁵ or the land claims of contemporary *quilombola* communities¹⁶ – is not under attack here. Rather, I explore the degree to which its articulation through research and cultural policy may have marginalized other varieties of cultural expression and identity that did not clearly fit into its framework.

Today most observers would find the two varieties of maracatu to be unmistakably different entities. “Nation” maracatu groups have a percussion section that dwarfs that of “rural” maracatu: the most striking difference is the presence of dozens of low-pitched *alfaia* and *bombo* bass drums bound with rope and tuned with wooden pegs, slung over the shoulders and played with mallets. The remaining percussion is comprised of snare drums (*caixa* and *tarol*), a tuned cowbell-type instrument called *gonguê* (similar to but larger than an *agogô*), and shakers (*mineiros*). The slow, thunderous sound of the drums has been described as a dolorous and nostalgic evocation of the ocean waves that carried the slaves from Africa to the Brazilian coast.¹⁷ There is no brass or reed instrumentation. The singing makes the impression of call and response, but whereas the “orchestra” of rural maracatu stops playing completely when the *mestre* sings his improvised

¹⁴ Rodrigues, João Jorge Santo. (1999). *Olodum and the Black Struggle in Brazil*. *Black Brazil: Culture, Identity, and Social Mobilization*. Los Angeles, UCLA Latin American Center Publications: 43-52.

¹⁵ Alberto, Paulina L. (2012). "Of sentiment, science and myth: shifting metaphors of racial inclusion in twentieth-century Brazil." *Social History* 37(3): 261-296.

¹⁶ French, Jan H. (2009). *Legalizing identities: becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's northeast*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁷ Arruda de Assis, Maria Elisabete. (1996). "Cruzeiro do Forte: a brincadeira e o jogo de identidade em um maracatu rural." Masters thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco

verses, the rhythm of urban “nation” maracatu breaks only occasionally to let the *mestre* initiate a new melody or theme. When it first became fashionable with Recife’s artistic elite during the 1930s, carnival songs were being written in *maracatu nação* style by famous *frevo* composers like Nelson Ferreira and Capiba.¹⁸

The presence of brass instruments in rural maracatu, so offensive to the ears of intellectuals worried about preserving the “authentic” *nação* tradition, is noteworthy for another reason. While they were a distinctive trait of the maracatus formed by rural migrants to Recife’s suburbs, brass instruments were not common in the groups found in the interior itself until quite recently. This was counterintuitive to conventional understandings of “rural to urban migration” and implies a more circular and dynamic flow of cultural expression. While towns like Nazaré da Mata had military-style brass bands and a music school in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sugar plantation workers relied on instruments that they could fashion themselves out of readily-available materials. Rural migrants did not arrive in Recife with intact maracatu groups, but rather founded new ones or reconstituted their former groups with new neighbors who were also from the interior.¹⁹ The historical accounts that first distinguished these new “rural” maracatus all remarked upon the presence of trombones, trumpets, and sometimes clarinets and saxophones. During carnival, these groups would then perform their maracatu both within Recife as well as in presentations in the interior, in their members’ points of origin. It is very probable that the new arrivals to Recife were inspired by the city’s popular *frevo* bands and their mobile “orchestras,” and began incorporating brass instruments into their own groups. These migrants, then, would have brought those instruments to the interior during their carnival visits to their home towns, or through circular migration. My older informants did not recall seeing brass instruments in

¹⁸ For musicological treatments of *maracatu nação* see Soares (2005) and Metz (2008).

¹⁹ Arruda de Assis, *ibid.* p. 33-35

maracatu until the mid-1970s. Brass instrumentation is recent enough to rural practice that during the cultural “revival” of the 1990s, the famous *cavalo marinho* and *maracatu* musician Mestre Salustiano – who himself migrated from the sugar usina town of Aliança to Olinda in the 1960s²⁰ - argued that it should be purged in an effort to restore “tradition.”²¹

At the root of intellectuals’ perplexity over rural *maracatu de baque solto* was the obsession with origins that characterized folkloric research, which combined methodologies of historical reconstruction and inference with ideological motives concerned with defining the spirit of “the Brazilian people.” The relationships built between folklorists and the practitioners of popular culture had concrete consequences in Brazil. In 1976, when city officials prohibited rural maracatu from participating in the official carnival parades, the rationale used by some to defend the decision argued that these groups were brash, crude insults to the “authentic” urban *maracatu nação*. One editorial pointed to their absence in the earlier folkloric writings of Pereira da Costa and Câmara Cascudo as proof of their inauthenticity,²² even as the state’s official organ of folklore studies was championing rural maracatu and criticizing carnival officials for relegating it to a second-class status.²³ The editorialists’ reasoning mirrors the language of earlier observations about maracatu de baque solto that described the groups as “stylized” and deculturated. It also highlights a struggle for resources in the cultural marketplace. By the early 1950s the new “rural” groups had begun to actually outnumber those of the “nation” style in the city of Recife.²⁴ The “rural” maracatus required fewer members, used less elaborate costumes, and had a potential base that was steadily expanding with the influx of new arrivals from the interior. By the 1960s, in the period after

²⁰ The city of Olinda is contiguous with the city of Recife, situated to the north of its port.

²¹ Personal communication, Siba Veloso.

²² Malheiros, Artur. “Maracatu autêntico” *Diario da Noite*, February 13, 1976, Recife

²³ Benjamin 1976 *ibid*

²⁴ Guerra-Peixe, César. 1955. *ibid.* p. 91

Recife's oldest maracatu Nação Elefante shuttered its doors following the death of its long-reigning queen, the more ostentatious "nation" maracatus were widely viewed as having entered into a period of stagnation.

Alarm and panic over the alleged stagnation and loss of traditions is the signpost at the crossroads of folklore research and cultural policies, and such concerns are readily apparent in the debates waged in the carnival section of Recife's periodicals during the 1960s and 70s. These fears fueled reactionary measures like the temporary prohibition of rural maracatu mentioned above, as well as campaigns of preservation such as the creation of the "Night of the Silent Drums" by the journalist Paulo Vianna in 1965. This began as a theatrical production "in honor of the slaves who never had the right to participate in Carnival," staged at a Recife church in the neighborhood of São José where many of the city's *nação* maracatus were accustomed to begin their carnival activities.²⁵ The choreographed production gathered together actors and dancers from the erudite theatre Teatro Equipe, who began the evening with a dramatic recitation of Viana's poem "*Lamento do Negro*" (Cry of the Black Man) while an actor was chained to a whipping post, followed by a benediction after which the maracatus were allowed to begin their normal festivities.²⁶ This spectacle was instituted as a yearly occurrence for many carnivals. Now the official opening ceremony for Recife's carnival has been shorn of the poem and graphic dramatizations, but elaborated to include concert staging and professional lighting, with an orchestra of percussionists presided over by internationally-renowned jazz musician Naná Vasconcelos.

²⁵ "Evento foi criado em memória dos negros." March 6, 2000. *Jornal do Comércio*

²⁶ "Atriz participou no primeiro encontro no pátio." March 6, 2000. *Jornal do Comércio*

Visibility and validation in folklore research

Issues surrounding heritage and lineage have also been used to validate rural maracatu as well as discredit it at different historical moments. The notion that part of its claims to authenticity might in some degree reside in unverifiable historical facts, on products of legend or mythification, places maracatu in dialogue with investigations into other invented traditions elsewhere, suggesting further nuances to the questions about ambiguous origins, legitimation through research, and interventionist cultural policies explored throughout this chapter. Appeals to the authority of “authenticity” and “tradition” in popular culture are frequently a means of masking over power relationships, and in this case position those concepts as “coconspirators in ensuring that the socially constructed and contingent nature of festive practice will continue to be misrecognized.”²⁷

One of my younger informants offered an intriguing insight surrounding the precise chronology and founding of one of oldest *baque solto* groups in the area of Nazaré da Mata, about which many privately express their doubts. In a non-judgmental manner, he proposed that some of the groups’ leaders and spokespeople were “confusing things ... mixing everything together.” In agreement with other, older maracatuzeiros I’d spoken to about it, he observed that the ages of the oldest known leaders of the maracatu simply did not make sense, unless they founded the group in their infancy. Instead, he suggested that the plantation where they started most likely had been home to other agglutinations of *cultura popular* that eventually took on an identity as a maracatu.

²⁷ Guss, David M. 2000. *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. p. 14-15

Like many sugar *engenhos* at the turn of the century, the plantation likely would have hosted a number of overlapping *cultura popular* groups, existing in greater or lesser degrees of permanence, concurrently or in succession,. Genres and manifestations of cultural expression such as those referred to as “rural samba,” “*samba de matuto*” (hillbilly samba), *ciranda*, *bumba-meu-boi* or *boi de carnaval*, *cavalo marinho*, or *caboclinhos* are well-known to have proliferated in the Mata Norte around the turn of the century, and nearly all of my informants born in the 1940s and 50s had participated in one or more of them during their youth. These and other types of popular cultural expression are often called *folgedos*, based on the words “folgança” or “folga” which signify a non-working day of rest, indicating that these loosely-organized groups were a “diversion” pursued during leisure time. They were “anonymous” not only in the academic sense related to folk culture and oral transmission but in a more specific way: many of these groups in fact did not have the regal names that are now commonplace in Pernambucan *cultura popular*. To rephrase this, the names may have existed, but were not universally or consistently used.

One maracatu which went dormant in the 1960s had the official name of Leão Brasileiro, but is far more likely to be remembered now by an association with its geographic location (Engenho Santa Fé) or its most famous *mestre-poet* Baracho, referred to as the “maracatu of Santa Fé” or “of Baracho” rather than its official name. Likewise my elderly Nazaré informants who were involved in groups of *caboclinhos*, *boi*, or *maracatu* when they were adolescents in the rural areas often did not recall any specific names for the groups they participated in (even when they held prominent positions with some level of responsibility), or told me that “everyone” referred to the group by its association to a physical place or a key individual, usually the owner (*dono*) or mestre-singer. This “anonymity” is not isolated to maracatu but equally applies to other forms of regional *cultural popular* found on the sugar *engenhos*, especially *boi* and *caboclinhos*, both of which are found in

a wider area of distribution through northern and northeastern Brazil than rural maracatu. In spite of the difficulty of pinpointing a single and specific date for when such groups may have been founded, the temporal logic of preservation that equates age and continuity with “authenticity” has essentially forced such groups to inscribe their memories into uncontested, incontrovertible fact.

These founding myths of specific groups can be viewed in the same framework as my argument regarding the anxiety over maracatu’s origins more generally. Maracatu, in the form that it is known today, was produced by accretions of different, heterogeneous, and often hybrid manifestations of cultural expression tied to specific locales over time, which were only retrospectively fixed and crystallized as “maracatu de baque solto.” From this point of view, my earlier expectation that Mário de Andrade or the researchers he employed on the 1938 Research Mission to the Northeast should have written about “rural maracatu” or “maracatu de baque solto” is an anachronistic demand. As previously noted, that terminology was not introduced until the 1950s and 1960s. Ivaldo Lima contends that criticisms against Gilberto Freyre and others for not distinguishing “rural” from “nation” maracatu in the 1920s are misguided, because those distinctions as separate, discrete styles were added much later. Rather, both styles of cultural expression developed through a multitude of “cultural borrowings” from other related forms of *cultura popular*.²⁸ The processual development of *cultura popular* styles and the tendency towards such borrowing has always been a source of frustration for scholars intent on constructing systems of classification and historical reconstruction in which to carry out their analysis.

Social theorists have mostly long since abandoned models concerned with purity of origins and bounded, discrete cultural forms, with paradigms of hybridity and creolization taking precedence. Unsurprisingly, these different orientations tend to run parallel to the rise and fall of

²⁸ Lima, Ivaldo Marciano de França. 2008. *Maracatus e maracatuzeiros : desconstruindo certezas, batendo afayas e fazendo histórias : Recife, 1930-1945*. Recife: Edições Bagaço.

ideas diffused throughout society at large, away from enclaves of academics and specialists: independence from a colonial power, the transition to a republic from a monarchy, the consolidation of the state and a national sense of Brazilian-ness, or an ongoing encounter with the manifold forms of modernity and globalization have all left their mark on both “popular” and “erudite” consciousness. The particularities in the shift in emphasis from one focusing on origins to one that celebrates mixture are worthy of analysis when they can be pinned down to specific cases, such as what occurred with the cross-fertilization of *maracatu de baque solto* and related, overlapping regional forms. As Charles Stewart writes:

Hybridity must be understood against the flow of time as a particular moment when exogenous traditions appear new and different to each other. After a while, when hybrids are formed, they become their own new entities perceived as zones of difference to other hybrid entities. Yesterday’s hybrid becomes one of the progenitors of tomorrow’s hybrid.²⁹

The notion of cultural hybridity does not imply accepting that some “pure” form actually existed in the past, but it does require us to recognize that some type of encounter in which differences were recognized took place. The value in analyzing hybrids, according to Stewart, is political: who is making claims of purity or mixture, to what audience, when and for what reasons?

This enjoinder calls for getting at the specificities of such claims and the encounters that fueled them, but in the case of *maracatu* is complicated by the proliferation of folkloric categories and the institutional circumstances which partially mask their creation in Brazil. It is necessary to grapple with them because, along with the related literature on *cultura popular* in Brazil, these folkloric categories formed the primary lens through which *maracatu* became visible to observers outside the plantations. The term “folklore” itself denotes both a method and an object of study;

²⁹ Stewart, Charles. 2011. "Creolization, Hybridity, Syncretism, Mixture." *Portuguese Studies* 27(1): 48-55.

the parsing out of these two senses of the word is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon.³⁰ The early folkloric literature generally disregarded *emic* systems of classification and interpretation and did not distinguish them from the *etic* constructions imposed on the same phenomenon by outsiders. By the time such reflexive analysis became common in the social sciences, folkloric categories had in many respects already crystallized. Such categories were not reified solely among those engaged with folkloric scholarship, but fed back into the *folguedos* and popular culture of the interior of Pernambuco and other regions, where people began to utilize, legitimize, and sometimes reappropriate concepts that came from “outside.” Much like early anthropology’s relationship to “the primitive,”³¹ and similar to twentieth century folk song revivals in the Anglophone world, folklorists have taken an active part in constituting the very categories and bodies of work that they purported to study in a naturalistic way as objects waiting to be “discovered.”³²

Origins and Authenticity

In the pages that follow, two core concepts are analyzed in different contexts: the importance attached to origins and authenticity in popular tradition, and the institutionally expressed moral imperative to preserve or revive those traditions. The degree to which these two ideas repeatedly return and become salient to conversations about *cultura popular* at different points in the last hundred years is striking. How particular expressions of *cultura popular* are celebrated and

³⁰ See Ben-Amos 1989; Dundes 1966; Fernandes; Tavares de Lima 1978

³¹ Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³² Titon, Jefferey Todd. 1993. “Reconstructing the blues: reflections on the 1960s blues revival.” In *Transforming tradition: folk music revivals examined*. Ed. Neil V. Rosenberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

recognized as legitimate, by both outside observers and participants depends in no small measure on such claims to authenticity and a long historical pedigree. Recent innovations are regarded by traditionalists as unwarranted modifications, something to be corrected by our second core idea of preservation or revitalization. Authenticity is central to regional identity in Northeast Brazil, and also forms part of the value assigned to specific traditions in the cultural marketplace. Hence, many enthusiasts of rural *maracatu de baque solto* are keen to differentiate the art form from urban *maracatu nação*, while insisting on a similarly distant historical pedigree that has little documentary evidence to support it.

In Brazil, an interest in folklore grew after independence and through the Imperial period, taking on particular momentum with the fall of the monarchy and the transition into a republic. Intellectuals, including those who populated the law schools and military academies that provided much of the political elite, were grappling with how to face the legacy of an economic and social system grounded in slavery, and the tensions – social, political, or philosophical – raised by the idea of racial hybridity. “The folk” became a chief concern of writers and artists during the nineteenth century during the “Indianist” or Nativist period, the particular articulation of Romanticism that became dominant after Brazil’s independence from Portugal. The provenance of folklorists was demarcated early on as the customs and habits of illiterate or “pre-literate” peoples in complex, literate societies. The emphasis was on the “modes of feeling, thinking, and acting” of the unlettered masses, and the chief vehicle for their inquiry was therefore oral tradition. In Brazil as elsewhere most of the folkloric research during the turn of the century was oriented towards the literary analysis of poetry and songs. In a nation where the social distance between the intellectual and “the common people” was profound and vast, and the country’s elite sent their

children to Europe for their education, a turn towards the popular culture of the unlettered poor represented an attempt at grounding an autochthonous Brazilian identity.

Silvio Romero, one of the nation's early and influential folklorists, explored these paradoxes as he sought both to investigate and propagate the relationship between Brazilian *cultura popular* and a national aesthetic in literature or art. He was one of the first to apply the dichotomy of "popular" versus "erudite" in Brazilian artistic production. In his collections of oral poems and stories Romero established the fascination with origins that would influence the next generations of folklorists by attempting to parse out the relative influence of the "three roots" of Brazilian society – the Indian, the African, and the Portuguese – a full fifty years before Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala*. For Romero, interaction between "the three races" had resulted in a disorderly amalgamation, a riddle of traits for which popular poetry served as the key of decryption. The figure of the mestizo served as the "transforming agent par excellence" in this scheme, yet the specialist was presented with the problem of how to separate and evaluate the unique contributions of his three ancestral lines. While he acknowledged that for three centuries little had been collected regarding the poetic traditions of African Brazilians or Indians, Romero did not hesitate to argue that it was "incontestable that the Portuguese is the most robust factor of our spiritual life. We owe to him our religious beliefs, our civil and political institutions, our language and our contact with European civilization."³³ The Portuguese heritage could be augmented by the addition of new habits, artistic or otherwise, acquired through contact with Africans and Indians and passed on to the *mestiço* without essentially modifying its essence. He writes:

The relations of the superior race with the two inferior races have two principal aspects: a) purely external relationships, in which the Portuguese could not, as

³³ Romero, Sílvio. 1888. *Estudos sobre a poesia popular do Brazil, 1879-1880*. Rio de Janeiro: Typografia Laemmert, .p. 250

civilized people, modify their intellectual life that would tend to dominate, and could only contract one or another habit [of the other races], and utilize one or another tool in ordinary life; b) blood relations, with the tendency to modify the three races and form the *mestiço*.

In the first case, it is understood that the action of Indians and Negroes on the European is nothing profound or radical; in the second, the physiological transformation would produce a new type that, while it would not eclipse the European, obfuscates the two inferior races.

In popular poetry, therefore, after the Portuguese, the *mestiço* is the principal factor. The savages and Africans, who are not directly contributors, nevertheless fit inside of that category in a more or less efficient way.³⁴

In this framework, Romero set up a pattern that endured for decades, whose influence can be found in Pernambucan writers like Freyre and Ariano Suassuna, wherein cultural currents only flow in one direction. The desirable traits of African or indigenous culture are sifted and filtered in the process of their assimilation to their Portuguese masters, transported like sediment in the tributaries that emerge in a new, truly Brazilian identity.

The purity of a lineage

The urban “nation” maracatu or *baque virado* style, whose history extends into the late eighteenth century, certainly suffered discrimination before it began to exert an enormous influence on Recife’s intellectuals from the early decades of the twentieth century. Although the oldest known group, Maracatu Nação Elefante, was said to have been founded in 1800, “nation” maracatus were not permitted in the city’s carnival commemorations until the late nineteenth century. It is precisely in the era of the abolition of slavery and its aftermath that a reappraisal of Afro-Brazilian traditions assumed larger proportions in all of the country’s urban centers. Araújo has written about how Brazilian elites generally did not participate in its famous street carnival for

³⁴ Romero, *ibid.* 251

most of that century, having undergone a process of Europeanization with the arrival of the Portuguese court in Brazil during the Imperial period. The disorderly *entrudo* carnivals, filled with pranks and rowdy behavior, gave way to elegant ballroom commemorations. Frevo, the music and dance style that is most strongly associated with the city of Recife, was considered an amusement for the poor and lawless until the turn of the twentieth century.³⁵ By then numerous Recife writers also saw in *maracatu nação* a story of the perseverance of dignity and nobility, a moral tale of survival and persistence within the most adverse circumstances imaginable: the harsh realities of slavery. Paulo Viana, a journalist and *cronista* with an interest in folklore, implied that maracatu was transported nearly intact across the Atlantic:

The most traditional groups of Pernambuco's carnival are the Maracatus – a black rhythm, brought from Africa in the holds of the slave ships, emerging from the slave quarters, in the absolute regime of captivity in consequence of the necessity of the blacks to pay homage to their ancient sovereigns or tribal chiefs reduced, like themselves, to the condition of slaves.³⁶

This Afro-Brazilian tradition, conceived as a survival of antiquity from the mother continent, is placed by this same author in a triad with *caboclinhos* and *blocos alegóricos* (theme-based clubs), representing for him the Amerindian and Portuguese contributions to Recife's particular expression of the "three races" of Brazilian national identity. While for some of the more aristocratic of Pernambuco's elite, these groups represented a noisy, barbaric intrusion of undesirables, for others they provoked fascination. Some intellectuals were enchanted by the maracatus' colorful costumes and their regal names which invoked "totemistic" relationships to the great beasts of Africa, the lions and elephants that were left behind in their homeland, or the

³⁵ Araújo, Rita de Cássia Barbosa de. 1996. *Festas: máscaras do tempo. Entrudo, mascarada e frevo no carnaval do Recife*. Recife: Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife

³⁶ Viana, Paulo Nunes. 1974. "Carnaval de Pernambuco." In *Antologia do carnaval do Recife*. Eds. Mário Souto Maior and Leonardo Dantas Silva. Recife: FUNDAJ, Editora Massangana, 1991

geographic references to parts of Angola.³⁷ Many were compelled by equal parts revulsion and curiosity: Mário Sette recalls his suffering during the “terrible” thunder of their large wood-and-rope drums at every carnival as a child, hiding inside the house while the maracatus made their way down his street.³⁸ Given the late arrival of abolition in 1888 it was not uncommon to find former slaves among the living participants well into the twentieth century. Such was the case with Dona Santa (Maria Júlia do Nascimento), the matriarch of Maracatu Nação Elefante who became its most emblematic, talked-about figure. When she passed away in 1962, she was commemorated in the press as a link with Brazil’s troubled past, heralded in obituary articles with headlines like “Born as a slave, died as a queen.”³⁹

Folklorists emphasized the New World origins of *maracatu nação*, tracing its roots to the coronation ceremonies of the Congo Kings held under the auspices of the Black Brotherhood of the Our Lady of the Rosary, the designated lay confraternity established for slaves and free men of color throughout Brazil during the seventeenth century.⁴⁰ When Recife was still largely a conglomeration of sugar plantations clustered around the urban mercantile port of the Old City, groups of maracatus formed on those plantations from the remnants of these organizations. The crowning of African and African-Brazilian kings is an example of what John Chasteen calls “neo-African nations” in Latin America.⁴¹ While the practice began to die out with the gradual shift from slave to free labor at mid-century, the new groups of “*maracatu nação*” may have

³⁷ Such zoological names included Maracatu Leão Coroado and Nação Elefante. Song references to the port city of Luanda are noted in the early accounts of maracatu, and the name “Cambinda”(as noted elsewhere) is generally thought to be a corruption of the Bantu word “cabinda”, designating both a region and a people of Angola.

³⁸ Sette, Mário. 1930 (1981) *Maxambombas e maracatús*. Recife: Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife..

³⁹ Diário de Pernambuco, 1962, October 28, “Nasceu escrava e morreu Rainha”

⁴⁰ Our Lady of the Rosary was the most common patron, but the saints Benedict, Ephigenia, and Balthazar also presided over Congo coronations. The earliest account of a coronation in Recife dates from 1674. (c.f. Cascudo, Luís da Câmara. 1962 (1999). *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Global.)

⁴¹ Chasteen, John Charles. 2004. *National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance*. Diálogos. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, p.94-98

appropriated some of their functions and participants.⁴² Although no longer protected under the umbrella of the church, and in fact persecuted by periodic police raids on associated houses of *xangô*, maracatu groups retained the royal entourage and other structural components of the coronations, continuing to pay homage to their saintly patrons by beginning their celebrations with a procession from the church plaza.

These coronation ceremonies, conducted throughout the vast territory of colonial Brazil, were part of a tradition of slave celebrations held on saints' days and other commemorations in the liturgical calendar, during which slaves were able to exercise their own musical and religious traditions under the watchful eye of the church authorities. On the days commemorating Our Lady of the Rosary or Saint Benedict, processions were led by slaves to the local church and a ceremony held, with fees paid to ecclesiastical authorities for their services. Administrative units, roughly corresponding to parishes, had their own black King and Queen, with different groups designated as "nations" by its members.⁴³ The English traveler and plantation owner Henry Koster described such a coronation ceremony on the island of Itamaracá in Pernambuco, that he witnessed in March of 1811:

At this period is chosen the King of the Congo nation, if the person who holds this situation has died in the course of the year, has from any cause resigned, or has been displaced by his subjects. The Congo negroes are permitted to elect a king and queen from among the individuals of their own nation; the personages who are fixed upon may either actually be slaves or they may be manumitted negroes. These sovereigns exercise a species of mock jurisdiction over their subjects which is much laughed at by the whites; but their chief power and superiority over their countrymen is shown on the day of the festival. The negroes of their nation, however, pay much respect to them.⁴⁴

⁴² Pereira da Costa, F.A. 1908, *ibid.* 235; Amorim and Benjamin (2002)

⁴³ Pereira da Costa, F.A. 1908 *ibid.* p. 232

⁴⁴ Koster, Henry. 1816. *Travels in Brazil*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown. p. 273-4

Koster remarks that each district has its own king, and that Itamaracá's king was abdicating at that time due to old age, while the queen would retain her office. He describes the vicar receiving the king at his residence and declaring "in a jocular manner" that he would be in his service for the day, and all of them proceeding to the church.

There was some delay in the Brotherhood producing the funds for the day's services, and Koster recalls with amusement that they were verbally accosted by the vicar for his inconvenience, and argued among themselves. Finally the crowning took place in the chapel, although "as the vicar was hungry, he dispatched the matter without much ceremony."⁴⁵ The king associated with this particular Brotherhood resided in the nearby plantation village of Amparo, and the entourage retired there for celebration while Koster remained in central Itamaracá. Some hours later, a black man in Koster's service ran frantically back to the town to inform him that another of "his negroes" was being badly beaten in an altercation there. He describes rushing off to find this man, bloodied and in torn clothing, defending himself and allegedly relieved at his master's arrival on the scene. The assailant, writes Koster, had been "provoked ... by the behaviour of some of the free persons towards him," and Koster faulted the overseer for not preventing the altercation.⁴⁶

The description left by Koster is the most complete and vivid on record for a coronation ceremony in Pernambuco. In addition to the ceremony itself, the dismissive attitude of the white Brazilians in Koster's social circle is noted, as is the implied tension between an individual assumed to be a slave and manumitted blacks (the "free persons" referenced) which appears to erupt in a fight targeting a member of Koster's own party.⁴⁷ The activities of slaves and free people of color within these Black Brotherhoods, organized under the aegis of the church, were not just

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 275

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 276.

⁴⁷ It is not clear whether the individual portrayed as the victim of the attack, referred to only as Manoel, is slave or freeman, but I infer the latter based on the contextual clues.

subjected to bemusement and condescending remarks but also official suspicion. Pereira da Costa cites correspondence from 1780 in which a former governor had voiced concerns over such “blacks divided into their nations, each one with their own instruments,” and such gatherings as took place on Sundays and feast days in the church yard. He was counseled by an official of the Portuguese Inquisition that “they can be tolerated, to the end that by permitting this lesser evil, greater evils can be avoided, requiring above all more subtle means, that in your prudence you suggest, to go on little by little destroying a pastime so contrary to proper custom.”⁴⁸ Some chroniclers and folklorists have mused that such occasional indulgences surely would have been a welcome respite in a life of servility.

Nineteenth-century folklorist Mello Moraes provides several descriptions of coronation ceremonial for eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, commemorated on the saints days of Santo Rei Balthazar, Nossa Senhora do Rosário and São Benedito. He describes the processions outside a chapel on Three Kings Day (*Dia dos Reis*), as a “plurality, at last, of representatives of the nations of Africa, slaves in Brazil, who showed themselves to be authentic, each one with their own differentiating characteristic, their own type, their private aesthetic.”⁴⁹ Like the ceremony Koster witnessed in Pernambuco, these took the form of a court procession with king, queen, flag-bearer, and vassals in attendance. Some folklorists speculated that the coronation ceremonies may have served to ameliorate differences between the different ethnic groups brought from Africa to Brazil, while others argued that they were a means by which church authorities during the colonial period granted symbolic recognition to the former social order of displaced Africans. The coronation ceremonies would have honored “tribal” chieftains with official respect while also establishing

⁴⁸ Pereira da Costa, 2004. *Folk-lore Pernambucano*. p. 224

⁴⁹ Mello Moraes, Alexandre José de. *Festas e tradições populares do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Fauchon e cia, 1895.

clerical authority.⁵⁰ Other folklorists have argued that the ceremonies were actually employed by the slave-holding oligarchy to instigate rivalries, reinforcing the idea of separate “nations” among slaves.⁵¹ Some have gone so far as to assert that the coronation ceremonies were themselves instruments through which slave owners indirectly asserted their authority through the intermediaries of African traditional authority and that this incidentally accounts for the “decline” of *maracatu nação* after abolition.

The relationship between the religious orders and the coronation ceremonies of African kings are cited by Rowe and Schelling as an example of a “double duality of resistance and accommodation.”⁵² A literal reading of these ceremonies is problematic: did the coronations and processions actually reproduce African political relationships and ceremonies, or represent a grafting of Iberian court ceremonial into slave society? This is difficult to determine from the available sources, which never thought to question the participants for their own reflections. Could there also have been a polysemous component, perhaps an element of farce on the part of the slaves, as Bakhtin suggested for the peasantry’s staging of Feast Day ceremonies in early modern Europe?⁵³ An ambiguous sense of parody and burlesque was present in some of the celebrations of civic and political holidays during the colonial and imperial periods. Rita Araújo notes that opportunities for satire were seldom missed when royal authorities required the mandatory participation of professional associations (guilds of shoemakers, carpenters, tanners, etc.) at public celebrations of official holidays, like the birthday of the monarch.⁵⁴ However, while farce and parody are an important part of *cultura popular* in Brazil, including several forms that contributed

⁵⁰ see also Mattoso 1986

⁵¹ Araújo, Alceu Maynard. 1973 (2007) *Cultura Popular Brasileira*. São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos. p. 106

⁵² Rowe, William and Vivian Schelling. 1991. *Memory and modernity: popular culture in Latin America*. London ; New York, Verso. p. 124-5

⁵³ Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

⁵⁴ Araújo, Rita de Cássia Barbosa de. 1996. *Festas: máscaras do tempo: entrudo, mascarada e frevo no carnaval do Recife*. Recife: Fundação da Cultura Cidade do Recife. p. 90

significantly to rural maracatu, the coronations of the Congo kings were conducted with a striking solemnity and seriousness.

Communication-theory folklorist Roberto Benjamin also draws attention to the relationship between the civil and religious calendars in Brazil, the persistence of saints' day processions, and their relationship to contemporary carnival groups or *cortejos*.⁵⁵ Their physical layout – the royal entourage of king and queen, a heraldic flag-bearer, the parasols - are remarkably similar in both. He offers three different hypothetical interpretations of carnival group origins in religious commemoration: 1) as an agglutination of popular manifestations that took place on festival days, and were either prohibited or lost their social function in the passage of time; 2) as copies of a hegemonic model imposed by state power onto religious or civic celebrations, appropriated and introduced as carnival commemorations, or 3) as caricature⁵⁶ in “the world turned upside down” of carnival.⁵⁷ He notes that all three hypotheses can be concurrent and are not mutually exclusive; however his analysis favors a synthesis of the first two. He notes the disappearance of coronation ceremonies in the middle of the nineteenth century, the foundation of new carnival groups, and the appearance in newspapers of reports about violent clashes between groups of maracatu, frevo, or *blocos*, and related police repression by the end of the century.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The branch of folklore studies known as *folkcomunicação*, begun in the 1960s by Luiz Beltrão, who was Benjamin's mentor.

⁵⁶ “O mundo pelo avesso,” this notion of the inversion of hierarchy is famously explored in Roberto DaMatta's “Carnival, Heroes, and Rogues.” See also Bakhtin and Burke for a treatment of the idea in Europe.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, Roberto. 2002 *Carnival, cortejos e improvisos*. Recife: Fundação de Cultura Cidade do Recife p. 41-44

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 45

The “Dramatic Dance” as the blueprint for *cultura popular*

If the early search for the origins of maracatu placed the most emphasis on these coronation ceremonies, then it also situated maracatu in relation to a constellation of other types of collective cultural expression defined as “dramatic dances.” Author, music critic, and folklorist Mário de Andrade formulated this concept in the 1920s. He argued that the Coronation of the Congo Kings ceremony served as a model for a variety of similarly-structured processions throughout Brazil’s territory, in groups like *moçambiques* (Rio de Janeiro state), *caipó* (São Paulo), or *cuçumbi* (Bahia), among others. In the 1950s Guerra-Peixe asserted similar roots for Bahian *afoxé* and the *cambindas* of Paraíba, the latter of which only had one remaining example existing across the Pernambucan border when Roberto Benjamin studied them in the 1970s.⁵⁹ The group performances known as *congós* and *congadas* in various regions of Brazil are also considered to have derived from the older coronation ceremonies.

Andrade, enamored with the work of early anthropologists and ethnologists like Lévy-Bruhl, Edward Tylor, and especially James Frazer, argued that all Brazilian *cultura popular* ultimately had roots in religious ritual of one kind or another, and searched in these collective forms of expression for survivals of a universal strata of humanity’s past (divine kingship, pagan vegetative rites), and specifically for African and Portuguese inheritances. He surveyed and mined the folkloric literature, and drew from his own fieldwork and auto-didactic familiarity with ethnology to present numerous examples of neo-African royal “embassies,” dramatic reenactments of legends of shipwrecks linked to Portuguese exploration, and recreations of the reconquest of the

⁵⁹ Guerra-Peixe, 1952. *Maracatus*; Benjamin, Roberto. *Cambindas da Paraíba*

Iberian Peninsula from the Moors.⁶⁰ Andrade developed the broad notion of the “dramatic dance” as a kind of unifying theory for the great variety of Brazilian expressive forms that shared similar traits, a conception of *cultura popular* that proved fruitful to other researchers. He argued that all forms of *cultura popular* ultimately derived from “suites” made up of songs and strung together with staged or choreographed dramatic scenes, many of which had historical relationships to didactic missionary catechisms and European “passion plays.” He found particular inspiration in the “boi” dramas that pivot on the death and resurrection of a bull, found throughout the North and Northeast regions and known as *bumba-meu-boi*, *boi-bumba*, or *cavalo marinho*. The “dramatic dances” concept was developed over the span of a decade in tandem with Andrade’s field excursions to those regions, which he viewed as the places where archaic forms had been best preserved while they were disappearing in the rest of the nation.⁶¹

Later folklorists made use of his schematic, and Alceu Maynard Araújo argued that the religious plays of the catechism coalesced into two main categories: those which dealt with the theme of conversion (*congada*, *marujada*, *moçambique*, *ticumbi*), and those whose central theme was resurrection (*quilombo*, *caiapó*, *guerreiros*, *caboclinhos*, *lambe-sujo*).⁶² Another grouping of dramatic dances originating in religious evangelization were those performed between Christmas on the 25th of December – the *pastoris* which involved shepherdesses, angels, and Biblical figures – and other celebrations (like *festa de Reis*, *Queima de Lapinha*, *ranchos*) culminating on Three Kings Day, January 6.⁶³ As the zeal of the religious missionaries receded into historical memory, these cultural manifestations took on new purposes and meanings, became more oriented towards

⁶⁰ Andrade, Mário de. 2002. *Danças dramáticas do Brasil*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia,

⁶¹ Cavalcanti, Maria Laura Viveiros de Castro. "Cultura popular e sensibilidade romântica: as danças dramáticas de Mário De Andrade." *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 19: 54 (2004): 57-78.

⁶² Araújo, Alceu Maynard. 1973 (2007) *Cultura popular brasileira*. São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos. p. 46

⁶³ Almeida, Renato. 1942. *História da música brasileira*. 2nd ed. Rio de Janeiro: F.Bruguier e Cia, p. 225-245

the entertainment of the public, and underwent a process of “desacralization” or “profanation.” Pereira da Costa writes about ecclesiastical authorities being scandalized by the transformation of their religious catechism dramas into comic burlesques; likewise, he notes the saints’ day processions in which the prevalence of sensual dancing, loud music and fireworks shocked friars, who repeatedly attempted to put an end to such “irreverent” practices.⁶⁴

Mário de Andrade made the plausible argument that most if not all group performances found in *cultura popular* were derived from these “dramatic dances,” but some had essentially shed their scripted and dramaturgic components, leaving behind the elements of choreography, characters (king and queen, vassals, soldiers and archers), the music, and the songs. This is his reasoning for how the more elaborate coronation ceremonies of the Kings of the Congo transformed into “nation” maracatu: the dramatic or narrative element is almost wholly absent, leaving only the royal court and ritualized procession. Similarly, he reasoned that the Jesuit and Dominican catechisms, the recreated scenes of the Reconquest (*chegança de mouros* or *marujos*), and the dramas based around the encounter of Africans with indigenous people around the infamous runaway slave communities (*quilombos*, *lambe-sujos*) all gave way to other expressive ensembles that retained some of the basic structures and forms, but became distanced from the content. He therefore posits a division into two main clusters of *cultura popular* forms existing during his lifetime: those forms of collective expression based around elaborate structured narratives, and those which were made up of disaggregated parts. This bifurcation has yielded some utility as an analytical tool, but the implicit value judgments are not difficult to locate in Andrade’s treatment of his material. The first group is portrayed as internally consistent while the second is confused, disorganized, and fragmented. In spite of the coeval existence of both groups, it was precisely in

⁶⁴ Pereira da Costa, F.A. 1908. (2004) *Folk-Lore Pernambucano: Subsídios Para a História Da Poesia Popular Em Pernambuco*. Second edition ed. Recife: Companhia Editora de Pernambuco. p. 208-213

these characteristics attached to the second grouping that Andrade found “a fragmented vision associated with the presence of deleterious urban influences and the evils of civilization.”⁶⁵

Such was the case for the *caboclinhos* which spanned the territory of coastal Pernambuco, Ceará and Paraíba: groups of African-Brazilians adorned as Indians and performing indigenous-inspired dances, a practice that historical accounts place as far back as the sixteenth century. The *caboclinhos* were said by musicologist Guerra-Peixe to have at one time recounted the entire history of Brazil as “micro-dramas” in presentations lasting four or five hours, but by the time of his work in the 1950s a performance of one hour was the norm. He noted the influence in these micro-dramas of the erudite literature of the Romanticists and Indianists, whose novels were popular enough that they received retellings in the *cordel* chap-books of the time or were sung as epics by the itinerant singers or *violeiros*. Guerra-Peixe writes

In a spectacle of micro-drama they recite homages to the Indian tribes, to Pedro Álvares Cabral,⁶⁶ to Portuguese dignitaries, to Amerindian divinities, etc, as well as remembering the traditions of “the ancestors” – all this in the dialect that the nativists José de Alencar and Gonçalves Dias established in their work, in which the *caboclinhos* are principally inspired.⁶⁷

Although Guerra-Peixe viewed this influence by the Indianist literature of the day to be unfortunate, he also asserted that the *caboclinhos* were “the most original presence in Recife’s carnival.”⁶⁸

Although in many contexts, especially in the interior of the country, the word “*caboclo*” is used as a term of endearment between one person and another, it can also have overtones that are

⁶⁵ Cavalcanti, Maria Laura Viveiros de. 2004. “Cultura popular e sensibilidade romântica: as danças dramáticas de Mário de Andrade.” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 19(54): 57-78.

⁶⁶ The Portuguese explorer credited with the “discovery” of Brazil.

⁶⁷ Guerra Peixe, César. 1966. “Os Cabocolinhos do Recife.” *Revista Brasileira de Folclore*. Rio de Janeiro: MEC, Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro, no. 15. Reprinted in *O Carnaval do Recife*, 1991 (Mario Souto Maior and Leonardo Dantas, eds.)

⁶⁸ Guerra Peixe, César. 1966. *ibid*

at best ambiguous, and at times pejorative. Jann Hoffman French has shown how the category “caboclo” is bereft of the legal rights of recognition afforded to ethno-racial categories like “black” or “Indian.”⁶⁹ In the Amazon, where the term originates and refers to a historical peasantry that has been largely overlooked by scholars, the term is ambivalent, with positive and negative valences depending on the frame of reference.⁷⁰ In the nineteenth century, Sílvio Romero noted the prevalence of jokes and stereotypes about both *caboclos* and *mestiços* in oral literature.⁷¹ Used in a negative way, the word *caboclo* often denotes a deculturated Indian – someone too despoiled by the effects of modernity to be considered “authentically” indigenous, and yet too marginal to the main stream of Order and Progress to be much more than an embarrassing remnant of miscegenation. Excluded from both the assumed superiority of whites and the resilience or fortitude of African Brazilians, the *caboclo* was doomed to a eugenic purgatory. These sentiments were inverted in Euclides da Cunha’s account of the Canudos war, *Os Sertões*, where – contrary to his own preconceptions – the tenacity and resilience of the backland *caboclo* population became a symbol for the soul of the nation. The ambivalent sense of “caboclo” surfaces again in Gilberto Freyre’s work, where he often appears as an indolent, malnourished, and disease-ridden victim of the colonial encounter.

Freyre’s lament of degeneration provides an apt metaphor for the problems faced by folklorists in an era of Positivist rationalization. The paradoxes of mixture would not be resolved without some form of refinement. When a lineage retained its essence, it contributed strength to the Nation; when it became contaminated by unregulated contact with a superior civilization, it offered only its impurities. The warrior traditions of indigenous Brazilians could be safely

⁶⁹ French, Jan Hoffman. 2009. *Legalizing identities: becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's northeast*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

⁷⁰ Nugent, Stephen. 1993

⁷¹ Romero, Sílvio. 1888 *Os estudos de poesia popular*. p. 257

celebrated, mythologized, reappropriated, or reinterpreted by blacks or mestizos, yet the figure of the “*caboclo*” himself remained ambivalent and interstitial. The cognitive dissonance between the folkloric spectacle, the lives of those who performed them, and the messages communicated or silenced by them, would require the mediation of the social classes destined to guide the nation into the future.

Standardization and mythification

“As an expression of experience, the folkloric fact is always contemporary, that is to say it is constantly renewing and updating. Therefore its conceptualization as a survival, anachronism, or vestige of a past more or less remote reflects an ethnocentrism or other prejudice of the observer foreign to the collectivity, which leads him to consider these ways of feeling, thinking, and acting as dead or on the road to disappearance.”

- Rossini Tavares de Lima, ABC’s of Folklore, 1952

“The idea that folklore is disappearing is in itself a kind of folklore.”

- Richard Dorson, American Folklore, 1959

“The dramatic dances are completely and quickly falling into decadence... In the North and Northeast some dramatic dances are still frequently found, more fixed in their dramatic qualities and held on their annual dates. But they furiously struggle with... civilization. Or more precisely: civilization struggles with them, and dominates...”

The way things are going, it’s a death sentence.

- Mário de Andrade, Danças Dramáticas do Brasil, 1934-1944

In the January of 2011, I sat in on a weeklong training seminar held for the popular jury at Recife’s carnival. Every year during carnival, several non-adjacent streets of downtown are set aside for the *concurso*s, the official parades which are evaluated and awarded prizes according to group division rankings that were established in the previous year. Screened off from the public sections of the stadium-style risers erected for the occasion, a *comissão* or panel of experts is

situated in box seating with the best view of the proceedings. Next to the *comissão* sits the popular jury in which any citizen can participate, provided that they complete a short course of training seminars sponsored by the city to educate them on the evaluation criteria for each type of carnival group. The scoring of the expert panel carries more weight, but the popular jury's evaluations get factored into the final scores.

Held on weekday evenings at a private college in Recife's Boa Vista neighborhood, the training sessions were split into separate classrooms with emphases on different aspects such as costume design, choreography, or music. Following the recommendation of the organizers, I chose to attend the sessions on the "personages" of carnival groups to get the best general overview of the training process. These sessions focused on how to identify and distinguish the principal figures or characters, defining their roles in each group and style, and advising the jury on how to evaluate their performance. The instructor, a young historian of early twentieth-century Recife, was charged with the unenviable task of covering the entire spectrum of the city's carnival conglomerations. Praised in guidebooks and tourist publications as being home to one of Brazil's last surviving traditional street carnivals, Recife's celebrations are remarkable for their emphasis on *cultura popular* and folkloric groups, and the lack of the more blatant forms of commercialization associated with carnivals in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. Both characteristics are reflective of a process of political struggles over "culture," and populist cultural policies implemented in stages since the early twentieth century.

The sheer amount and variety of material covered in the popular jury training requires brevity and abbreviation. In the unit devoted to both styles of maracatu, the lesson plan mirrored the differential assignment of value that has historically been the pattern: the majority of time was given over to a discussion of the "nation" or *baque virado* style, while rural maracatu was relegated

to a hurried treatment at the end of the session. In describing the figure of the *caboclo de lança* and making an inventory of his complicated costume, the instructor drew attention to the two-meter lance carried by each *caboclo* weighted with hundreds of strips of colorful fabric. According to the presentation given to the jurors-in-training, the *caboclo* must go alone into a forest and cut the wood for the lance himself, and bury it in a cemetery at midnight, to be disinterred later and prepared both cosmetically and ritually for the three days of carnival.

Leaving aside the fact that the severe deforestation of the Mata Norte region of Pernambuco has been well-established since the nineteenth century, this story still struck me as peculiar for another reason. After a year of living in Nazaré and interacting with *maracatuzeiros*, I had not heard of this custom of wood-cutting and interment. The following day I asked some of my friends about the story. They told me that decades ago the *caboclos* had in fact cut their own lances and buried them for a time. But the reason given for this practice was to harden and strengthen the wood so that it would better endure the three days of constant use during Carnival, and they assured me that the part about cemeteries at midnight was nonsense. I asked where they got the wood for their lances today, and was informed of the contemporary method of procurement: from a lumber yard, pre-cut to the right size. Nobody disputed that the lances can be ritually prepared for carnival, but it is also arguable that such practices are optional rather than obligatory. It is normal, but not required, for maracatu participants to take one piece or another of their costume or personal effects to a *mãe* or *pai de santo* for a ritual of blessing and protection, such as a *defumação* (bath of tobacco smoke or incense) or *rezaria* (prayers and orations), common practices in the rural permutations of *xangô*, *jurema*, *catimbó* and spiritism found in the interior.

The particular mixture of fact and fiction in the training seminar story, imparted to a group of eager and urban enthusiasts of carnival, aptly illustrates how a custom with a particular history

can become mythologized by outsiders. It also hints at a process of self-folklorization. “*Tem gente que fala muita besteira* / There are people who will say any old thing,” was a phrase I heard in conversation numerous times with maracatuzeiros. “They don’t know [about the origin or purpose of a particular practice], so they invent.” At some point in time, a maracatu participant told an inquisitive outsider about how their lances are made and prepared; it is entirely plausible that the story was tailored and embellished to meet certain expectations hinted at by the person asking the questions. For example, the practice is mentioned in Arruda de Assis’s thesis from the 1990s, but there too it is only spoken of in terms of absence: her informants lamented how things had changed and how certain practices were being lost.⁷² Legendary stories about *caboclos de lança* in the past who made “deals with the devil” are occasionally told in a similar way that relegates them to a bygone era.

Other similarly “disappearing” practices mentioned by Assis’ maracatu informants included the ritual observation of certain sexual taboos in the period preceding carnival, and the drinking of *azougue*. My own research revealed that a significant number of *caboclos de lança* do in fact observe or respect the taboos against sexual intercourse for a predetermined period prior to and during carnival, yet it should be noted that similar taboos are also commonly found outside of religious or ritual settings, for example among athletes before a big competition. As in Arruda de Assis’s case, some of my informants would lament that younger people do not take the abstinence prohibition seriously, while other taboos such as not allowing a woman to cook their food, or to step across them while seated in a room, are even less common. The decline of the consumption of the *azougue* drink, a preparation made from sugar-cane brandy and gunpowder, was never lamented by my informants; if anything, its disappearance was touted as a positive sign of

⁷² Arruda de Assis, Maria Elisabete. 1996. “Cruzeiro do Forte: a brincadeira e o jogo de identidade em um maracatu rural.” Masters thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

modernity. A strong stimulant with hallucinogenic properties, it was credited with giving the *caboclo* the stamina to perform their very physical labor during carnival. It was also a highly toxic concoction and rather dangerous. The imagery of *azougue* continues to influence representations of maracatu today – it provided the name of a new performing group formed in 2014 by artist Siba Veloso with Mestres João Paulo and João Limoeiro, as well as appearing in imagery of song lyrics of his old band Mestre Ambrósio. “Azougue” is also the title of a feature-length dramatic film that features maracatuzeiros Mestre Anderson and Barachinha in prominent roles.⁷³

Hence, whether or not the *caboclo de lança* “originally” had a ritual obligation to cut and inter the wood used for the lance is not my concern here. What is remarkable is that although a group of ethnographic informants remarked that nobody crafted their lances this way any longer in the mid-1990s, nearly twenty years later this same practice was being described to a seminar of Recife carnival jurors as being the standard. A great deal of misunderstanding and sensationalism has surrounded the religious and ritual dimension of maracatu, lending an added layer of mystery and allure for outsiders. Without denying the richness of the spiritual dimension for many participants, I argue that it is often played for symbolic and dramatic effects in the cultural marketplace, at least in so far as stories about links between maracatu, magic, and the spirit world are performatively pitched at different registers depending on the interactional frame. Some participants have claimed to me that maracatu was itself originally a religion, and that today it has become more of a social and recreational pursuit. Heterodox sets of beliefs, such as the presence or absence of specific ritual acts or taboos among practitioners, are represented as a unified “maracatu tradition.”

⁷³ The film “Azougue” was shot on location in Nazaré da Mata during the autumn of 2014. See http://www.diariodepernambuco.com.br/app/noticia/divirtase/46,51,46,61/2014/09/01/internas_viver,526569/maracatu-rural-e-o-tema-central-de-em-azougue-em-primeiro-longa-do-cineasta-pernambucano-tiago-melo.shtml Accessed September 1, 2014.

While the flattening out of heterodoxy could also be applied to “nation” maracatu, it is particularly salient to “rural” maracatu. The incessant and unfavorable comparisons of the latter to the former by intellectual authorities, outlined throughout this chapter, have left religiosity and ritual practice as yet another contested mark of identity. “Nation” maracatu is strongly associated in the scholarly and popular imagination with the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions of *xangô* or *candomblé*, which are thought to have syncretized with the coronation ceremonies of the colonial and imperial eras, evidence of a link to an African past. In this view, the “nation” maracatu is in an isometric relationship to the ritual life of the *terreiro* or religious temple, centered on the collectivity. Each “nation” maracatu was linked to a specific *terreiro* and an individual *mãe* or *pai de santo*, the Afro-Brazilian sacerdotal leader or priest, identifiable by all members of the group. Similarly, certain social actors in the world of rural maracatu will assert and emphasize an equivalent link between *maracatu de baque solto* and *catimbó*, *jurema*, or *xangô*. My own fieldwork, however, paints a slightly different portrait of the relationship between the formal organizations of a rural maracatu and a ritual or religious fraternity. While several of the most visible, oldest maracatus in the region possess publicly-recognized *terreiros* specific to them, they are exceptional, in spite of being celebrated by cultural mediators as typical or representative of “the maracatu tradition.”⁷⁴

Among the majority of the rural maracatus with which I had extensive contact during my research, spirituality and ritual struck me as private, secretive, and even individualistic affairs dominated by an ethic of silence. The strength of that private spiritual life is being constantly

⁷⁴ The two notable exceptions of maracatus publicly linked to specific *terreiros*, *centros espíritas*, or a particular *mãe* or *pai de santo* are Cambinda Brasileira in Nazaré and Estrela de Ouro outside Aliança. These observations are limited to my own interactions and experiences in the area around Nazaré da Mata. It is quite likely that the rural maracatus founded in the suburbs of Recife between the 1930s and 1960s have a different religious culture that may in fact more closely resemble that of maracatu nação in these respects.

tested in the public stage on which the “spectacle” of maracatu currently takes place. While one very public, well-connected rural maracatu recently elected to place ritual items from their *centro espírita* in a museum exhibit displayed in downtown Recife, such publicity is far from the norm. During the filming of a pre-carnival news spot for Globo television with Nazare’s Cambinda Brasileira (see fig.7), the interviewer tried repeatedly to get a *caboclo de lança* to tell her about “the secret of the carnation” (*o segredo do cravo*), the flower held conspicuously between the teeth or lips during carnival. The *caboclo* João Paulo flatly refused. Had this journalist been familiar with maracatu events held outside of carnival – the *sambadas* and *ensaios* that keep the pulse beating the rest of the year - she might have noticed that when not in costume, *caboclos de lança* frequently hold sprigs of the rue plant (*arruda*) in the mouth in the same fashion. *Arruda* is ubiquitous in the ritual pharmacopeia of many Brazilian traditions, along with a variety of plants used in “folk medicine” by *curandeiros* or healers. The journalist revealed herself to be unfamiliar with these practices in the way she asked her questions. Before this interrogation, hours had been spent transporting maracatu members from their homes in the town out to the sugar plantation that houses the original *sede* and current Culture Center belonging to Cambinda Brasileira, where a picturesque, staged scene of “cane cutters” was filmed for the news piece. In addition to the journalist’s unfamiliarity, this request to divulge secretive information in front of a television camera is indicative of a condescending attitude, masquerading in the guise of reverence, which entitles outsiders to the expectation that “the folk” should perform their culture on demand.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ See Georgina Boyes (1993) study of the English folk revival movement for analysis of this type of entitlement.



Figure 12: Reporter for TV Globo and *caboclo* João Paulo of Cambinda Brasileira

Standardization and regulation

A feedback loop between practices, observation, and reportage occurs in which all involved parties become invested in certain representations. These representations must be understood as partially produced within the history of institutionalization surrounding tradition, and of how the problem of “transmission” has been addressed. This brief discussion about religious and ceremonial practices provides a good example of how transmission becomes related to ideas about authenticity, and how representations are created and manipulated around those ideas. The religions of *candomblé* and *xangô* place an emphasis on initiation ceremonies requiring the commitment and isolation of the candidate for a set period of time. The religious tradition of *jurema* involves similar ceremonies, but the more exclusively rural *catimbó*, on the other hand, functions without elaborate initiations. One legendary founder of a *cavalo marinho* and maracatu is said to have taught himself *catimbó*, communing with the spirits in his bedroom with only a candle for company. Anthropologist Sandro Guimarães de Salles writes that autodidacticism is a paradigm for *catimbó* priests in the area around Alhandra, Paraíba, citing the well-known invocation to a popular spirit incorporated by many mediums, Mestre Carlos. The ritual song goes:

Mestre Carlos is a good mestre
Who learned without being taught
Three days he lay fallen
At the trunk of a *jurema* tree
When he got himself back up
He was ready to work.⁷⁶

While this intuitive style of spiritual development is given a laudatory treatment in this song, specialists in the study of Brazilian religions have often framed the lack of a chain of transmission

⁷⁶ Salles, Sandro Guimarães. 2010. *À sombra da jurema encantada: mestres juremeiros na umbanda de Alhandra*. Recife: Editora Universitária UFPE. p. 126

as a rupture. Roger Bastide's negative view of "rural *candomblé*" and *catimbó* drew upon conclusions he had made about the practice of *macumba*. He related the conditions of rural Brazil to the "de-africanization" and transformation of religious ceremony into sessions of consultation. Rituals became individualized, based on clientage and the needs of a person rather than the community. Bastide lamented the dissipation or outright disappearance of initiation rites, as well as the prevalence of a priest or medium assuming a trance state for purposes of ritual or divinatory consultation and curing, rather than group trance.⁷⁷ Bastide's biases are evident in his disdain for the incorporation of European occult elements, his vocabulary of pathology, and his deduction that *macumba* inevitably leads to criminality – none of which are positions taken seriously today by scholars. But his worry over "de-africanization" and the endangerment of the collectivity would not be out of place with some contemporary discourse surrounding the preservation of culture. Indeed in the Bahian *candomblés* of the early twentieth century, lively debates over the importance of initiation ceremonies and anguish about the potential cultural losses of neglecting them took place within the *terreiros*.⁷⁸ In the realm of *cultura popular* and folklore, it fell to the state institutions established since the 1930s to vigilantly guard against the possibility of "ruptures" in the traditions of the folk that were not in accordance with their nationalist aims. The regulation of carnival, the formation of folklore societies, and the establishment of "cultural incentives" for folkloric or *cultura popular* organizations are ideal phenomena for observing these processes of stewardship.

⁷⁷ Bastide, Roger. 1978. *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*. Les Religions Afro-Brésiliennes, trans. English. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

⁷⁸ Johnson, Paul C. 2002. *Secrets, gossip, and gods: the transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*. Oxford: New York, Oxford University Press. See also: Landes, Ruth. 1947. *The city of women*. New York: Macmillan;

The institutionalization of carnival performances as a spectacle to be evaluated and judged began with the policies enacted under the administration of Getúlio Vargas. In the 1930s, as President Vargas centralized powers in the years leading up to the authoritarian Estado Novo, multiple institutions were established to bring Brazil's twenty states under more systematic federal control. Vargas' cultural policies included the creation of new organizations and the buttressing of existing ones whose aim was the preservation, maintenance, and restoration of national patrimony in the form of historic sites and museums, as well as systematic research into immaterial patrimony such as *cultura popular* and folklore.⁷⁹ One of the initiatives aimed specifically at imposing order on the three days of annual chaos at carnival through the creation of state federations to orchestrate the festivities.

Founded in January of 1935, the Pernambucan Carnival Federation laid out a series of goals in its statutes. These included facilitating cooperation between the various carnival clubs or groups; the distribution of resources between them; the creation of awards and prizes for the most exemplary groups in each genre; the development of tourism; and the creation of outreach programs to the interior through the media of radio and film.⁸⁰ Although its first board of directors consisted almost entirely of men with backgrounds in business and industry, the Federation took a stance on the defense of a traditional carnival, stating in Article 5 of its statutes that it sought "To mold Carnival in a spirit of historical and educational traditionalism, reviving our customs, with characters typical of our History, and facts that enrich us."⁸¹ These goals were expanded upon in a 1938 editorial article published in the FCP's carnival almanac. The anonymous author writes,

⁷⁹ Williams, Daryle. 2001. *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945*. Durham: Duke University Press

⁸⁰ Statutes of the Carnival Federation of Pernambuco, Articles 1 and 2. In *Anuário da Federação Carnavalesca de Pernambuco, 1938*

⁸¹ *Anuário da Federação Carnavalesca de Pernambuco, 1938*

Acting in this way, the Federation establishes a highly instructional and pedagogic character for our carnival, avoiding the presentation of costumes without any significance for our people, purging the great popular celebration of Pernambuco of exotic things, giving preference to what is ours, inspiring the sentiment of the Fatherland, which is what the Brazilian needs most in this time of confusion in which the country is passing.⁸²

Although intellectual as well as institutional orientations towards “the traditional” have changed and transformed significantly over the last seventy years, the agenda behind the original FCP charter has remained relevant to the concept of *cultura popular*. Folklorists, and the artists who draw from their research, have helped to set that agenda throughout the decades even if they have not always had control over its articulation through policy. Many of the FCP’s original functions have become distributed between a handful of other organizations, such as the city of Recife’s Secretary of Culture and *Casa de Carnaval*, the state arts council (FUNDARPE), the federal tourist board (EMPETUR), the federal offices for preservation of artistic patrimony (FUNARTE and IPHAN), and voluntary associations like the Association of Maracatus of Pernambuco. The nuances of the rhetoric have changed, but “tradition” is still viewed as a bulwark against the encroachment of outside “exotic” influences, defined intra-territorially – for example, against the encroachment of carioca samba from Rio in the 1930s, or Bahian *axé* and *trio elétrico* music in the 1990s - as well as against the globalizing effects of international mass media.

Recent state initiatives have sought to decentralize the corporatist structures inherited from Vargas, sponsoring the creation of local cultural centers and workshops. This decentralization, which is realized with greater or lesser degrees of effectiveness on the ground, opens up policy decisions to input or participation from members of the carnival clubs themselves. More sophisticated, specialized understandings of the dynamic and contingent aspects of categories like

⁸² *ibid* Anuário da Federação Carnavalesca de Pernambuco, 1938

tradition, *cultura popular*, and folklore have informed recent collaborations between “the popular classes,” academic researchers, and policymakers, such as the on-going projects of making “cultural inventories” for every state in the Federation. However, as the first such inventory in Pernambuco demonstrated, the accessible intellectual knowledge about those subjects available to non-specialists – represented by the holdings of the municipal libraries where their inventories began – is still almost exclusively confined to the writers who produced their work between 1920 and 1970.⁸³ Additionally, many contemporary projects for preserving, memorializing, or celebrating “local” culture stem from collaborations between the public and private sector established under 1991’s “Lei Rouanet,” which offers tax incentives to individuals and corporations for their patronage of “culture,” a process that is subject to clientelistic manipulations.

Vilhena has written extensively about the precedents, institutional dynamics, and objectives of the nascent Brazilian folklore movement in the earlier part of the century that eventually transformed into a “para-statist” phenomenon.⁸⁴ Before the founding of the National Council on Folklore in 1947-48, a handful of folklore societies operated independently of each other, dispersed around the country and typically revolving around the strong charismatic personalities of their founders. Between 1920 and 1940, societies were founded in São Paulo, Rio, and Natal, spearheaded and directed by prolific writers such as Amadeu Amaral, Mário de Andrade, and Luís da Câmara Cascudo.⁸⁵ As in many other countries, this early period of folklore studies was characterized by a literary approach that emphasized “the analysis of tales in terms of plot, incident, conflict, climax, motivation, and character development,” considered largely apart from

⁸³ Barbosa, Cibele and Sylvia Couceiro. “Cultura imaterial e memória documental em Pernambuco.”

⁸⁴ Vilhena, Luís Rodolfo. 1997. *Projeto e missão: o movimento folclórico brasileiro 1947-1964*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte: Fundação Getúlio Vargas.

⁸⁵ Cascudo’s unwillingness to leave his native northeastern city of Natal meant that he was often sidelined and excluded from the efforts to create national folklore societies, whose principal players were overwhelmingly located in the Rio-São Paulo axis. (Vilhena 1997).

their social context.⁸⁶ In Brazil, these formative decades of folklore were also dominated by figures tied to the fine arts.⁸⁷

Poet, philologist, and literary critic Amadeu Amaral typifies the milieu in which the emphasis and orientation of folkloric research underwent rapid change. In his essays on folklore he espoused many ideas that were consonant with his predecessor Silvio Romero, such as the insistence that popular poetry was not influenced at all by indigenous or African traditions but was wholly Portuguese in its origins. He rearticulated many of the tropes about an anonymous “oral” culture: peasants were still “repositories of tradition” who pull ideas from the air, and recycle verses “without authors, that travel from mouth to mouth.” Rural poets “do not compose, but repeat; they do not invent, but transform.”⁸⁸ In Pernambuco these ideas of embodied tradition and a hierarchy of cultural invention continued to be echoed for more than a half century by figures like Ariano Suassuna. Yet Amaral was also one of the first to observe the interpenetration of rural and urban popular culture in his home state of São Paulo. Amaral noted the migration of expressive forms from the north to the southeast, as well as the appropriation of themes and language from erudite literature in popular poetry. He cautioned his regionalist contemporaries against the romanticization of rural people, condemned the editing of “uncouth” language in folkloric collection in order to accommodate the more “refined” sensibilities of an erudite audience, and decried the need to fight against what he saw as a persistent dilettantism of folklore researchers. Amaral was developing and refining his ideas about popular poetry precisely on the vespers of the formalization of the social sciences in Brazil, and their incorporation into the relatively new public

⁸⁶ Bascomb, William. 1965. “Folklore and Anthropology.” In *The Study of Folklore*. Edited by Alan Dundes. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall

⁸⁷ In addition to Andrade and Amaral, mentioned above, other folklorists who were equally or more famous for their novels, poetry, or *crônicas* (short essays) included Gustavo Barroso, Mario Souto Maior, Leonardo Motta, and others.

⁸⁸ Amaral, Amadeu. 1948 (1976) *Tradições populares*. São Paulo: Editora Hucitec. P.19-21

university system in Brazil. He personally founded two São Paulo-based organizations, The Society for Paulista Studies (1921) and the Society for Ethnography and Folklore (1936). The latter was organized under the auspices of the Department of Culture of the Municipality of São Paulo, which also counted on Mário de Andrade and Dina Levi-Strauss for their contributions.⁸⁹

Mário de Andrade is best known as one of the principal personalities of São Paulo's modernist vanguard of the 1920s, a respected poet and the author of the novel *Macunaíma* (1928). His essays on music and aesthetics were influential, and he came to play a crucial, foundational role in the protectionist and preservationist policies regarding *cultura popular* and folklore that endure to this day. Andrade was also outspoken in his role as critic and aesthetic theorist about the Brazilian elite's disdain for the "popular" classes and their cultural production, and the denial of their contribution to national culture, in particular Afro-Brazilians. His 1928 *Ensaio sobre a música brasileira* criticizes this prejudice, as well as the futility of an emphasis on "purity" in those artists and intellectuals trying to establish a national music. He cites the canon of classical European composers who borrowed freely from other national traditions, and yet were not condemned for it. And yet his overriding concern was with the crafting of a *national* music, something truly Brazilian, which could be achieved by educating composers and artists about the culture of "the people," which in the process became "elevated" to the level of art.

Andrade's sophisticated writings and research into the folklore and musicology of popular cultures are lesser known, scattered as they were across a variety of specialist journals and only collected together posthumously in the massive three volumes of *Danças Dramáticas do Brasil*, annotated and published in 1946 by his research assistant and protégé Oneyda Alvarenga.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Vilhena, Luís Rodolfo, *ibid*

⁹⁰ Andrade, Mário de. 2002. *Danças dramáticas do Brasil*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia.

Although he denied being a folklorist,⁹¹ his ideas had a profound influence on the field via his writings as well as his network of friendships and professional relationships.⁹² He was familiar with the full range of folklore studies up to his own day, and developed the ideas of Romero and Amaral even further. Whereas most folklorists up to his time had focused primarily on literary elements and psychological interpretations of popular culture (stories and parables, legends and myths, or the lyrics of popular song as oral poetry), Andrade pushed his contemporaries to analyze more performative aspects such as drama, ritual, and music.

Whether or not he identified himself as a folklorist, Mário de Andrade did more than any other individual in Brazil to move the study of folklore towards a scientific orientation.⁹³ He co-founded the National Institute for Historic and Artistic Patrimony (or IPHAN) in 1937, and has been credited by recent Minister of Cultural Gilberto Gil among others as the pioneer of “the idea to amplify the reach of protection, preservation, and valorization of the symbolic goods of our people.”⁹⁴

What began as a “heroic mission,” comprised of meetings and publications privately funded by their members, followed a trajectory into increasingly more ambitious projects involving various levels of state and federal government, oriented towards the collection and preservation of folk materials. By the 1950s this process yielded “para-statist” organizations like the National Council on Brazilian Folklore (CNFB), whose members hoped to rescue the folklore movement from what they saw as dilettantism and autodidacticism by creating institutional spaces for rigorous

⁹¹ Andrade, *O Turista Aprendiz*, p. 232

⁹² For example, his long letter-writing friendship with Câmara Cascudo

⁹³ Lima, Rossini Tavares de. 1978 (2003) *A ciência do folclore*. Sao Paulo: Martins Fontes.

⁹⁴ IPHAN. "Os sambas, as rodas, os bumbas, os meus e os bois: princípios, ações e resultados da política de salvaguarda do patrimônio cultural imaterial no Brasil, 2003-2010." edited by Ministério da Cultura. Brasília: Ministério da Cultura/IPHAN, 2010

training in the form of fieldwork and systematic inventories of “folkloric facts.”⁹⁵ The “folkloric fact” was a central part of the movement’s manifesto that was presented at the first Folklore Congress of 1952 (and revised again in 1955). Defined as “every manner of feeling, thinking, and acting that constitutes a particular expression of the life of any human collectivity, integrated into a civilized society, that is characterized by spontaneity and the power of motivation.”⁹⁶ The emphasis on spontaneity highlights one of the surface tensions and paradoxes involved in pushing for the standardization and institutionalization of folklore, which by the folklorist’s own definition was restricted to phenomena that had developed apart from the influence of outsiders, institutions, or mass media.

Another important CFNB figure, Edison Carneiro, urged the registration of folkloric groups as civic associations, arguing that Brazil badly needed to foster the spirit of cooperation. Traditional folkloric groups and *folguedos* were based on links of kinship and friendship and acted as schools for its participants. Where traditional forms of economic activity persisted, traditional folklore would flourish and a consistent means of transmission from one generation to another was guaranteed. When the mode of production changed, Carneiro argued, folklore would be less common and begin to disappear. For *folguedos* to maintain a means of transmission, they would need new institutions and structures to replace those that were being eroded by modernization. Carneiro noted that folkloric groups were already giving presentations organized by their own initiative in cities far away from their place of origin, yet he nevertheless argued for an interventionist cultural policy that would encourage older popular artists to revive their groups which had (according to folklorists) fallen into decadence. He advocated fiscal incentives and the

⁹⁵ Vilhena 1997 *ibid* p 107-9. The terminology of “para-statist organization” was used by the head of CNDF, Renato Almeida. See also Tavares Lima, Carneiro

⁹⁶ Tavares Lima, “ABECE do Folclore” p. 168

creation of awards or prizes (prêmios) that would still leave the groups freedom without “violating” their character.⁹⁷ Although he does not cite him in this discussion, Carneiro is drawing upon ideas developed by Dutch folklorist Von Sydow who distinguished between active and passive bearers of tradition.⁹⁸ The premise behind Carneiro and his colleagues’ advocacy of an interventionist cultural policy, and the CNFB project in general, was that traditional society would not be able to maintain their traditions without the help of outsiders in a position to provide durable structures for reviving, renewing, and reproducing them.

Conclusion: from the invisible to the crystallized

Since the first half of the twentieth century different claims about the origins of rural maracatu have been put forth by scholars, journalists, artists, and *maracatuzeiros* themselves. Faced with a scarcity of documentation, these claims are prone to conjecture and more than a trace of romanticism. Until the 1980s, precious little existed in the way of sound recordings, photographs, or studies of rural maracatu, in striking contrast to urban *maracatu nação*. Earlier accounts of maracatu usually failed to make a distinction between the two different types of maracatu, and when they did they considered its rural form to be of minor consequence. Scholars have often asserted or implied that rural *maracatu de baque solto* is a mongrelized and degenerate cousin of *baque virado*, a position that more accurately reflects the bias of the authors than it does

97 Carneiro, Edison. 1957. *A sabedoria popular*. Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Cultura

98 An “active” bearer implied someone who participated in the enactment and perpetuation of a practice, while “passive” bearers could be thought of as a spectators or audience, those who could recall the basic formula or patterns of a tradition but were unable to perform it on their own. Passive bearers of tradition constituted the public audience necessary to provide any given performance with “resonance.” They also acted as “a check on tradition” against deviations by pointing out when alterations had been made, which was “of great importance for the unchanging survival of a tradition.” See Carl Wilhem Von Sydow, 1948. “On the Spread of Tradition.” In *Selected Papers on Folklore*. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger

their source material. This characterization also reflects wider concerns with cultural authenticity as conceived by outside observers, a preoccupation that has carried over into the rural maracatu community as it has gained more visibility throughout Pernambuco and the nation. The prejudices of urban intellectuals may have dissipated over time but their presumptions are still criticized, albeit privately, within that community. As the director of Cambinda Brasileira, Zé de Carro, articulated it to me, “Some of these people think they know more about maracatu than we do.”

Nevertheless, it is striking that any cultural phenomenon as rich as rural maracatu could maintain its invisibility even to such a comprehensive project as Mário de Andrade’s folkloric survey of the Northeast. In 1938, as part of his work with the newly-launched Department of Culture under the Vargas government, Andrade put together a team of researchers that undertook a massive fieldwork expedition through the Northeast as part of their *Missão de Pesquisas Folclóricas* (Mission for Folkloric Research). Their work took them into rural areas of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Piauí, and Maranhão. Hundreds of recordings were made, all or most of which would be housed at an archive in São Paulo, cataloged, transcribed and published in print volumes in the late forties.⁹⁹ Although *maracatu de baque solto* is nowhere to be found in this body of work, Andrade’s collection has ample representations of cultural expressions that have a strong relationship to rural maracatu, such as *caboclinhos*, *bumba-meu-boi*, *catimbó*, and the sung poetry of itinerant guitarists or *violeiros*. Are we to infer from its absence in this vast phonographic archive that rural maracatu did not exist in 1938? Or was it encountered, but deemed unworthy of documentation by a research team unable to discern the nuances that set it apart from the abundant variety of related *folguedos* and rural pastimes? The answer to the first question is that maracatu

⁹⁹ The recordings themselves went largely unheard by the public at large until they were restored and released in a set of five compact discs by the SESC foundation in 2006 (and a one-CD version has also been issued by the Library of Congress in the United States)

almost certainly did not exist in the form in which we now know and recognize it as a distinct category. But how do we untangle the blind spots of categorization when talking about cultural forms that are in a continual process of reinvention and renewal?

One vernacular story about the origins of the word “maracatu,” rather different from Andrade’s “beautiful struggle,” is that it simply denoted noise and disorder, and came to be applied to any lively, chaotic gathering of poor people, especially a “colored peoples’ thing.” The original social scientists’ calling was one of making order out of chaos, from Comtean positivism, to Durkheimian sociology, to Redfield’s models of peasant society. Robert Redfield’s “ideal types” were influential on the folklorists of his era in many corners of the world. He hypothesized that as rural, isolated, and homogenous communities came into contact with urban, heterogeneous communities they would become “more characterized by disorganization of culture, by secularization, and by individualization.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, they would become saturated with the noise of modernity and mixture. Redfield carried out his fieldwork in Mexico and Guatemala in the 1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, and was the coordinator of a number of simultaneous community-study projects all exploring similar themes. His ideal types were used to gauge the characteristics of where different communities fell along a “rural to urban continuum,” a concept which continued to be debated among anthropologists and rural sociologists for the next few decades. Their work was pioneering in its day and also guilty of the peccadillos we have come to expect: an inattention to where the models broke down and a marginalization of the inconvenient. Although eventually abandoned, the death rattle of the rural-urban continuum was remarkably prolonged. In the southern hemisphere, Andrade’s project departed to the Nordeste (although he did not personally accompany them) at the same time as Redfield’s team were

¹⁰⁰ Redfield, Robert. 1941. *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

working out their theories. One wonders if perhaps the sound of a *baque solto* group was simply one more noise among many, inaudible to the trained ears of the Mission's research team.

Following Stewart's injunction to investigate the ways in which "hybrid" forms crystallize by recognizing each other across zones of difference liberates us both from a nagging worry about origins as well as a reflexive urge to see all these discrete categories as merely the constructs of folklorists and social scientists. The distinctions between the many varieties of popular cultural expression in Pernambuco were refined through dialogue, between those who created and performed them and in intellectual exchanges with curious researchers and tourists – although we might be at pains to find acknowledgement of the popular intellectual contributions to those elite representations. These past waves of romantic and modernist fixation on origins and an interest in "the popular" as roots in the tree of Brazilian identity still exert a remarkable influence about how *cultura popular* is talked about in Pernambuco. Yet, as taken up again in the fourth and fifth chapters, this type of traditionalism is also presently in discursive competition with recent postmodern celebrations of difference and hybridity, wherein a maracatuzeiro can punctuate his explanation of what maracatu is and where it came from by saying "é tudo misturado!" (it's everything mixed together) with relish and pride.

Chapter 3:

The Sambada As the Pulse of Maracatu

Introduction

For the majority of people who don't live in the Mata Norte of Pernambuco, rural maracatu only becomes "visible" around carnival. However, the street rehearsals (*ensaios*) and improvising contests (*sambadas*) between two mestre-poets, which typically begin to occur every weekend from late August and on until carnival, are vital components that sustain the momentum of the groups throughout the year. By this I mean that even during the dormant period where *sambadas* are happening infrequently (from the end of carnival until the harvest season), the remembering and reliving of these events in the form of audio and video recordings is continuous. The organization, preparation, and anticipation for a given group's next *ensaio* or *sambada* – typically held at or near the groups' headquarters, with crowd ranging from a few dozen to a few hundred people - is a constant theme in the life of a maracatuzeiro. This chapter examines these events to provide a sense of that importance, and also to pose questions about the way power, history, emotion, and morality are articulated through the poetic exchanges as well as the participation of the hundreds of people who stand shoulder to shoulder with their chosen, preferred mestre-poet as he faces off against an opponent.

The first intellectual to give the aural component any substantive attention was the musicologist César Guerra-Peixe in the 1950s, when he devoted nine out of one-hundred seventy

pages to it in his book *Maracatus do Recife*, a monograph that focused principally on the different form of *maracatu de baque virado* or “maracatu nação.” For Guerra-Peixe, *maracatu de baque solto* was a more recent, derivative genre that incorporated elements of a handful of other regional forms of *cultura popular* with which its practitioners had been in contact.¹ The majority of his brief description concerns the technical details of the instrumental music, which was considerably different than the style played today, at least in the case of the group he describes for early 1950s Recife. Of the song content, Guerra-Peixe gives only one brief paragraph delineating a sequence of what appears to be fixed compositions, beginning and ending with “Quando eu vim lá de Luanda,” a *toada* also found in *capoeira* and *xangô* (the Pernambucan variant of candomblé).² Katarina Real does not mention anything about the lyrical content in her section on rural maracatu found in her book “Folklore in the Carnival of Recife.”³ A short essay written in the middle 1970’s by Olímpio Bonald Neto mentions a few *toadas* or *loas*⁴ from a single carnival performance that bear little resemblance to either what Guerra-Peixe observed in the 1950s or what I found in my own work, aside from a few that could be *marchas* in the standard ABCB rhyme scheme.⁵

The earliest known, identifiable *mestre*-poet who sang a style of rhymed “sambas” based around more complex series of seven-syllable lines was Mestre Baracho of Engenho Santa Fé

¹ Guerra-Peixe means “derivative” in its technical sense, as something which derives from something else, and not necessarily with the pejorative connotations about lack of originality in contemporary usage. Guerra-Peixe, César. 1954 (repr. 1980) *Maracatus do Recife*. São Paulo: Irmãos Vitale.

² *Ibid.* 92. The phrase translates as “When I came from Luanda.” For more on the *xangô* of this period, see: Ribeiro, René. 1952 *Cultos afrobrasileiros do Recife: um estudo de ajustamento social*. Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais

³ Real, Katarina, 1967. (2nd ed. 1990) *O folclore no carnaval do Recife*. Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana.

⁴ A *loa* refers to verses of exaltation or praise (*louvação*), specifically of the saints, but could also be general compliments of a person. Although maracatuzeiros are familiar with the term “loa”, the only people I have actually heard use the word in practice are academics or journalists when talking to them. This is probably because the phrase *mestre tirador de loas* is found in some of the older literature in reference to mestre-poets of maracatu. Contemporary poet-singers will say “samba” or simply “verse.”

⁵ Bonald Neto, Olímpio. 1991 “Os Caboclos de Lança - Azougados Guerreiros de Ogum.” In *Antologia do Carnaval do Recife*. p. 281-296. Recife: Editora Massangana. The maracatu in question was located in the town of Paulista, which is close enough to Recife and Olinda to almost be considered part of the greater metropolitan area.

(Antônio Baracho da Silva) in Nazaré da Mata, who in the 1960s emigrated to Recife and founded Maracatu Estrela da Tarde.⁶ Baracho was also a singer of *ciranda*, a genre which came into vogue in Recife in the 1970s, and he recorded several LPs in this genre during the 1970s; unfortunately there are no known recordings of him singing maracatu.⁷ The earliest known phonographic recording of *baque solto* maracatu is comprised of two short tracks totaling less than four minutes in combined length, and released on the folklore label Discos Marcus Pereira.⁸ Nearly twenty-five years would pass before rural *maracatu* again found its music released on a professional recording, with the inclusion of one track in an ambitious cultural mapping project, the four-CD box set and book assembled by anthropologist Hermano Vianna, *Música do Brasil*.⁹ Since the turn of the millennium there has been a growing discography of CDs featuring *mestres* of maracatu. Some of these recordings are organized by outside producers, but the majority occur through the initiative of the maracatus themselves, who secure financial backing in a variety of forms, including donations from local businesses or public arts grants.

I encountered three particular poetic aspects in the *sambadas* that I believe to be salient to questions about memory, authenticity, and identity that are raised repeatedly in this thesis. These are the modality of rudeness (*malcriação*), the display of knowledge (*sabedoria*), and the role of the “man of words” in communities that until recent years been mostly illiterate, including what constitutes a successful or failed performance. *Malcriação* involves the trading of insults and the practice of “besting” your opponent through a clever and well-composed put-down, a practice that

⁶ Veloso, Siba and Astier Basílio, 2008. “Samba novo: a poesia do maracatu de baque solto,” In *Na ponta do verso : poesia de improviso no Brasil*. (Eds. Alexandre Pimentel & Joana Corrêa) Rio de Janeiro: Associação Cultural Caburé.

⁷ Interview with Baracho conducted by Roberto Benjamin, September 7, 1977. Cassette recording, personal archive of Roberto Benjamin. Baracaho’s *ciranda* records were released by the Recife label Rozenblit and the labe Vagalume based in Caruaru.

⁸ Instrumentos Populares do Nordeste, 1976, Marcus Pereira MPL 9346

⁹ Vianna, Hermano, and Ernesto Baldan, 2000. *Música do Brasil*. São Paulo: Abril Entretenimento.

is not unfamiliar to other regions of the African diaspora or those with a history of Iberian colonization. It is usually undertaken in a spirit of playfulness, and can include making up fictitious and ludicrous scenarios that describe your opponent in a humiliating situation. But there can often be an undercurrent of tension, and sometimes these exchanges can turn serious and even ugly.¹⁰ How can the negotiation of personal honor and reputation between one poet and another be seen playing out in the language of boasting, joking, and insult? Where are the boundaries of this type of poetic exchange, and how are they drawn? How might this reflect forms of sociability that are unacceptable within the ideology of contemporary Brazilian civil society or, perhaps more importantly, how do such social expressions *become* acceptable in select contexts?¹¹

The second aspect addresses the notion of *sabedoria* or knowledge and the pedagogical role of maracatu within its audience. During a sambada, the subject matter and tone often flows freely and changes rapidly, and it is common for one *mestre* to introduce a topic or theme to which the other is expected to respond, because to not to engage with the theme (*não entrar no tema*) is viewed as an exhibition of both cowardice and a lack of poetic skill. This material may be drawn from contemporary events, such as the war in Iraq or the police siege of drug traffickers in the favela of Alemão in Rio. Natural disasters are a recurrent theme, and frequently interleaved with commentary on inequality or development that calls their naturalness into question. The tragic mudslides that killed dozens in the seaside town of Angra dos Reis at the first of the year in 2010;

¹⁰ In addition to the examples provided later in this chapter, I once witnessed an anomalous occasion where the poetic exchange turned into a family quarrel and had to be stopped. The event was a general rehearsal of Piaba de Ouro, the maracatu founded by Mestre Salustiano in the suburbs of Olinda. Although not a formal song contest, the organizers decided to call up guest mestres from the audience and pair them off against each other just for fun. The fun quickly soured, though, when two of the Salustiano siblings began poetically airing some grievances that became increasingly heated. When gossip about one poet's wife involving accusations of cuckoldry entered the exchange, the oldest brother stopped the band, took the microphone, and brought a different poet-singer in to replace them.

¹¹ Abrahams, Roger D. 1983. *The man-of-words in the West Indies: performance and the emergence of Creole culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

the earthquake in Haiti, also in January of 2010; the floods that displaced thousands and destroyed entire towns in southern Pernambuco in June of the same year; and the 2011 tsunami and nuclear meltdown in Japan; and the Rio school shooting of April, 2011, were all topics sung about while they happened and for months afterward.

The role of the poet as a conduit of information in semi-literate societies has been well documented, and maracatu *mestres* can be compared to the singers of *cantoria de viola*, of the *vaqueiros* or cowboys, and the authors of *cordel* chapbooks in this regard.¹² Luiz Beltrão remarks that the poet-journalist in these contexts cannot simply relate the news, but is expected by his public to offer a passionate opinion and perspective, to interpret events in ways that resonate with their quotidian concerns, their aspirations, and their ideas about the world. “Basing their work not only on a fact in itself, but on what is said about it: the rumors, the gossip, the multiple versions gathered together by the sensibilities of these amateur reporters.”¹³ Similarly he emphasizes the centrality of the public spaces in small towns and villas as locations for the exchange of opinions and ideas about the news of the day, local intrigues, nostalgia for “the good old days,” ecological and climactic worries, or the short-comings of government.¹⁴

Alternately the “knowledge contests” played within the maracatu sambada may invoke a narrative of maracatu’s own history, remembering key figures and events, not only to prove the poet’s mastery of these details but to display how eloquently they can express them in a way that strikes their audience as genuine and unique. The poet-singer may show off his knowledge of historic events and personages in Brazil’s history or beyond. Mestres may challenge one another

¹² See chapter five for further discussion of this.

¹³ Beltrão, Luiz. 1971. *Comunicação e folclore; um estudo dos agentes e dos meios populares de informação de fatos e expressão de idéias*. São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos. 70-71

¹⁴ *ibid.* 121

on their mastery of sports trivia, Pernambucan history, or Biblical personages. The point of these exchanges is not in “pure and simple recall” but rather in how, as Paul Zumthor asserts, the poet

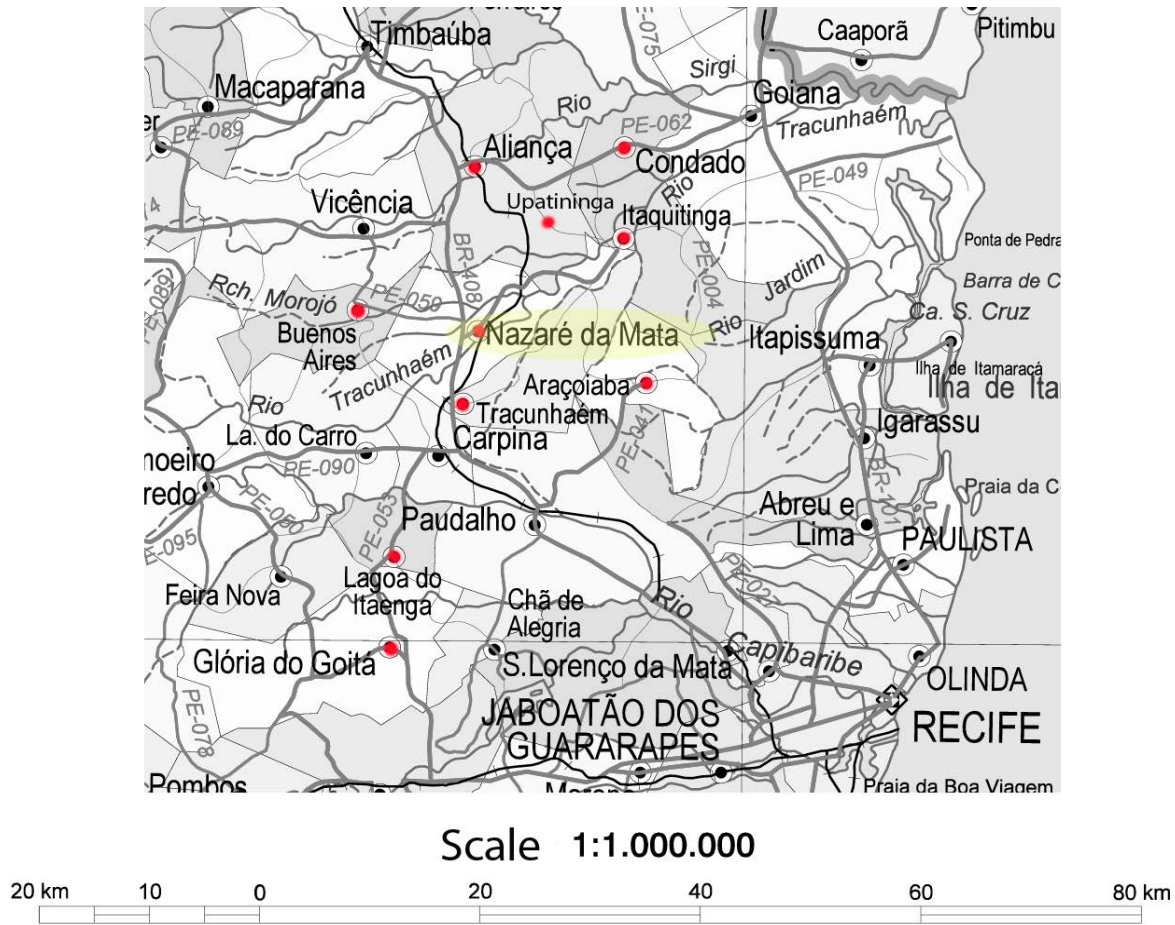


Figure 13: Map of the study area, centered around Nazaré da Mata. Towns with ensaios and sambadas attended during the fieldwork of 2009 – 2012 are marked in red.

(Source: IBGE, 2009. ftp://geoftp.ibge.gov.br/mapas_tematicos/politico/unidades_federacao/pe_politico.pdf)

Maracatus discussed in this dissertation include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Águia Dourada (Nazaré) | Mestre Sibia |
| Águia Dourada (Glória do Goitá) | Mestre Heleno Fragoso |
| Águia Misteriosa (Nazaré) | Mestre Zé Flor in 2009, Mestre Anderson in 2011 |
| Águia de Ouro (Araçoiaba) | Mestre Zé Demézio |
| Cambinda Brasileira (Nazaré) | Mestre Carlos Antônio |
| Cambidinha Brasileira (Araçoiaba) | Mestre Dedinha |
| Estrela Brilhante (Nazaré) | Mestre Barachinha 2009-2011, Mestre Veronildo 2011-2012 |
| Leão da Mata Norte (Tracunhaém) | Mestre Manoel Domingos |
| Leão Mimoso (Upatininga) | Mestre Barachinha 2011-2012 |
| Leão Misterioso (Nazaré) | Mestre João Paulo |

Pantera Nova (Araçoiaba)
Pavão Dourado (Lagoa de Itaenga)
Pavão Dourado (Tracunhaém)
Piaba de Ouro (Tabajara)

Mestre Dedé Vieira
Mestre Bio Caboclo
Mestre Zé Joaquim
Mestre Dinda Salu

stresses remembrance over memorization, the recreation through performance of things already known, and the questioning or contesting of their details.¹⁵ Classic studies of epic oral literature have highlighted the degree to which certain repeated phrases, themes, or sequences could be used as a stockpile of formulas from which to construct and compose poetic verse in the midst of performance.¹⁶ Similarly the *maracatu mestre* draws from a repertoire of specific social, geographic, and historical referents shared with their audience.¹⁷

This leads to my third concern, the role and importance of clever wordplay itself that is so central to *maracatu*. The oral poet or “man-of-words” plays an important role in a semi-literate social milieu, where traditions of eloquence lead people to place value on the talent to *encaixar* or fit a rhyme into an aesthetically pleasing and formally structured pattern. For example, the deployment of parody, irony, and vulgar or “low” humor has strong antecedents in popular art forms of the colonial period often derived from the religious *autos* – mystery plays or catechisms – that were transformed into profane amusements outside the purview of the Church.¹⁸ These profane entertainments have constituted a parallel discourse offering its own points of view about morality, justice, sexuality, hierarchy and other subjects that were often at odds with those held by ruling elites.¹⁹ Such alternate value systems and ideas about the social order are found throughout the *cultura popular* of Brazil and in other parts of the world, particularly those with a carnival

¹⁵ Zumthor, Paul. 1990. *Oral poetry : an introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 181

¹⁶ Finnegan, Ruth H. 1977. *Oral poetry: its nature, significance, and social context*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷ I provide specific examples of *sabedoria* knowledge verses in the fourth chapter.

¹⁸ Ramos 1988; Cascudo 1962; Bastide 1978; Burke 1978

¹⁹ Almeida 1958

tradition.²⁰ However, while all of these qualities are found in an arch of northeastern *cultura popular* forms that spans the dramatic arts, the plastic arts, literature, and music, *maracatu de baque solto* belongs to a subset where high value is set on the practice of improvisation.

The survival of a tradition of improvising requires individuals with the talent to compose within a performance itself, drawing upon the resources available to them in the form of memories and experiences (including past performances) and manipulating that material into something new and singular. But a receptive, knowledgeable, and active audience is just as essential, as oral poetic improvisation requires a “cultural agreement, an expectation and a predisposition of the public, and a collective attitude towards memory” in order to thrive.²¹ The accomplished *mestre* is able to communicate well on multiple levels, speaking to one audience with contextually-specific knowledge and another audience with broader but intersecting knowledge, by coding their poetry in a mixture of ordinary and non-ordinary language, both referential and expressive.²² This ability to nest one meaning inside or alongside another may enable poets to “smuggle in” certain oppositional or insubordinate points of view in seemingly innocuous language, allowing for the expression of sentiments critical of the old agrarian aristocracy in what is a relatively autonomous social space.²³ During the “time of the engenhos” described in our first chapter, it was not unheard of for the *patrão* or boss to give some type of assistance (typically food and shelter) to the maracatus that passed through and performed there during carnival. Outside the town of Carpina (which has since outgrown Nazaré) the owner of one engenho is remembered as being an actual aficionado of maracatu, and his plantation became a favorite stop during carnival. The voicing of

²⁰ Burke 1978

²¹ Zumthor, *ibid.* 179-182

²² Feld, Steven. 1990. *Sound and sentiment: birds, weeping, poetics, and song in Kaluli expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

²³ Scott, *ibid.*, 156-158

ambiguous or opaque criticism and mocking satire beneath the noses of the masters of the *casa grande* or Big House is one of the most striking characteristics of the *Bumba-meu-boi* dramas of the northeast, and a similar phenomenon occurred with song contests in the American antebellum south during corn-shucking parties.²⁴

One of the earliest scholars to seriously consider improvised poetry on its own terms, Albert B. Lord, noted that the privileging of texts by literate societies (or, more specifically, by scholars within literate societies) resulted in not just a prejudice against oral literature but a blindness to and misunderstanding of some of its basic characteristics, such as Balkan epic poetry's heavy use of repetition and even "nonsense" phrases that would have been out of place in "erudite" literature.²⁵ Many of the criteria transferred from formal literary analysis were meaningless to his informants, including the distinction between "improvised" and "prepared" verse. Likewise, it is unlikely that a specific designation for improvised poetry existed when maracatu began to develop on the sugar plantations of Pernambuco during the early part of the twentieth century. Yet that category is entrenched now, and some stigma is attached to using "memorized" or prepared verse inappropriately. These categories of improvised (*improvisado*) and memorized (*decorado*) samba in maracatu are somewhat flexible, with boundaries that are constituted in practice and through interaction. All *mestres* compose away from the performance field of a *sambada*, arranging verses in their head or sometimes on paper, and *mestres* have no qualms admitting that they used a *samba decorado* at a formal presentation, a recording studio, or a carnival stage in Recife. But the relationship of such pre-composition to performances with an engaged audience comprised mostly of *maracatuzeiros* is a slightly touchy question, and many *mestres* will insist on a totally

²⁴ Borba Filho, Hermilo. 1967. *Apresentação do bumba-meu-boi. Recife*: Imp. Universitária.; Murphy, *ibid*;
Abrahams, Roger D. 1992. *Singing the master : the emergence of African American culture in the plantation south*. New York: Pantheon Books.

²⁵ Lord, Albert Bates. 1960. *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

improvised nature as the mark of authenticity. As one of the sambadas discussed later in this chapter suggest, the indeterminacy of these categories can become tangled up with differences in social mobility and educational level between the generations of *maracatuzeiros*.

Long discussions are held by *maracatuzeiros* about the relative merits of one mestre-poet or another, about *sambadas* both recent and long past, with some improvised sambas remembered by fans years after they were sung. They might sometimes be reluctant to admit that their preferred mestre sang poorly on a given night, but generally they are critical and demanding of the poets. Here we see that *maracatu* in this articulation has more characteristics of a participatory rather than a presentational music genre.²⁶ The mestre-poet is treated as a respected colleague rather than placed on above or beyond their reach. This is represented spatially during *ensaio* and *sambada* performance when the mestre always sings on the ground surrounded by his *nação* or nation, and not on a stage. Mestres are subjected to critique and evaluation much like the performance of a respected musician can be critiqued by fellow musicians, even though the mestre-poet is an elevated, prestigious role not available to all. A common way to put down a mestre (in the third-person, naturally) is to say that he is not a poet but just a *singer* of *maracatu*, hence differentiating the true poet as an individual possessing a unique gift and skill.

Until fairly recent years, tape recordings were often made on portable cassette recorders of these all-night affairs, to be listened to again and again by *maracatuzeiros* sitting around their headquarters or perhaps at a corner bar whose owner was a friend to the *maracatus*. Cassettes began to give way to digital recordings during the last decade, with some fans carrying handheld voice recorders at performances. But by far the most common recording device is currently the

²⁶ Turino, Thomas. 2000. *Nationalists, cosmopolitans, and popular music in Zimbabwe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

cell phone, which is cheaper but also more precarious in terms of reliability and quality than magnetic tape.²⁷ Amateur or semi-professional DVDs are occasionally made of sambadas, although they are not nearly as common as videos of carnival presentations. Both types of recordings – for both types of event, the participatory and presentational – provide further opportunities for analyzing and evaluating their own performances. This self-reflexive component of the poetic art of maracatu is important, because it runs contrary to certain essentialist, atemporal, and primordial notions about the intellectual and cultural production of “the popular classes” that still circulate, a partial legacy of the earlier folklore studies that emphasized or insisted upon anonymity, antiquity, persistence across time, and orality as essential characteristics of *cultura popular*.²⁸

Maracatu poets may learn their art outside of formal institutions and with the aid of apprenticeship relations with older practitioners (two characteristics indicative of “folkloric” arts), yet specific verses sung by specific poets at specific *sambadas* have been recorded, remembered, and retransmitted using available technology over the last three decades. “Oral transmission” as the means of cultural reproduction is no longer a useful concept. *Maracatuzeiros* frequently mention that their art is more professionalized today than in the past, and that it is held to a higher standard by its own public. They are self-conscious about reaching multiple publics through media

²⁷ Cassette tapes, if stored reasonably well, can still reproduce good audio on a well-maintained tape deck. In 2010 I began a digitization project in Nazaré of maracatu cassette recordings dating back to the 1990s (or in some cases the late 1980s, although these were most likely copies made at a later date). Most of these came from a large collection belonging to Siba Veloso, but a few came from friends who had a tape or two stashed in a shoebox in the closet and which still played perfectly. Two copies of this digital library, one in São Paulo and one in the United States, currently exist on computer hard drives. Unfortunately, most of the new cell-phone recordings made by my maracatu friends have been nearly unlistenable due to the low bit-rate resolution used to economize storage space. With digital formats, there is always the question of data corruption and proper backups, and I fear that many of the casual recordings made this way could end up lost in relatively short period of time.

²⁸ This summary of characteristics is drawn from Cascudo, Luís da Câmara. 1952. (2nd ed. 1978) *Literatura oral no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Livraria J. Olympio Editora. Cascudo in fact makes a distinction between the “popular” and the “folkloric” when he writes, “All folkloric literature is totally of the popular classes but not all popular production is folkloric.” He distinguished the folkloric as that which had no fixed origin in time but rather belonged to the collective memory. (Ibid. 23.)

and presentation opportunities, and the socioeconomic conditions that require a skilled mestre-poet to be able to tailor a performance for different types of audiences. The changed sociocultural landscape in which maracatu presently takes place is a result of broader changes within Brazil, specific interventions by outsiders, and the initiative of *maracatuzeiros* in taking ownership over their own cultural production.

Sambada, Itaquitinga: Mestre Barachinha vs. Mestre Zé Flor

Arrival and manobra

On the Saturday of Barachinha's sambada with José Flor of Maracatu Águia Misteriosa, December 5, 2009, I took the Recife-Timbaúba bus in the early afternoon carrying a backpack with some recording equipment, a camera, and a change of clothes. Another month would pass before I would be able to move to Nazaré and live there full time, so for the moment I was still a *turista*. On a map Nazaré is deceptively close to the capital, a mere sixty-seven kilometers, yet the bus could take over two hours to travel that short distance.²⁹ It seemed to stop every few hundred yards: "pinga-pinga," or drip by drip, is how it's called by the people who live in the small towns along highway 408 and rely on this sole bus line to commute to the city for work, school, or any specialized medical care that is difficult to get in the interior. One of the disadvantages of traveling this way is that you are exhausted when you get to your destination. Hot and usually crowded, the open windows invite the ever-present road dust, bus fumes, and the acrid odors of burning trash

²⁹ A project to double the single-lane highway from Recife to the nearby city of Carpina was well underway by the time I finished my fieldwork. This expansion of the roadways was directly tied to the upcoming 2014 World Cup tournament, when Recife is one of five cities set to host the games, and for which a new stadium is being constructed in the suburban city of São Lourenço da Mata. The impact of more efficient travel from Nazaré to the capital remains to be seen.

or cane fields in the harvest season. Although I did not know it at the time, this same mode of transport along these same stretches of highway is how I would experience three consecutive carnivals with Estrela Brilhante, when the overwhelming heat transformed into the reassurance of companionship, and the noise and dust of the road were tempered by the constant marking of time as the musicians played in the back of the bus.

I got off at Nazaré alongside the highway, in front of the city's only hotel. Although I had been a frequent visitor since my introduction to Barachinha and the core membership of Estrela Brilhante in late August, I did not want to impose on my new friends, all of whom lived in tight quarters with many family members. I went to my hotel room to shower and decompress, then called Barachinha to tell him I had arrived in town. He informed me that everyone was meeting at eight o'clock in front of his father Porfirio's house whose garage doubled as the *sede* or headquarters of Maracatu Estrela Brilhante, the place where we first met. This was the meeting place for the *concentração*, the rallying point of participants, a term used by the maracatus for *ensaios*, carnival, or any other event involving a good deal of group organization. Although both maracatu groups involved in this sambada were based in Nazaré da Mata, it was being held in the nearby town of Itaquitinga, where Mestre Zé Flor of Maracatu Águia Misteriosa lived and owned a bar. Barachinha had not sung in a sambada against another mestre for almost two years, and he planned to bring a big contingent of supporters from Nazaré. Three buses worth of supporters, to be exact. He had taken care of the transportation arrangements personally, as he took care of so many of the logistics of Estrela's activities.

It was going to be a long night. I had a bite to eat, prepared my recording and photographic gear, and headed towards the *sede*. A blast of fireworks as I approached the street let me know that I was right on schedule. In the interior homemade fireworks are used to commemorate and

announce any and all kinds of events: football goals, holidays, parties, and even funerals or wakes.³⁰ These *fogos* do not have much of a visual component besides a quick flash, but release a loud and rapid succession of small explosions, and in maracatu they are an essential component of the aural aesthetics. As I approached the *sede* I could hear that the percussionists or *terno* had already begun to warm up.³¹ The frantic rhythms would start and stop in an unhurried way, with some of the gathering crowd dancing when they felt inspired. The brass players, who are the only ones referred to as *músicos* or musicians, straggled in one by one over the next hour.³² Although I was only a neophyte in maracatu, I had already developed a deep admiration for the sheer endurance of these musicians who would play all evening and into the next morning. The core *terno* of any given maracatu had the luxury of relinquishing their physically-demanding role to musical friends and colleagues who had shown up to the event, people who could stand in for them while they took a short break. Every maracatu percussionist is seemingly proficient on more than one instrument, which also allows them to rotate throughout the night and relieve cramped muscles. The horn players, on the other hand, are on their own. Being fewer in number makes them a commodity even in Nazaré, which is home to two small but historically important music schools, and allows them to receive a higher payment for their services in recompense for the relentless pace and often repetitive melodies. A common combination is one or two trombones

³⁰ César, Getúlio. 1975 (repr.1988) “Velório” in *Antologia pernambucana de folclore*, eds. Mário Souto Maior and Waldemar Valente. Recife: Editora Massangana.

³¹ The *terno* in maracatu refers strictly to the percussionists, comprised of *caixa* (snare drum), *tarol* (smaller snare drum, pitched higher), *bombo*, gonguê (a double bell instrument worn with a harness, a larger and heavier relative of the agogô), the *mineiro* (a metal, cylindrical shaker), and *porco* (pronounced *poy-cah*, this is a local variant of the friction drum found in samba, the *cuica* found in samba music).

³² The word *músicos* means literally just “musicians,” but in maracatu refers to the brass players and on the rare occasions when they are present, reed instruments like saxophone or clarinet. The practice of reserving a generic term for “musician” exclusively for horns players reflects the fact that these individuals are typically the only musicians in maracatu who have received any kind of formal instruction. A similar phenomenon occurs with carioca samba where, despite the considerable degree of musicality involved, percussionists are referred to as “bateria” while individual soloists are designated as “músicos.”

and a trumpet: one or more are often teenagers (normally boys, but occasionally girls) matched up with a slightly older player, who would be responsible for creating impromptu musical arrangements based on the main melody the mestre provides them before the night begins. Sometimes the brass arrangements follow the melody, and sometimes they are a kind of contrapuntal answer to it. A very commonly heard phenomenon is the use of triumphant themes from famous animated cartoons or films. Current hit songs from the genres of *brega*, *axé*, *pagode* or *suingueira* are often incorporated as well, as are themes from popular telenovelas, the famous Brazilian soap operas.

Estrela Brilhante's band, *terno* and *músicos* both, was one of the tightest in the region during the time I spent in the Mata Norte. Some of its musicians had toured outside Brazil as part of Siba Veloso's roots-music ensemble Fuloresta, which he put together while apprenticing as a mestre of maracatu in Estrela Brilhante. There is no formal membership per se in any maracatu band, even in a group with a fairly stable lineup, although there is always a core of individuals that persists across various carnivals and provides continuity and guidance. Given that maracatu musicians play much more for their own edification than for the scant compensation, nobody seems to begrudge a colleague who has a chance to land a better-paying gig on a weekend night or even during carnival, when brass players are especially in demand by *frevo* bands. Additionally, musicians are completely free to sit in at any given *ensaio* or *sambada*, relatively free of the rivalries that often accumulate between different groups or mestres. Many of them had played with different maracatus whose *ensaios* I had attended since coming to the area every weekend since September. Some of them went by their actual names, while others had possessed *apelidos* for so long nobody knew them by anything else. They mingled in front of the *sede* along with the

groups of *caboclos*, *baianas*, directorate members, fans, and friends from other maracatus in the neighborhood.

Some of these whom I barely knew that night would come to be close friends over the next two years. Cosmo, Geraldo, Péu, Cabucha, Baixinha, Thony “Bambu”, Cabeça, Ronaldo, Lilo, Galego do Trombone, Roberto do Pistom, Zé Maria, Nal, Né, Carlinhos, Kiko, Narciso, Gildo, Maria, Biu Porfiro, Biu Rosi, Edinaldo, Sandro, Berenice, Veronildo. At some point more fireworks, set off by Barachinha’s father José Porfiro, summoned us onto the buses. The *terno* only stopped playing long enough to climb the steps, then resumed their relentless beat. It seemed we had only just pulled out onto the highway when we were slowing again, and I wondered what was happening. The bus had stopped at the entrance to Tracunhaém, the village five kilometers down the road, to pick up some stragglers from Maracatu Pavão Dourado, with whom Estrela had a close relationship of alliance and support. The bus moved on, and soon made a left hand turn on to the dark, twisted roads that cut through the cane fields.

We arrived at the town of Itaquitinga between ten and eleven at night, and the streets near the main entrance from the highway appeared nearly abandoned, unusually so for a Saturday. The bus passed near the more animated center of town as we made our way towards the neighborhood of Chã de Fogo where the sambada was being held. We left the vehicles parked quite a distance from the event, allowing Estrela Brilhante to assemble their people and prepare to descend on the sambada with a grand entrance. Later in my fieldwork, I would learn that when maracatu was still a local *engenho* phenomenon, the visiting group would take particular relish in trying to take the other by surprise, sneaking up cloaked in the shadows of the tall sugarcane. These days an entrance is a semi-orchestrated affair, with members of the visiting directorate scouting ahead to announce their presence and get a feel for the physical layout of the event. I wandered a bit while Estrela

and their supporters collected themselves. The street of brick cobblestone or “paralelepípedo” was illuminated by strands of small light bulbs strung overhead just for the occasion. Neighbors inspired by an entrepreneurial spirit set up tables with sweet or salty delicacies for sale and Styrofoam coolers packed with soda, beer, and bottled water. Smoke billowed from portable grills cooking kabobs of beef, chicken, sausage or cheese. Closer to where Mestre Zé Flor and Maracatu Águia Misteriosa were set up and already playing, there were some small pavilion-style tents providing shelter for vendors with a small team of workers, who served large glass bottles of ice-cold beer and waited on clients seated at their handful of folding tables.

When the grand entrance for Estrela Brilhante was ready to begin in earnest, someone ignited still more fireworks and the organized chaos of the *manobra* began to make its way forward. In a sambada, as the visiting group enters, the etiquette is that the hosting maracatu stops and takes a rest, allowing the gathered crowd to appreciate the force of the invading army of anywhere between fifty to a hundred and fifty people as they make their way down the avenue with interlocking circles of clockwise and counter-clockwise *caboclos* and *baianas* leaping, dancing, or simply jogging in their circuitous involutions around the core of the band and the mestre. Many of the men carry hand-carved wooden staves or large sticks, a symbolic surrogate for the two-meter lances the caboclos wield during carnival, which they swing and sweep in motions over their shoulder and downward to tap loudly on the ground.³³ Many perform these acrobatic moves with sprigs of *arruda* secured between pursed lips.³⁴ When the mestre blows a certain series of long notes on his whistle near the end of a brass chorus, everyone knows to stop moving and drop to the ground in a squat while he sings a *marcha*. Many land in awkward,

³³ Watching this along with the individual or small-group mock battles can sometimes be vaguely reminiscent of *maculelê*, a type of stick-fighting dance found in capoeira

³⁴ *Ruta graveolens* or the rue plant, an important and ubiquitous element in *jurema*, *umbanda*, *catimbó* and related religious traditions.

sprawling poses, and some might stretch almost completely horizontal, ear pressed to the ground in what some say is a survival of an older practice when *caboclos* listened for the vibrations of an approaching rival maracatu. The *marcha* sung by the *mestre* is really only audible to people in the immediate area, given how noisy *sambadas* tend to be. At the end of the verse, everyone springs to life again and the procession continues. The group will cross from one corner to another, as if to seal off each entryway from malevolent forces and preparing a sacred battleground. If there is a church on the street, the maracatu invariably makes one of their stops in front of it as the *mestre* asks for protection for his tribe, nation (*nação*), or *batalhão* (army). After a number of these evolutions up and down the adjacent streets, the maracatu will settle in or *encostar* into a spot near where the host group has established its *mestre* and *terno*. The arrangement and distance between the groups depends on the amount of people in attendance, and especially the placement of the sound reinforcement – a *carro de som* with wired microphones usually supplied with long 50-foot cables. In the case of this *sambada* between Estrela Brilhante and Águia Misteriosa, they had set up across the street from one another with the car sitting in the middle and blocking off any through traffic.

The etiquette for a *sambada* requires the first group to stop playing while the second make their entrance. I did not actually realize how standardized this practice was until much later, because on this night and this night alone of all the *sambadas* I attended in three years of fieldwork, the rule was not observed. *Mestre Zé Flor* did not command his *terno* to stop playing when Estrela entered the area, but continued singing and playing. Overwhelmed as I was by my first genuine *sambada pé-de-parede*, one of the largest I would ever attend, the concurrent playing and singing of two maracatus added more confusion to an already chaotic situation. The *locutor*, or announcer hired to open and close the *sambada* in the same booming voice used in countless sportscasts,

seemed hesitant. The videographer Val Tranquilino from Nazaré, whom Barachinha had contracted to partially document the night, didn't seem to know where he should be pointing his camera. It was only later that I realized the degree to which the core membership of Estrela Brilhante was offended by this breach of protocol. It was viewed as a deliberate snub, a show of disrespect in the ceremonial opening of the sambada when the two groups are nominally acknowledging each other as equals.

The gesture was not lost on Barachinha either, who commented about it in some of his first sung *marchas* on the microphone. Zé Flor sang his response, saying that he did in fact stop his *terno*, but that Barachinha seemed too busy “*rebolando*,” and so he gave the order for them to start playing again. In one respect this insinuates that Estrela was taking too long with their manobra; more importantly, the imagery of Barachinha performing a sensuous, hip-shaking dance (*rebolar*) effeminizes him and implies ridicule. This kind of ridicule is a major component of sambadas generally, but it tends to become more pronounced in the middle and especially the end of the evening when “rudeness” comes and goes. Opening an evening with such language, in contrast to the usual courtesies, would likely be seen as adversarial. Zé Flor also did not seem overly pleased with the amount of people Estrela had brought with them, as seen in this exchange:

(Zé Flor)

Você veio com muita gente	You came here with a lot of people
Eu não tenho assombração	But that doesn't scare me.
Eu não sou chefe de turma	I'm not some kind of big boss
Pra gostar de batalhão ³⁵	That I want a big gang.

(Barachinha)

Eu trouxe meu batalhão	I brought my gang
Não pra trair ninguém	Not to betray anyone
Mas um mestre sendo simples	But a mestre who is humble

³⁵ While batalhão literally means an army or battalion, in parts of the Northeast it can also refer to a work gang, such as a *mutirão*, a type of mutual assistance often used in building or making repairs to a home

Todo mundo lhe quer bem

Everyone wishes him well

(Zé Flor)

Tu fosse pedir arrego
Quase em todas regiões
Teu maracatu é pouco
E crescesse seu batalhão

You went to ask for help
To practically the whole region
Your maracatu is weak
And so you built up your army

(Barachinha)

Pedindo arrego ou não
Eles vieram porque
Nem o pessoal daqui
Quer saber mais de você

Asking for help or not
They all came because
Not even the people here³⁶
Want anything to do with you

Zé Flor attempts to portray Barachinha as lacking the innate qualities of confidence and leadership required of a *mestre*, that he needs to “rent” or bribe followers to come out and cheer for him. Barachinha responds that sincerity and simplicity will naturally inspire others to stand by you when you need them. Over the next two years, I would come to see this simply-put statement as an apt description of Barachinha, a person whose humility was equaled only by his selfless dedication to his maracatu and the demands he made of himself as an artist. His soft-spoken and sober demeanor could also belie his leadership abilities, the easiness with which he could command mutual respect and discipline from the members of Estrela Brilhante when it came time to confront the challenges that are part of every carnival and every sambada. People were magnetically drawn to him and did, in fact, seem to wish him well. Barachinha had an army at his back who admired his skill as a poet, but skill alone does not produce that kind of loyalty. He is also a tireless organizer of the maracatu community, spreading good words about other talented artists and receiving curious outsiders like myself with open arms. He has spent his career as an

³⁶ It is worth restating that “here” is Itaquitinga, a town where neither of the two maracatus are actually based.

artist lending support and strength to his friends and allies with no other expectation than that they are there for him too in his time of need.

The tension diffused somewhat as the sambada moved into the next phase as the mestres began to ask the audience to buy drinks for the maracatu, and many compliments were paid to the town's ex-mayor who had helped sponsor the night. Although this was the first sambada I attended entirely from start to finish, beginning and ending at the maracatu's headquarters, I had been to a few *ensaios de rua* and partial *sambadas*. One of those events in the town of Araçoiaba (thirty-eight kilometers from Recife) was only nominally a sambada between Piaba de Ouro, the maracatu of the late Mestre Salustiano, and the oldest maracatu in the state, Cambidinha Brasileira. It was atypical because although it was announced as a sambada, Cambidinha chose to host it as an informal birthday celebration rather than a *desafio*, in part because their regular mestre had asked an old friend to sing in his place. Although two different maracatus were involved, the evening in almost all other respects resembled an *ensaio* rather than a *sambada*. During those first few months of fieldwork, I was still parsing out the differences between the two types of events: both share many similarities in their organization and execution, but their divergences are critically important. Before continuing with the rest of that night in Chã de Fogo, Itaquitinga, a few words distinguishing those differences can provide a better picture of how *ensaios* and *sambadas* are structured.

The elements of *ensaios* and *sambadas*

An *ensaio*, or open rehearsal, is obligatory for any maracatu to function from carnival to carnival, whereas *sambadas* are undertaken only if the maracatu feels the time is right and can meet the conditions of attracting a second group and their mestre-poet, which includes a payment.

*Ensaio*s and *sambadas* are always held on Saturdays, a tradition adhered to at least in part because Sundays are the only days most of their social base is guaranteed to have the day off work.³⁷ Both types of event typically happen on weekends after the harvest season begins in August and September. While at least one open *ensaio* must be held by a maracatu during the season (if they hope to retain their membership), additional *ensaio*s are optional, and some groups often try to squeeze in another during the final weeks leading up to carnival. The competitive attitudes and rivalries of the *sambada* have no place in the ethos of the *ensaio* – all *maracatuzeiros* are extended an open invitation to participate.

After the directorate settles on a date with its *mestre* and as many musicians as they can get to commit, the planning gets fully underway.³⁸ The location is always somewhere near the *sede* or headquarters of the maracatu. Many groups have some sort of relationship or understanding with the proprietor of a local bar who helps fund the event, with the expectation that they will make their money back in a night of good business. Many bar owners are fans and friends of particular *mestres*. This is the case in the relationship of Mestre João Paulo of Leão Misterioso and his friend Seu Luiz who has a bar perched on top of a hill in the neighborhood of Paraíso right next door to their *sede*, and hosts events of several local maracatus. Likewise, Maracatu Estrela Brilhante always holds their *ensaio*s alongside the Bar of Gerônimo, across the highway from the state police headquarters, and Águia Dourada in nearby Buenos Aires has a friendly relationship with a bar next door to their headquarters at the entrance to the city. Sometimes a key person in a maracatu may actually own such an establishment, as was the case of Mestre Zé Flor owning the

³⁷ Arruda de Assis mentions the Recife maracatu Cruzeiro do Forte holding *ensaio*s on Sundays. As I will discuss in my chapters dealing with carnival, this maracatu is somewhat polemical for both its proximity to the FCR (Carnival Federation of Recife) and that it is considered by *maracatuzeiros* in the interior as being much closer to maracatu “nação” or *baque virado*. Arruda de Assis, Maria Elisabete, 1996. *Cruzeiro do Forte: a brincadeira e o jogo de identidade em um maracatu rural*. Masters thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

³⁸ As I will describe shortly, there is no set membership for the musicians, although there is typically a core that provides continuity.

Itaquitinga bar where this sambada took place. In the village of Tracunhaém, Né of Pavão Dourado and Zezinha of Leão da Mata Norte both have bars attached to their *sede*. In these cases of entrepreneurship the groups are actually able to cover their expenses and any extra earnings from the night go right back into the maracatu. Publicity about *ensaios* is done through word of mouth, announcements on the two radio stations in Nazaré da Mata, and sometimes with handbills.

A *carro de som*, a large sedan-style car with an array of oversized bullhorn-style speakers mounted on its roof, provides the sound system. A handful of such cars exist in Nazaré, contracted during daytime business hours for the purpose of announcements and advertising at eardrum-crushing volume, promoting everything from sales at shops in the center of town, to city events or political propaganda, all in blatant contravention of Pernambuco's sound pollution law. For an all-night *ensaio* or *sambada*, arrangements are made to have a person tap into the city's power grid directly from any utility pole located close by. If nobody is available to do this, the *carro de som* must use its own generator which tends to be as loud as or louder than the music itself, in addition to releasing a constant cloud of diesel fumes.³⁹

In terms of civil authorities, the maracatu must register their *ensaio* with the local police and get a permit to hold it. There is no monetary charge for this permit, and the maracatus prefer to comply with these requirements. When I asked if that was because they were subject to police harassment if they failed to obtain permits, I was told, "No, it's because we *want* the police to come by once or twice during the night, it keeps things from getting out of hand. If you don't

³⁹ I never determined for certain if the person who climbs the utility poles to tap into the power grid, called a *macaco* for his aptitude with heights, is actually an electrician or in any way licensed to perform such work. Although my own recording equipment was separate, I still ran my cables alongside theirs and the details about the electricity fell in the category of things I preferred not to know.

register your event, they won't come around at all, not even if you call for help if something happens.”⁴⁰

Between nine and ten in the evening, people will begin gathering at the *sede* in preparation for the evening to get underway. When enough of a crowd has gathered, the sound system is up and running, and mestre and musicians are ready, then the maracatu will at last make its *manobra* around the neighborhood. The *manobra* is a simulacrum of the carnival procession that maneuvers its way in formation through the streets, leaving the *sede* and heading to their final destination. Anyone who wishes may march along with the *manobra* provided that they know enough not to be trampled by the circumambulating caboclos when things begin to move rapidly. Loyal members of other maracatus as well as other *mestre* poets are often seen in the *manobra*. Whereas the *sambada* is spoken about in language emphasizing group pride and defending one's "nation" or "tribe" in a confrontation with another maracatu, the open *ensaio* sees *maracatuzeiros* celebrating an inclusive, unifying, and collective cultural identity. Curious neighbors or spectators watch from the sidelines as the group continues *manobrando* until they settle at the designated location for the *mestre* and the musicians. The first hour or two are led by the mestre and his "contra-mestre" – the respondent whose main job is to closely follow the mestre's improvisations in order to sing back the designated lines of repetition when appropriate without bungling it up.

A good portion of this opening period is taken up with the mestre simply acknowledging the crowd, calling out individuals by name in rhyme, expressing happiness at being able to celebrate and show off their *nação* or maracatu. I usually found myself called out to by the *mestres* who knew me, like in this example from the *ensaio* that followed about a month after the Chã de Fogo *sambada*:

⁴⁰ Maurício of Leão Faceiro (currently with Leão de Ouro)

Avistei os americano
Sei que para festa vinha
Diga pra Barack Obama
O primo dele é Barachinha

I saw The American here⁴¹
I know he came to the party
Send a message to Barack Obama
That Barachinha is his cousin⁴²

Then there is a ritualized petition for people to buy drinks for the maracatu, to which the crowd never fails to respond, and before long there accumulates a stack of beer bottles, cachaça, cheap whisky and two-liter bottles of soft drinks at the feet of the mestre. When the *mestre*-poet calls for a break and hands over the microphone to a visiting *mestre*, the spoils are distributed among the core membership. The practice of recognizing individuals by name and making requests for drink is a shared trait of both *ensaios* and *sambadas*. The example here is taken from one of the latter, because it displays two styles of such requests:

(Dedinha)

E tá faltando a bebida
Pra meus menino tomar
A minha família é grande
E nada pouquinho não dá

And there is nothing left
For my children to drink
My family is large
And a little bit just won't do

(Dedé Vieira)

Peço pra Zezé do Forte
Me mandar uma Pitú
Pra gente brincar bonito
Neste meu maracatu

I ask Zezé do Forte
To send a bottle of cachaça
For us to celebrate in style
In this, my maracatu

(Dedinha)

Vou pedir uma bebida
A meu amigão considerado
Pessoá, Antônio Filintro

I'm going to ask for a drink
For my good and esteemed friend
Here he is, Antonio Filintro

⁴¹ Having shown up to Nazaré without an *apelido* or nickname, I was quickly given one: *Americano*.

⁴² Ensaio for Estrela Brilhante, January 9, 2010 in Nazaré da Mata. .

This can go on for quite some time before a break is actually taken. When it is, the *mestre* always sings, “Vou parar pra beber” or “I’m going to stop to have a drink.” Although it might be a reflection of the people I chose to surround myself with during fieldwork, a surprising number of *mestres* (Barachinha, Zé Joaquim, Dedé Vieira among others) are teetotalers, and others who do enjoy a drink now and again often take it easy or abstain on the night of a sambada, when the most challenging moments come at four in the morning. So when the *mestre* sings figuratively that he is going to stop to have a drink, his identity is subsumed in the collectivity of the maracatu: they are all taking a break, as the *torcedores* or fans disperse to socialize before regrouping for the final stretch, and the *mestres* meet with friends or fans or sometimes go off on their own to collect their thoughts.

Throughout the evening each *mestre* varies their melodies only when changing from one metric and rhyme scheme to another. Quite often the *mestres* are singing different melodies independent of one another. For four-line *marchas* these are typically melodies of the *mestre*’s own creation and over time become identified with that individual. As we will see shortly, during the sambada there is a succession of metric forms that is more or less adhered to during the evening, beginning with simple four-line *marchas* and moving through “sambas” of six and ten lines, *galopes* (a type of combined *marcha* and *samba*), and finally *samba comprido* or *samba curto*, the most rapid and difficult to sing. For these more complex forms it is common to find *mestres* borrowing melodies from one another, usually a younger neophyte borrowing from an old veteran. There are some melodies that have circulated long enough that they are no longer strongly

⁴³ Sambada in Araçoiaba, September 17, 2011, between Maracatu Pantera Nova and Maracatu Águia de Ouro (with Dedinha filling in for his friend Zé Demézio). A portion of this recording can be heard here: <http://baquesolto.org/2011/09/18/sambada-dedinha-x-dede-vieira-aracoiaba-17-09-2011/>

associated with a particular *mestre*, falling into something akin to a “public domain.” However, during a sambada it is possible to hear one *mestre* criticize the other for an implied musical or lyrical plagiarism, as happened on the night cited here, when Dedinha (a famous *mestre* in his 60s)



Figure 14: Mestre Dedinha of Cambidinha Brasileira (top), and Mestre Dedé Vieira of Pantera Nova (bottom)

called out Dedé Vieira (a *novato* in his early 30s at the time) for singing another poet's melody and implying that he was too inexperienced to know its authorship. Such rebukes are light-hearted, as there is no real stigma attached to using the melody of another singer. The same cannot be said of actually singing a rhymed verse that is remembered to have been sung by another, a taboo that would be greeted with open condemnation and ridicule.

The reprimand given by Dedinha to the younger Dedé Vieira was sung in the *galope* style. The *galope* is metrically identical to the *samba em seis linhas* (6-line samba) but differentiated by the slower cadence of the first two lines, which are then repeated back by the contra-mestre or *coro* (chorus) just like a *marcha*, with the remaining four lines sung at a faster clip. The exchange went as follows:

Mas esse galope é velho
Foi Galdino que cantou (2x)
Respeite-se seu professor
Me acompanha no samba solto
Quem cantar coisas do outro
É ladrão salteador

But this galope is old
It was Galdino who sang it (2x)
Respect your professor
Keep up with me in the loose samba
Whoever sings another's things
Is a highway thief⁴⁴

During the relaxed *ensaios*, that sequence of verse structures (*marchas*, *sambas*, *galopes*) exists only in a loose way, and after the opening period of *marchas* mestres are free to engage in or refrain from singing any of the forms at their own discretion. However, the impetus towards increasing complexity and momentum still holds sway to a degree. Although not facing an opponent as he would in a *sambada*, the *mestre*-poet still wants to put on a good show for those

⁴⁴ This recording can be listened to online at <http://baquesolto.org/2011/09/18/sambada-dedinha-x-dede-vieira-aracoiaba-17-09-2011/>

assembled. In the absence of a verbal contest, the best way to hold the crowd's attention is to build up your rhymes from the simpler quatrain forms and end with more dazzling displays of verbal dexterity. It also keeps the event more challenging for the *mestre* seeking to either extend or maintain their proficiency in the different song forms. Another reliable method for keeping the crowd engaged is to temporarily relinquish the microphone to other *mestres*:

Acho que já tá na hora	I think it's time
De botar o pessoal (2x)	To call up the gang (2x)
Que vive cantando samba	Who live singing samba
Desde há de carnaval	Ever since carnival
(Barachinha) ⁴⁵	

Sometime after the first hour or so, it is expected that the *mestre* will invite another *mestre*-poet to sing. They do not sing together or square off against one another; rather, the invitation is for the other *mestre* to take over, after which he will hand the microphone off to yet another invited guest. The amount of time each *mestre* sings depends greatly on the number of *mestres* present that evening but typically lasts between twenty to thirty minutes. The expectation is that all *mestres* in attendance will get a chance at the microphone, whether old veterans of maracatu or new talent. It is viewed as an insult not to call up a veteran *mestre* present at the *ensaio*, and it would be equally insulting for the *mestre* to refuse the invitation (although I have occasionally seen the latter, usually attributed to the person feeling ill). Typically the role of respondent or *contra-mestre* is filled by whoever is available.

Although the normative ideal of the *ensaio* is egalitarian, hierarchy can come into play especially during this part of the evening. The succession of *mestres* can appear random, but in truth involves a variety of factors from personal friendships and alliances and the respective *mestres*' status within the maracatu community. To wait too long to call upon a well-respected or

⁴⁵ Ensaio, Estrela Brilhante, January 9, 2010 in Nazaré da Mata

virtuoso *mestre* might be construed as insulting, yet to call upon him too soon might be seen as presumptuous depending on where the “host” *mestre* ranks in the hierarchy. Much depends on the history and intimacy between the individuals. Often the first person to immediately take over from the *mestre* will be the maracatu’s own *contra-mestre*, many of whom aspire to lead their own maracatu at some point in the future and wish to practice and display their own talent. Unless established through eye contact by the host *mestre*, the first guest poet is usually arranged by members of the directorate. After this, the *mestre* is free to relax, socialize, and pick the remaining series of *mestres* from the sidelines, often in coordination with the members of the directorate or the maracatu’s owner. During Estrela Brilhante’s *ensaio* at the beginning of January, 2010, the first *mestre* who Barachinha called upon was Zé Joaquim of Maracatu Pavão Dourado (Tracunhaém) who is his cousin as well as brother to João Paulo (“The Pope of Maracatu”) in Nazaré.

Zé Joaquim a vez é sua
 Venha ajudar Barachinha
 Por que se minha Estrela é sua
 A sua nação é minha

Zé Joaquim it’s your turn
 Come and help Barachinha
 Because if my Estrela is yours
 Then your nation is mine

Os mestres que tão na festa
 Tem que cantar samba quente
 E só parar amanhã
 Onze horas para frente

The *mestres* here at the party
 Have to sing ‘hot’ samba
 We won’t stop until tomorrow
 Eleven o’clock or later

The claim to keep the party going until eleven in the morning is hyperbole, although this particular *ensaio* continued on for some time after sunrise. Barachinha sang for almost five more minutes: his earlier call simply gives Zé Joaquim time to present himself at the front of the performance area. Zé opened with a simple *marcha* that he often uses:

Vou cumprimentar o povo
 Ao senhor e à senhora
 Deu-me oportunidade

Let me compliment the people here
 Gentlemen and ladies
 You gave me the opportunity

Vou me apresentar agora

Now I will introduce myself ⁴⁶

The fact that Barachinha called on Mestre Zé Joaquim to sing first was no accident. As mentioned earlier, Estrela Brilhante shared a long history of friendship with his maracatu, Pavão Dourado. When the crowd includes a relatively unknown mestre, or in some cases an unpopular one, they typically must wait their turn after the others. During the time of my fieldwork I had the privilege of observing Mestre Anderson, the star of the second half of this chapter who was only a fourteen-year old *contra-mestre* when I met him, get called up as guest poet a little earlier each time. The informal hierarchy playing out at the micro-level during these *ensaios* is unlikely to be thought of as important enough to warrant comment or conversation, but occasionally improprieties do become a focus. One such instance occurred at an *ensaio* in late 2011 involving Mestre Zé Galdino, a friend and collaborator of Barachinha who is also a *ciranda* singer and a *violeiro* (more commonly known as *repentistas* outside Pernambuco). Galdino at the time was almost as well-known for his vanity as he was for his indisputable talent – I met a great many maracatu fans who consider him the greatest living mestre-poet - and on that particular night he refused to follow *contra-mestre* Cabeça in the sequence of singers but insisted on being introduced on the microphone by Barachinha himself. He then justified his actions in a *marcha* that many people found insulting towards Cabeça, which was talked about for weeks afterwards. In retrospect Galdino's refusal was more of an awkwardly-phrased criticism leveled at his friend and colleague Barachinha, because it was Galdino's custom in his own maracatu to personally introduce the visiting mestres.

⁴⁶ *Ensaio* of Estrela (already cited) from January 2010. Zé Joaquim also sang the same introduction for himself at an *ensaio* of Maracatu Leão Formoso, Nazaré da Mata, July 24, 2010, and probably many others in my archives.



Figure 15: Zé Joaquim sings at a 2009 ensaio of Estrela Brilhante (top). Members of Pavão Dourado and Estrela Brilhante dancing together (bottom).



Figure 16: Mestre Barachinha and Contra-mestre Cabeça greet the dawn (left). Geraldo poses while José Porfiro looks on (right).

It is not at all unusual for half of the night or even longer to be spent with such “visiting” guest *mestres* from outside the maracatu leading the *ensaio*. At the point where momentum seems to lag or the hour is getting late, the maracatu will put its own *mestre* back on the microphone to close the evening. Unlike a *sambada*, an *ensaio* is not required to last all night. Although the majority of the ones I attended did indeed last until dawn, there were cases when either a low turnout or foul weather resulted in the directorate deciding to end a few hours before the sun came up. When this happens, it is not considered a failure or any type of negative reflection on the *ensaio*. *Ensaio*s, like *sambadas*, also end with a *manobra*, leaving from the performance space and ending at the group’s headquarters.

Depois de beber / After the drink

During a *sambada*, the break or *intervalo* with other guest singers cannot go on so long that it detracts momentum from what everyone came to see – the duel between two *mestres* stretching

their skills to the limit. Although there is no formal timeline, the *desafio* or challenge part of the evening is usually underway by two o'clock. When the *mestres* take their places again, they may begin with quatrain *marchas* but soon start in with the variation of *samba em dez linhas*, verses of ten lines theoretically made up of seven syllables a piece, although this rule is often flaunted as the accent of rural Pernambuco tends to combine syllables and drop the final consonants off words. The form of ten lines of seven syllables (*décimas*) is of Iberian origin and has been popular in northeast Brazil since at least the seventeenth century when it was popularized by the baroque poet Gregório de Matos, often considered the first *violeiro* or itinerant guitarist-poet, noted for his skill at blending satire, philosophy, and romantic verse. In maracatu the *décima* rhyme scheme is typically ABBACCDDC. The fifth and the sixth lines are repeated by the contra-mestre and *coro* (the “chorus” composed of whoever is standing near their mestre and wishes to sing along, provided they don't throw off his attention).

From this point on in the evening there are no comparisons with *ensaios*: this is serious business, the verbal, symbolic, and even spiritual duel between two singers and their maracatus. The gloves of courtesy come off. Even the “knowledge contests” mentioned near the beginning of this chapter are likely to be peppered with pejorative putdowns toward the opponent. But there is still a line, however ephemeral and indistinct, between the acceptable insult and a *baixaria*, or undignified cheap shots. As the real work of the sambada at Chã de Fogo got underway, an exchange would happen that would become infamous for a time in the local lore of maracatu.

Barachinha

Zé Flor em Deus não pôs fé
 Porque não crê em Maria
 Mesmo quem lhe protegia
 Foi Zé Pedro de Sapé
 Ele morreu você é

Zé Flor didn't put faith in God
 Because he doesn't believe in Mary
 The one who really protected him
 Was Zé Pedro of Sapé
 He died, and now you are

Baba-apito, fraco e ruim
Zé Pedro já levou fim
Pra deixar você penando
Nem ele ressuscitando
Vai tu escapar de mim

Speechless, weak, and without talent⁴⁷
Zé Pedro is long gone
And he left you suffering
Not even if he came back to life
Would you escape from me now

Zé Flor

No dia que tu nascesse
Foi a maior confusão
Já tinha certo irmão
Pra te ensinar a brincar
Contrataram uma babá
Às seis horas da manhã
O povão não achou bom
Deu de presente uma fita
Que ia nascendo Chita
Pra macaca de Tarzan

On the day that you were born
There was a great confusion
You had a certain brother
To teach you how to play
They hired a nanny
At six o'clock in the morning
The people didn't think it was good
They gave a ribbon as a present
To the newborn Cheeta
Tarzan's (female) monkey

Barachinha

Zé Flor, isso é um defeito
Que tu bota em minha cor
Tu vai perder teu valor
Essa coisa eu não aceito
Deixe de seu preconceito
Que é pra você não se dar mal
Atenção, policial
Preste atenção e me atenda
Algeme Zé Flor e prenda
Senão eu meto o pau

Zé Flor, you are finding fault
With my color
You are going to lose your own worth
I won't accept that kind of thing
Let go of your prejudice
Or you'll be in trouble
Attention, police officer
Pay attention and assist me
Handcuff Zé Flor and arrest him
Or I'll beat him up

Zé Flor

Você foi caçar emprego
Terminou numa fazenda
Caiu na porta da venda
Quase que acaba bêbado(bebo)
E foi pegar um arrego
Da burra de Dona Bela

You went in search of work
Ended up at a plantation
Fell at the door of the company store
Almost did yourself in with drink
And went to take advantage
Of Dona Bela's donkey

⁴⁷ The phrase “baba apito” is slang very common in maracatu and has no good English translation. Taken literally, it evokes the image of a *mestre* sucking on his whistle as if it were an infant's pacifier. The whistle is blown only when the band plays between verses, when the *mestre* uses it for percussive accents to the rhythm, and also signals them to stop when he blows one prolonged note at the end of a measure. To say that a *mestre* is “baba apito” (a noun) or “babando apito” (a gerund) is to essentially say that they have nothing left to say or aren't singing anything of substance.

A pobre besta amarela
Deu vinte patas de coice
Porque você se afoitou-se
Faltou com respeito a ela

Barachinha

Quando você trabalhava
No Engenho Serra D'Água
Seu patrão sentia mágoa
Que produção tu não dava
Um dia cana cortava
No outro fazia vala
Até hoje o povo fala
Na preguiça de Zé Flor
Que como trabalhador
Não paga nem uma bala

Zé Flor

Faltaste desperdiçar água
Ai perdesse o emprego
Marcada hora eu não chego
Aqui é papa capim
Isso é uma coisa feia
Que nego desmantelado
No fim ficasse enrolado
Corre ou o dono pega
Faltando respeito à égua
Ficaste desempregado

Barachinha

No dia do pagamento
Seu Francisco, teu patrão
Que tu chamava Chicão
Xingava a todo momento
Que quase oitenta por cento
Na venda você devia
E os pão doce que comia
Fiado sem ter dinheiro

The poor golden beast
Gave you twenty kicks with its heels
Because you got too hasty
And disrespected her

When you used to work
At Engenho Serra D'Água
Your boss would get upset
Your production was worthless
One day you would cut cane
And the next day dig a ditch
To this day the people still talk
About the laziness of Zé Flor
How as a worker
He wasn't worth a damn

When it was dry, you were wasting water
Like that, you lost your job
Make an appointment and not keep it
This is really something
This is a tasteless thing
What a ramshackle black man
In the end you're a big mess
Better run or the owner will get you
Disrespecting the donkey
And you end up unemployed

On payday
Mr. Francisco, your boss
Who you always called 'Chicão'
Would curse all day long
Because you owed almost 80%
Of your pay to the company store
And the sweet rolls you would eat
On credit, without any money

Quando avistava o padeiro
Pra não pagar se escondia

When you would see the baker coming
You would hide so as not to pay him

At the beginning of this passage, Barachinha gives a pretty standard put-down of his opponent. Zé Flor's next stanza depicting the birth of Barachinha as a female monkey, however, sent shockwaves of laughter from his cheering section, which made more noise than they had all night up to that point. On Estrela's side there was lots of headshaking and disapproval. Barachinha is very dark in skin color, and Zé Flor is light.⁴⁸ In contemporary Brazilian society his kind of racist "joke" is in theory punishable by law. Decades of work by NGO's and activists have helped create dialogue about racism and discrimination in a country where "racial democracy" had long been an unofficial orthodoxy. It is that change in social mores, and increased public awareness about discrimination, that Barachinha draws on in his response, saying that racism not only makes Zé Flor a lesser person but could also land him in jail. Nobody really expects the police to act on this point, but Barachinha's response to the racist barb drew jubilant cheers and shouts from his supporters. It can be asked, however, whether they were cheering for Barachinha's invocation of his constitutional rights and championing of social justice, or simply because he had come back from a stinging insult with a sharp and clever response. Looking at other traditions of ritualized insult trading or contests, one of the principal objectives is to remain composed and in control no matter what your opponent says, even if the material in question is comprised of lewd jokes about your sister. The insult-game of "playing the dozens" that was once a mainstay of black American street culture is somewhat similar in this respect.

⁴⁸ This was actually the second time that Zé Flor had made reference to Barachinha as a monkey. The first time was in a *marcha* sung within the first hour of the sambada, and Barachinha chose to let it pass without comment.

Zé Flor goes on to describe Barachinha looking for work, then passing out at the company store – the *barracão* or *venda* was still a common feature of the sugar plantations well into Zé Flor and even Barachinha’s generation. As Heleno’s story in our first chapter showed, they were notorious for their exploitation: often the only place to buy essential goods for miles around, they inflated their prices, sold on credit (*fiado*) to the *engenho* workers and often cheated people on their wages when it came time to settle on payday. They also were a place to socialize, selling drinks to the workers – hence the imagery of passing out in front of the place used here by Zé Flor. He then continues, in an attempt to seemingly up the ante of questionable taste, by describing a drunken Barachinha taking sexual advantage of a donkey.

Undaunted by these character assaults, Barachinha enters the theme of *engenho* imagery and goes to work on a trope depicting Zé Flor as a slovenly worker. Lazy, shiftless, inefficient, and a thorn in the side of his boss or *patrão*, Zé Flor is made out to be not so much a victim of the company store as a buffoon, indulging on sweets he can’t afford and sheepishly hiding from the baker. These themes of unproductivity at work and personal irresponsibility go hand in glove with similar themes I discuss below in a sambada between Mestre Anderson and Mestre Sibia. In both cases the mestres each belong to a different age cohort or generation, and the poetic strategies and imagery employed can open up useful insights into the social changes transforming the Zona da Mata.

Sambada, Nazaré: Mestre Anderson vs Mestre Sibia

Two years after my initiation into the sung duels of maracatu described above, a much anticipated sambada took place in August of 2011 between two young mestre-poets who represent

what some are calling the “new generation” in maracatu. This was between Mestre Sibia (Edielson Luiz de Freitas) of Águia Dourada and Mestre Anderson (Anderson Miguel da Silva) of Águia Misteriosa, both of Nazaré. Sibia has sung for quite a while, and his brother Waldemar was the owner of the maracatu, one of the most distinguished in the city. Anderson would be making his debut appearance heading up Águia Misteriosa, also a widely-respected group. Anderson, now fifteen years old and still in high-school, had not even had a chance for a proper *ensaio* with them yet when they were approached about participating in the new *Sambada no Parque* series organized by the city government. The performance slots had become coveted, with only one sambada per month in the series leading up until carnival, and the directorship had little choice but to accept the offer.

Mestre Anderson had both the weight and the impetus of grand expectations going into the sambada. He was recognized as a prodigy, with stories about his skill on the lips of many admirers. But along with admirers, there were others who thought he was being overhyped, a mere novelty. In a community where there is a taboo against behaving as if you are better than anybody else, it can be a difficult balance between carrying oneself as self-assured and appearing arrogant. While both *mestres* had maracatu in their family, Anderson had been able to take advantage of a new climate of valorization around the art form and a degree of institutional investment that did not exist when Sibia was growing up.

Anderson had been a *lampião* or lamp-bearer in Cambinda Brasileira, where he also sang eventually as respondent (*contra-mestre*) with his father. At the same time, he participated as a young *mestre* in the maracatu made up entirely of children, Maracatu Mirim Sonho de Criança, set up in the late 1990s by the city under the auspices of an administration that made deliberate efforts to promote maracatu. His most formative experience, however, may have been the five-month

workshop he took part in under Mestre Antônio Roberto where he learned to make “aligned and correct” verse from someone who knew “proper” Portuguese.⁴⁹ Designed as a type of after-school program, Anderson and one other young *mestre* would meet with Antônio Roberto several times a week, bringing in verses that they had worked on at home, fine-tuning them under his instruction. Anderson would go on to be contra-mestre for Zé Flor of Águia Misteriosa for several years, and in fact served in that role during the sambada in Chã de Fogo, Itaquitinga, against Barachinha. When Zé Flor gave his resignation to the directorate of Misteriosa, they offered the job to young Anderson.

I had come to know Anderson because we were both good friends with Cabeça, the *contra-mestre* of Barachinha. Cabeça was always enthusiastic about going to any maracatu event where he might have an opportunity to sing and sharpen his skills. When I eventually acquired a car to facilitate my work, Cabeça was a constant companion and protector on the roads of the *canavial*, and more often as not we would stop to pick up Mestre Anderson and Mestre Dedé Vieira to accompany us to one or another *ensaio* in the neighboring towns. In this way I had seen Anderson sing many times as a guest at other maracatus’ rehearsals. But unlike the majority of *mestres* who had their first sambada experience in a local neighborhood or semi-rural location, this was going to be a large spectacle in the most public of Nazaré’s spaces, the Parque dos Lanceiros plaza. He confessed to me that he was slightly apprehensive that his first real public appearance would be during the newly-inaugurated series of large sambadas in the public plaza. Turnout had been quite high for these events, and so there was the pressure of “the whole Mata Norte” watching. These plaza events had also successfully attracted a different audience of curious spectators who typically wouldn’t attend a neighborhood sambada. But Anderson played down the pressure, saying that

⁴⁹ The words Anderson himself used were that he learned to sing “verso alinhado, correto” and that Antônio Roberto “canta certo, com português correto.”

even the most experienced *mestres* still got nervous stomachs before *sambadas*, and that he would trust in God. Besides, he said, “*Lapada de sambada não dói. Se doesse acho que ninguém sambava mais não.*” // “A beating in a sambada doesn’t hurt. If it did, I don’t think anyone would still do it.”

When the night of the *sambada* came, attendance was indeed good. Anderson had told me he had thought Barachinha would be along in his *manobra*, but in fact Barachinha chose to diplomatically stay in the audience rather than be seen to favor one *mestre* over the other. Trailing alongside and behind Anderson were Cabeça, Dedé, and myself attempting to record the unamplified opening verses. I had also accompanied Sibia’s *manobra*, which preceded Anderson, although he chose not to sing until they had taken their place at the designated staging area. The first part of the evening contained the usual greetings and banter found in the first half of all *sambadas*, but things picked up considerably after the break. Singing in *marchas*, Anderson bragged that the mayor was standing over on his side of the plaza watching him sing, to which Sibia replied that he wasn’t worried, soon the mayor would be coming over by him. Anderson got in a dig about Sibia’s “old age” by singing that the mayor didn’t cheer for *velhice* but for youth. Sibia defended himself by thanking Jesus for his twenty-seven years of life.

Switching to ten-line samba, the contest soon switched gears to each *mestre* asserting the superiority of the entire *maracatu* group over the other, with imagery aided by the fact that both *maracatus* had an *águia* or eagle as their mascot.⁵⁰

Anderson

Minha Águia é verdadeira
A sua falsa ela é

My Eagle is true
And yours is a fake

⁵⁰ The entire *sambada* can be listened to online at this link: <http://baquesolto.org/2011/08/21/sambada-20-08-2010-mestre-anderson-aguia-misteriosa-x-mestre-sibia-aguia-dourada-em-nazare-da-mata/>

E a minha em Nazaré
É chamada de guerreira
E a tua é traiçoeira digo
Digo pra turma todinha (2x)
Recebi na Capelinha
Sei que todo mundo viu
Que tua Águia surgiu
Do ovo goro da minha

Sibia

Ô Anderson, onde tu visse
O ovo goro gerar
E a quem tu foi perguntar
Qual foi o burro que disse
Eu acho que isso é burrice
Vou honrar minha bandeira (2x)
Minha resposta é ligeira
Minha Águia foi comprada
E a tua foi roubada
Da Cambinda Brasileira

Anderson

Pois samba não é lambada
Pra se cantar repetindo
E o povo está sentindo
Que não tá cantando nada
Minha bengala é pesada
Digo pra turma todinha
E falo sem ladainha
Com sentimento profundo
Tem tanta águia no mundo
Verdadeira só a minha

Sibia

A tua não é verdadeira
E na primeira está
Ô Anderson, eu vou te falar
Vou honrar minha bandeira
Tu tá cantando besteira
Lhe respondo o sambador

And in Nazaré mine
Is called a warrior
And yours is traitorous, I say
To everyone gathered here
I heard it at the Capelinha⁵¹
I know that all the world saw
That your Eagle was created
From the rotten egg of mine⁵²

Anderson, where have you ever seen
A rotten egg hatch
And from who did you hear such a thing
Which fool said that.
I think this is foolishness
And I'm going to honor my flag
My response is quick and easy
My Eagle was paid for
And yours was stolen
From Cambinda Brasileira

Well samba isn't a simple thing
To sing, repeating yourself
And the people here can tell
That you're not singing anything
My cane is heavy
And I'll say so to everyone here
I speak without any ceremony
With profound feeling
There are many eagles in the world
But only mine is genuine

Yours isn't genuine
But it is in first place
Anderson, I'm going to tell you
I'm going to honor my flag
You are singing nonsense
I respond like a real singer

⁵¹ A corner with an old chapel in the neighborhood of Sertãozinho

⁵² "Ovo goro" means literally an unhatched egg, translated here as 'rotten' for the sake of eliminating redundancy in the next stanza.

Hoje eu sou teu professor
Aqui hoje a noite inteira
Voce só tá na primeira
Porque Manoelzinho botou

Today I am your professor
Here all night long today
You are only in first place
Because Manoelzinho put you there⁵³

In this passage, Anderson's boasting that *his* eagle is the genuine article (both maracatus have an *Águia* or eagle as their name and mascot) ends up getting used against him. In a response that would only make sense to those who know the details of the intragroup politics between Nazaré maracatus, Sibia responds that his maracatu is on the up-and-up and accuses Anderson's group of stealing from the oldest maracatu in the city, Cambinda Brasileira. This refers to the foundational story surrounding *Águia Misteriosa*, which was indeed founded by former members of Cambinda. The narrative goes that there was a dispute within Cambinda Brasileira that led to a split: this much of the story is agreed upon by everyone. The narrative continues that part of the dispute involved money from presentations, with key members feeling they were being cheated out of their share. When they left the maracatu, they took a number of the caboclo costumes (*arrumação* in the singular) with them – expensive and very labor intensive pieces. From the perspective of those who left Cambinda, they had a right to the costumes in lieu of the payments they were owed, in addition to many of them having contributed their own unpaid labor as artisans. From the perspective of Cambinda's directorate, they had been robbed and would have to remake the same number of *arrumações* if they expected to have a normal carnival. Sibia's concise encapsulation of this story in a response to Anderson's posture of authenticity was widely heard as a *golpe*, that he had scored a point. Anderson did not back down and persisted in his claim that *Águia Misteriosa* was the truer *Águia*. Sibia then pulled rank on Anderson by saying that tonight he was his professor, and also insinuated favoritism by the Association of Maracatus, the

⁵³ Reference to Manoelzinho Salustiano, son of Mestre Salu and president of the Maracatu Association of Pernambuco.

governing body set up by the Salustiano family to which nearly all Pernambuco's maracatus belong.

Imagery of dominance and subordination

In the sambas that followed, Sibia challenged Anderson's originality, saying that he spent all of his time listening to Barachinha's CDs. Anderson's response was that it did not matter if he listened to anyone's CD or not, and the only one singing now was him.⁵⁴ Sibia sung mockingly that Anderson had a professor in Itaquitinga to whom he would go and ask for *sambas* (Zé Flor). Anderson then took something of a risk that I found strange. He addressed gossip that had been previously circulating but which had not entered the *sambada*: namely, that his two older friends and allies, Cabeça and Dedé Vieira, would be whispering in his ear all night with verses for him to sing. He attempted to turn this around to reflect poorly on Sibia.

About twenty minutes later, an exchange began that touched on attitudes towards work, hierarchy, and dignity. They both sang the same melody, a lilting, descending figure. Anderson sang a standard insult-stanza that, to paraphrase, said "you have no talent, your maracatu is suffering, and the owner (Waldemar) is going to fire you." To which Sibia responded, once again singing in ten-line samba:

Estou sendo cobiçado
Por vários maracatu
Por vir quebrando tabu
E fazendo verso rimado
Dando conta do recado
nesta minha caminhada (2x)
Deus pra mim não falta nada
E meu povo jamais se queixa
E Waldemar líder não deixa

I'm in high demand
By various maracatus
For breaking all the records
And making rhymed verse
Proving my ability
On my chosen path (2x)
The Lord has not forgotten me
My people would never denounce me
And Waldemar would never permit me

⁵⁴ "Será que me entendeu / Seu cabeça de pneu / Veja o que eu vou falar
Deixe Barachinha lá / Quem tá cantando sou eu."

Eu sair da Águia Dourada

To leave the Águia Dourada

(Anderson)

Depois de ser despejado
De Águia de Waldemar
Mando alguém lhe contratar
Pra tu ser meu empregado

**Depois que ser contratado
vá na fazenda porque (2x)**

Eu vou dizer a você
Em tudo que eu precisar
Não tente me reclamar
Só apenas obedecer

After you are fired
From the Águia of Waldemar
I'll send someone to hire you
To be my worker

**After you are hired
Go straight to the plantation because (2x)**

I'll going to boss you around
To do everything I need done
Don't try to complain to me
You just need to obey

(Sibia)

Você é fraco demais
É um poeta sambador
Não vai tirar meu valor
E não tirar meu cartaz

**Eu vou tirar sua paz
Anderson comigo aprenda (2x)**

Botou chave de fenda
Pra ver se és corajoso
Não faz nada, preguiçoso
Como quem tem uma fazenda

You are really weak
A samba-singing poet
But you won't take away my value
And you won't take away my fame

**But I'll take away your peace
Anderson, with me you're going to learn (2x)**

I'll take a screwdriver to it
To see if you have courage
You don't do anything, you lazy-bones
Like someone who owns a plantation

(Anderson)

Quando eu lhe chamar me atenda
Nunca finja que me escutou
Sempre lave meu trator
Enche ele na fazenda

**E a pé tu vai pra venda
Comprar um vinho para mim (2x)**

Não reclame nem acha ruim
Faça o que estou mandando
E que todo mês ganhando
Tem que trabalhar assim

When I call you, pay attention
Don't just pretend like you're listening
Always wash my tractor
And fill it up on the plantation

**And on foot you'll go to the store
And buy some wine for me (2x)**

Don't complain or gripe
Just do what I tell you
And every month if you want to get paid
You'll keep working just like this

(Sibia)

Já aqui em Nazaré

Already here in Nazaré

Eu vou tirar sua manha
Você eu já me apanha
Eu sou mestre de fé
**Vou fazer o que puder
pra gritar por todo mundo (2x)**
Com sentimento profundo
Você é fraco de fama
Aderi, tu corta cana
E sustenta esse vagabundo

I'm going to stop your whining/boasting⁵⁵
I'm going to rough you up today
I am a *mestre* of confidence
**I'm going to do whatever I can
To shout to the whole world (2x)**
With a profound feeling
You are weak in reputation
Aderi, you cut cane
To support this bum⁵⁶

In many ways this exchange serves as a commentary on the changes that have occurred over the last twenty years in Nazaré. Sibia, although still quite young by any standards, is old enough to have missed out on the benefits available to Anderson regarding what is essentially a professionalization of the craft. Sibia learned his maracatu on the street and in performance. In spite of various attempts to mark a time to sit down for a formal interview, I never managed to get Sibia alone and my interactions with him were mostly conversations at maracatu events. This in itself is a reflection of his socioeconomic situation: like so many *maracatuzeiros*, at his stage in life he is providing for his family, spending five days a week living in Recife in a shared *conjunto* while working in construction, returning to Nazaré only on the weekends. Anderson creates an imaginary scenario where he is not only Sibia's boss, but a rich *fazendeiro* (farmer or plantation owner), commanding him around in a humiliating way. He would employ this same trope of a boss-employee dialectic again near the very end of the sambada, and it has more than a hint of an inverted master-slave dynamic, as Anderson is dark-skinned and Sibia relatively light. Both young men grew up in the rural periphery around Nazaré, even though both now reside “no asfalto” – meaning the town (literally “the pavement,” regardless of the fact that half of Nazaré's streets are not paved). Both have a family history of rural workers and manual laborers, yet a pejorative

⁵⁵ This is a multivalent line that can be heard as referring either to Anderson's young age (“manha” can be a tantrum) or his swagger.

⁵⁶ Aderi is the name of Anderson's father.

3ª Sambada no Parque

Dia 20/08 às 21:00hs

Local Parque dos Lanceiros BR 408

Nazaré da Mata - PE

“Abertura do Evento com a Ciranda Brasileira de João Limoeiro”

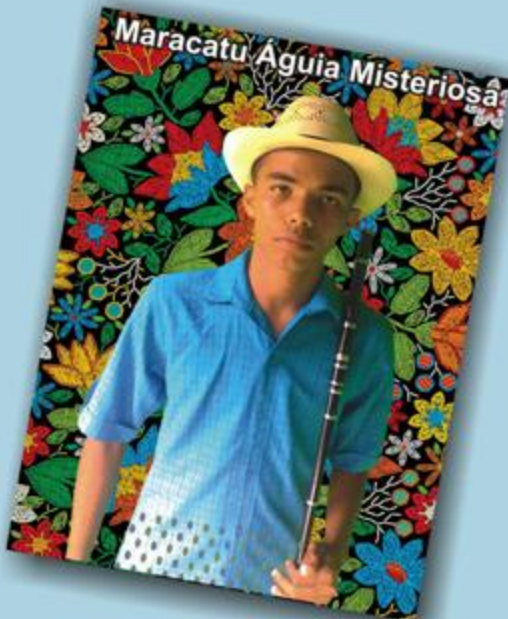
Semana da Cultura:

*De 21 à 26 de agosto Exposição com Indumentárias de Maracatu no Espaço Cultural Mauro Mota e no Parque dos Lanceiros / Nazaré da Mata - PE

*Dia 27/08 às 20:00hs no Parque dos Lanceiros

Coco de Roda / Boi Maguary

Violeiros / Forró Pé de Serra



Participem!

Realização:

Prefeitura Municipal de Nazaré da Mata

Secretaria de Turismo e Cultura

www.prefeitanazaredamata.com.br

Participação:

Mestre Anderson - Maracatu Águia Misteriosa -

Mestre Sibia - Maracatu Águia Dourada -

João Limoeiro - Ciranda Brasileira -



Figure 17: Flier for the sambada between Mestre Anderson and Mestre Sibia

discourse towards such work is deployed to humiliate Anderson's opponent. From personal conversations, I knew that Anderson's plan at that time was to finish school, get his diploma, and look for a decent job somewhere beyond his small town, because for him Nazaré is a "*cidade muito parada*", a dead town with little opportunity. His ambitions for himself are translated into denigrating his opponent by insinuating that Sibia will never rise above his class. Sibia responds with an assertive refusal to have his dignity insulted, and a critique of Anderson as lazy. Anderson continues with very poetically well-constructed admonishments to discipline his interlocutor-as-worker, while Sibia ends the exchange by lamenting that Anderson's father works so hard to support such a spoiled child. Traces of this style of discourse were heard in many *sambadas* I attended, where for example you might hear one *mestre* sing to the other that he will never be a poet so he might as well get back to work cutting cane.

Many *sambadas* end without a clear victor, in an *empate* or tie, often because the visiting group was contracted by the hosts to sing until 5 a.m. and they don't want to stay a minute longer. However in the small hours of this June evening, you could feel the tide ebbing away and pulling Sibia out to sea. Anderson seemed to be increasing the quality and complexity of his rhymes and imagery, drawing inspiration from his cheering section who were nearly mad with excitement. When they entered the *samba curto*, the fastest of the song styles with each *mestre* singing their verse in about fifteen seconds, Anderson began with another strong visual metaphor that he would carry on for several minutes. He sang that he had a house to paint, and that Sibia was going to be the one to paint it, and he had better do it right or else face the consequences.

**Sibia, eu fiz uma casa
e ela é toda lajeada (2x)**
E precisa ser pintada
É é tu que vai pintar ela
Se fazer besteira nela
Vai se acabar na porrada

**Sibia I built a house
And it's nice and fancy (2x)**
And it needs to be painted
You're the one who's going to paint it
And if you make stupid mistakes
It's going to end in trouble

and again, moments later

**Sibia pinta na frente
Sem cair tinta no chão**
Eu vou ficar de plantão
Pra ver a frente pintada
Mas se ela tiver borrada
Me apanha de cinturão

**Sibia, paint the front
Without dropping paint on the ground (2x)**
I'm going to stand watch
To make sure you get it done
And if it's painted badly
I'll beat you with my belt

The tone is clearly one of humiliation: Anderson would watch and supervise Sibia's work from the front yard, and if he did a sloppy job he would be disciplined with a beating. But unlike earlier in the evening when Sibia had smart responses that engaged Anderson's attack and turned it back on itself, this time he had no comeback. As the *samba curto* continued, Sibia's loss of momentum was palpable. He repeated phrases he had used only moments before, as filler, and his cheering section grew quiet. What had been a pretty evenly-matched contest was turning into a trouncing. Anderson eventually returned to the four-line *marcha* format, signifying that the night is over. Although sambadas do not as a rule have a clear winner or loser, there can be strong differences of opinion and debates that carry on for weeks over who had sung better. This did not seem like it was going to be one of those cases. Surrounded by a rather sullen group of his supporters, Sibia sang his compliments to the mayor for sponsoring the event, stating that it didn't matter which master sang better than the other: the people of Nazaré were the true winners. Both groups made their exits in a *manobra*, continuing to play and sing in the direction of their respective *sede*. Anderson was hoisted onto the shoulders of his fans in a show of victorious pride.

Preparation and improvisation

The following week, talking about this night with Barachinha, he provided some insights into what went wrong for Sibia. He remarked that it's necessary to have some things prepared,

samba decorado (memorized samba) to draw on when a mestre begins to run out of steam at the end of a long night, or when they find themselves cornered. Listening back to the recording, I couldn't decide if Sibia was attempting to be a purist in the ethic of improvisation, or if he was simply unprepared for that kind of eventuality. There was an almost audible running out of steam: his repetitions of things he had sung only moments earlier; his making critiques that would have been salient a half hour ago but now fell flat, like the proverbial snappy comeback that enters the mind long after a moment has passed. The enthusiasm of his supporters began to ebb, and there were a few instances where his verses were met with a nearly complete silence, a devastating thing for a performer in his position. Anderson, meanwhile, was on fire and showed himself to be in command. To my ears, his vignettes about the plantation and the house painting sounded at least partially prepared ahead of time, and in the former case did not truly engage with Sibia's responses. By the time he reached the latter – the house-painting metaphors – Sibia was deflated and stuck in a rut. He could have responded more directly to Anderson's metaphor and imagery, forcing him to break with his prepared verses and improvise a return response. Instead Sibia continued recycling his put-downs (you are weak/*fraco*, you aren't singing anything, etc.) thus leaving Anderson free to proceed unhindered with the script he had already prepared. However, the question of who gains the upper hand in these struggles does not depend solely on the textual content of the poetry itself: it involves interaction and exchange of energy with the audience, body language and comportment, and the strategic invocation of local and personal histories.

Was this still the same improvised “oral poetry” that is described in romantic terms by scholars who paint its practitioners as organic embodiments of collective experience? Has the creative tradition been ruptured and transformed by new access to education and technology, e.g. the ability to watch and listen to a *mestre's* performance over and over again, on a DVD, CD, or a

cell phone recording? Or is this type of reasoning fundamentally misguided? The conversations I had with *mestres* from different generations, along with my digitization of a sizeable cassette archive of maracatu going back to the 1980s, complements the conclusions of previous research on oral-poetic practices which indicates that verbal improvisation is always a heterodox process of memorizations, retelling, and resignification. While few would argue for the real existence of a “pure” improvisation, the notion of such purity still adheres to maracatu’s representations of authenticity, representations that are both self-created and imposed by others, reflected back on each other infinitely like a hall of mirrors.

Back in Chã de Fogo on that December day two years earlier, as dawn was breaking the sambada between Barachinha and Zé Flor wound to an end. There was no formally acknowledged victor, and the festivities were brought to a close with an interruption from one of the sponsors of the night, a police officer named Tenente Filipe. He thanked everyone who turned out for a great *sambada*, saying how important it was that the evening passed “in peace and tranquility,” complimenting both *mestres*, “these two heroes” of *cultura popular* and their respective directorates and members. The real winner was the town of Itaquitinga, who “have never seen a *sambada* of this quality” and he hoped this would be one of many to come. Barachinha then took the microphone for a few words. He thanked Tenente Filipe for convincing him to participate after a long break away from performing in *sambadas*, and continued to thank Zé Flor and the owner of Águia Misteriosa, saying “tonight we fought, but tomorrow, God willing, we’ll be at the plaza in Nazaré chatting and conversing.” He thanked Manoelzinho and the Association, and all other *mestres* who sang. He was not all ebullient humility, though. He also added, “Yesterday I told

Manoelzinho on the telephone that I wanted to realize a dream of mine, and I did. We put on the best *manobra* in the history of maracatu with the help of all our allies and supporters.”

The *terno* began beating again and Estrela Brilhante began its elaborate leave-taking *manobra*, everyone energized and satisfied with the performance of their *mestre*. To my surprise the festive mood was hardly dampened by exhaustion on the bus as we made our way back to Nazaré, the sun now fully risen and a breeze moving through the undulating hills of sugarcane like a vast green ocean to either side of us. The buses came to a stop across from the Bar do Gerônimo on the main drag of town, and Estrela performed a *manobra* one final time, a victory lap back to the *sede*. Fireworks announced our return, breaking the tranquility of a small-town Sunday as Barachinha’s battalion wound its way up the hills and around the corners. A few neighborhood people came to their doors or watched from the windows as the whole group came to a standstill at the simple garage with Estrela’s name painted over it. Barachinha and Cabeça stood facing outward and addressed their people in song - all their *caboclos*, *baianas*, musicians, and poets - with closing *marchas* of gratitude and thanks.

Conclusion: fighting words on the corner and in the plaza

Should we expect to find differences in the type of poetry sung at a sambada in a local neighborhood in Itaquitinga versus one held in the public plaza of Nazaré that is sponsored by the mayor’s office and the tourist ministry? As long as the language of maracatu poetry continues to draw from the discursive traditions established across half a century, I expect that any difference will be in degree rather than in kind. But there is more to these exchanges than just a discursive

tradition. There are the scripted and unscripted steps that lead up to and follow the duel between the poets, the planning, preparation, and ceremonies of departing the *sede* and arriving in “foreign” territory, and of coming back home. There are fans crowding around to record every word, a researcher with a microphone or a camera, and the fireworks – always the fireworks! Unfortunately we have only anecdotal accounts, and no direct records, of the earliest *sambadas* with which to make the detailed comparisons that would be useful here, but for all that has changed since maracatu has moved from the plantations and into the towns, it seems as if certain “structures of feeling” have persisted, to be developed in new and surprising ways.

In communities of rural or manual laborers where people own little more than their reputations, it might be tempting to view the ritualized aggression of “fighting words” as a steam-valve mechanism, a release of the pressure built-up over years of symbolic and material humiliations and subordinations between masters and slaves, bosses and workers: rituals that ultimately serve to bolster and reinforce a hegemonic social order. But a more flexible and productive approach might foreground the emphasis maracatuzeiros place on the capacity of the mestre to keep a cool head and respond to the most degrading of insults with eloquence, to spin their meaning and turn them back on his opponent. And the mestre does not accomplish these feats alone, but with his *batalhão* at his back, maneuvering through familiar and unknown territories, sealing the crossroads, and clearing the space to build a foundation on which to make their stand.

In the first sambada we see one poet, Barachinha, pushing back against the hegemony of racial superiority, making appeals to a variety of collectivities – the townspeople, the police, and the civil spirit embodied in a new Constitution – in order to do so. In the second sambada, some of the poetry actually reinforces the dominant discourse, with the triumphant poet denigrating the

other through metaphors of humiliation and servitude. In the first case, who won – or as maracatuzeiros phrase it, who “sang more” (*cantou mais*) – largely depends on the preference and perspective of the individual and where they find themselves in relation to the *mestres*, to racial politics and ideologies, and to aesthetic judgments (what is “good” song poetry, what constitutes fair play, and where to draw boundaries). In the latter case, the poet Sibia may have been the more “authentic” artist by adhering to the normative rules regarding improvisation, and yet by most accounts he lost the contest. Although sambadas are highly-structured events, beset by all kinds of rules, they are also “socially emergent performances,”⁵⁷ where meaning is constructed with the participation of people offstage, in the absence of orthodoxy, and through the mobilization of shared histories and sentiments.

Barachinha’s statement at the end of the night expresses the boundedness of the sambada experience: no matter what was said within those boundaries, all is forgiven (in theory) when the sun rises. Nonetheless what happens “offstage” during non-performance times also has an impact, and many *mestres* who regularly face off against each other have long-standing personal friendships. It is only fair to point out that not all sambadas are quite as adversarial as the two highlighted here. The *mestres* who have been singing longest all have people they consider favorite “sparring partners” with whom they enjoy a healthy, challenging exchange of words. Barachinha, Zé Galdino, João Paulo, Manoel Damião, and Dedinha are *mestres* who have challenged each other dozens of times and look forward to the next opportunity. By whatever twists of fate, the majority of sambadas during my time in the field were between *mestres* who had no significant personal histories together, and in some cases had not even met before the evening of the performance.

⁵⁷ Schieffelin, Edward L. 1985. "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality." *American Ethnologist* 12(4): 707-724.

Perhaps this unfamiliarity fuels the degree to which *malcriação* can take over a performance. What happens then when a maracatu performance is lifted completely out of its normal context of the street corners of the Mata Norte, and dropped into a professional theater in an upper class São Paulo neighborhood, where the shared history, sentiments, and participation must be drastically reconstructed? That is the subject of our next chapter.



Figure 18: Fans at sambadas and carnival performances. (Top) Fans of Mestre Barachinha recording him at the sambada, December 5, 2009, Itaquitinga. from a video by Val Tranquilino. Still capture (Bottom) Mestre João Paulo singing during carnival 1988, Nazaré da Mata. Note the large tape recorder held by a fan to his left. Video still courtesy of Dil-Som

Chapter 4:
Raising Sand in the City

Introduction

João Paulo:

Não fiz o vestibular
Não cursei a faculdade
A minha universidade
Só me ensinou cantar
Na cultura popular
Foi onde eu ganhei troféu
Meu professor tá no céu
Me corrige e dá aprovo
O diploma é o povo
Vale mais do que papel

I never took an entrance exam
I never went to college
My university
Was where I learned to sing
In *cultura popular*
Was where I won my prize
My professor is in heaven
He corrects me and gives approval
My diploma is the people
Worth more than any paper

Barachinha

Meu estudo é muito pouco
Canto porque trouxe o dom
A voz é fraca de som
Se for muito fico rouco
Mais eu deixo o público louco
fazendo verso bem feito
Se o português der defeito
Procure me desculpar
Que cultura popular
Só tem graça desse jeito

I have little education
I sing because I have the gift
My voice is weak in sound
If it was louder, I would be hoarse
But I drive the public crazy
with my well-made verses
If my Portuguese is imperfect
Please try to excuse me
Because *cultura popular*
Only works this way.

- Verses sung May 2011 in São Paulo at the Brincantes Institute poetry workshop

On the eighth annual *Encontro dos Maracatus* in the Olinda suburb of Tabajara during carnival of 2000, newspaper reports remarked on the audience comprised of “intellectuals, artists, many tourists, and common people that admire the *folgado*, and even local and national political figures.”¹ These dignitaries included writer Ariano Suassuna, the recording artists Antônio Nóbrega, Siba, and Renata Rosa, and the Worker’s Party leader and future Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Their presence was framed as recognition for the “anonymous men of the people” who cut cane, cared for livestock, or worked at *usinas* for the remainder of the year.² A decade later, I accompanied Maracatu Estrela Brilhante for three consecutive carnivals from 2010 to 2012 as they traveled both to small towns and villages and to present at Recife’s largest carnival stage at Marco Zero, backlit by video screens and dramatic lighting and on one occasion broadcast live on TV Globo. They also performed at the *Encontro dos Maracatus* festival of the Maracatu Association held at their Aliança headquarters, which in 2012 was attended by presidential hopeful, Governor Eduardo Campos.

In the period of 2009 to 2012 there were an astounding number of other performance opportunities for these “anonymous men” of the Mata Norte that were separate from both the ludic spectacle of carnival as well as the more “local” expressions of *sambadas* and *ensaios* presented in the previous chapter. Estrela Brilhante was included in a short documentary concerning the legacy of the Dutch occupation of Recife in the eighteenth century, and they were invited to attend

1 Jornal do Commercio, March 7, 2000. “Maracatus honram tradição na Cidade Tabajara.”

2 O Globo, March 7, 2000. “Maracatu rural: tradição em Olinda.”

the film's premiere in full dress. In late 2010 Estrela was also contracted to perform alongside a variety of *cultura popular* groups for a carnival television advertisement, and in early 2011 featured prominently in a half-hour documentary for TV Brasil. After the latter event, Mestre Barachinha had hopes to pitch an idea for a film script about maracatu to those same producers. In February of 2010, members of Estrela Brilhante were invited to the reception of a photography exhibit largely centered on them at Recife's Banco Real Cultural Institute. In December of 2010 one of my close friends participated in the Third Festival of Black Art in Dakar, Senegal, with Maracatu Águia Dourada of Tracunhaém. In May of 2011, Barachinha and Ronaldo of Estrela Brilhante traveled with João Paulo of Leão Misterioso to São Paulo to participate in workshops and performances at the Brincantes Institute, an event from which the opening epigraph is taken.

The complexity of how Barachinha and his peers view both the role of the *mestre* and the place of maracatu in their community defies the categories of “erudite” and “popular” realms of creativity which, however archaic they seem today, continue to shape the way creativity and performance are approached in Pernambuco, particularly in its official cultural sector. While believing that the communities of the interior could do more to value and respect the maracatu tradition, Barachinha resists the frequent attempts to separate the artists from that tradition by placing them into an elevated social space. He defends the “popular” as essential and inseparable to *cultura popular*, staving off concessions to middle-class preconceptions of how art should be presented to a public. Barachinha, in his role as a leader in the maracatu community, is guarding against attempts to turn a participatory tradition into a “presentational” music, defined by Turino (1998) as a type of musical experience where sharp distinctions between audience and performers are created and maintained through a series of distancing practices. Maracatuzeiros are able to comfortably function in several of Turino's ideal types (including recording their work in studios),

but there are prohibitions against the indiscriminate mixing of different modes in a way that would create “confusion.” The use of professional elevated staging and sound systems would separate the singer-poets from their supporters, and so is eschewed in favor of performing on the ground during “participatory” events like *ensaios* and *sambadas* and using the noisy sound cars (*carros de som*). Likewise, a change in the performance days or times to accommodate visitors rather than *maracatuzeiros* is frowned upon as antithetical to a participatory event. Alternately, maracatus have no objections to taking part in “presentational” performances to which those criteria do not apply, such as festivals or the theatrical context in São Paulo described here. Presentational performances are understood to be tailored to the expectations of an audience of outsiders, even if the majority of those actually in attendance are maracatu “insiders.” The adherence to a complex, internal ethos of performance values is one way in which maracatu has resisted the various types of elite appropriation.

These internal standards of authenticity are deployed by maracatuzeiros differentially, according to contextual categories. Although most do not assume leadership roles like Barachinha and João Paulo, the *mestre* is regarded as embodying the values of the maracatu community. These values often mirror the expectations of the hegemonic class – for example in their emphasis on personal humility, civility, discipline, and “knowledge” - but are articulated in different registers and in frameworks specific to the Mata Norte. The unique position of the “popular” artist in Brazil, whose work is not fully integrated into the capitalist market but dependent on systems of patronage, creates an ambiguous variety of “cultural broker” that creates certain frustrations in their lives. There is not enough mobility within the class structure for distinguished artists like Barachinha to take on a fully “cosmopolitan” identity, should he even desire it. In the early 2000’s, Barachinha once ran a campaign for city councilman on a platform of promoting and defending *cultura*

popular. He recorded four short maracatu pieces in a studio to play from the sound cars that circulate through the streets during election season. In the end he got very few votes. *Mestres* are frequently called upon to publicly lend their support for political candidates: both his colleagues João Paulo and Manoel Domingos have been called upon to write sambas on behalf of mayoral candidates in Nazaré and Buenos Aires to play from those same sound cars. Like a West African *griot*, the *mestre*'s praise and eloquence is welcome at court, but his position in the social order is not always clear.

In this chapter I will draw on some of these contextual scenarios to explore how maracatu in the twenty-first century is immersed in complex and shifting relationships with social actors and institutions outside of its traditional audience and context in the Mata Norte of Pernambuco. While keeping in mind that the boundaries of social identities shift and interpenetrate, I will largely compare these situations as taking place in either “erudite” and “popular” spheres of artistic creation and reception, following the split and division inherited from folklore research, modernist narratives, and early cultural policy in Brazil.³

This chapter looks at analogous processes occurring in different spheres of Brazil's hierarchical society regarding the performance of authenticity, and the dynamic relationship between modernity and tradition. These concepts are approached from different angles by different social actors, and framed here in a way that recalls an antiquated division between “little” and “great” traditions, and its more contemporary echo of “local” versus “global.” This is also a story of the regional and national in terms of a particularly Brazilian experience of modernist, developmentalist logic. The problematic place that *cultura popular* holds in that modernist logic was sketched out in the second chapter and is developed further in the first part of this one. The

³ See the introduction, pages 33 to 36 for a discussion of why I chose to retain the archaic terminology of “erudite” and “elite” as an analytical dichotomy.

consequences of the dynamic encounter between “elite” and “popular” in the artistic realm continues to unfold, played out in the daily lives of those who create *cultura popular* and their communities. By placing side by side the ways different groups of social actors (the cultural elite, trained artists, maracatuzeiros, and mediators) have dealt with similar processes, we gain some insight into maracatu’s increase in status, its partial professionalization, and how this paradoxically reinforces the differential prestige and bonds of patronage between “erudite” and “popular” artists.

These groups of actors are not rigidly fixed or bounded. But the extent of mobility or fluidity between them is structured by certain restraints: it is much easier and hence more common for an institutionally-trained, elite artist to dip and delve into the creative worlds of the “popular artist,” and to broker that artistic expertise through the (often self-serving) presentations, exhibits, and performances geared to a middle-class audience, than it is for the popular artist to move in the other direction. While some individual artists in rural maracatu and related cultural expressions have found ways to negotiate within the realm of elite artists to their advantage, they tend to be exceptional. The constraints they face are considerable, and their efforts are not always validated or even acknowledged by the gatekeepers of institutionally-sanctioned cultural production. Maracatu has yet to build its own institutions run by and for maracatuzeiros that are not dominated by political intermediaries and the system of patronage so central to the hierarchical structure of Brazilian society.⁴ Although its practitioners have been able to influence the narrative that is told about them, they are limited in their ability to control the form and content of representations and the discourses embedded in that narrative, as my final example of Barachinha’s unfulfilled dream to make a dramatic film will show.

⁴ The clearest candidate for such an institution was the Maracatu Association of Pernambuco, which was coopted early on by powerful figures in the official cultural programming infrastructure.

Maracatu on the stage

On a Friday night in May 2011, Barachinha and João Paulo traded verses before a packed theater in São Paulo's upscale Vila Madalena neighborhood. Their exchanges simulated the form of a traditional sambada over the course of two hours. Many in the audience had also attended the workshops in the days leading up to the performance, where the two *mestres* had instructed students in some maracatu basics. These workshops included the choreography of the manobra sequence that opens a sambada, quick lessons on each of the percussion instruments used, and a session on poetic improvisation where students were encouraged to come up and sing verses composed during the class. At the end a dry run for Friday's show was held, with the students dividing up into different "sides" to cheer for either Barachinha or João Paulo. The attempt to create an active and participatory audience tempered, to a degree, the strange displacement of the maracatu sambada from the street corners and plazas where it usually takes place, and into the stage lights and air-conditioning of a São Paulo theatre. The students on the polished dance floor did their part to follow the command typically directed by the *mestre* to his audiences in the dusty streets of the interior – "*levanta a poeira*", or raise some sand.

The stage area was on the floor of the theatre rather than on an elevated proscenium, an architectural gesture mitigating the space between performers and audience, although there was formal seating in rows arranged on a gradient. There were a fair amount of spectators in the fixed seating, but there were just as many people actively participating in an open space in front of the performers, pausing in frozen postures on the ground during the intervals of a cappella singing, and dancing every time the band came back. They were mimicking the kinetic movement of

maracatu in the Mata Norte, which most of them had never seen first-hand, taught to them earlier in the week by Mestre Nico, who now resides in São Paulo but has been affiliated with Maracatu Cruzeiro do Forte in Recife. The dancers had attended at least one of the aforementioned workshops in the days leading up to the performance, tutored by Barachinha, João Paulo, Mestre Nico, and Ronaldo Armando de Souza, a percussionist, artisan, and *caboclo de lança* with Estrela Brilhante. Curiously, when the Friday night performance happened, the element of playful rivalry, when they had all picked a *mestre* to cheer on, was dropped by the students during their participation.

The following evening was a very different affair, taking the form of an “aula espetáculo” or didactic performance. On this night before a nearly sold-out house, the performance centered on recording artist, actor, and dancer Antônio Nóbrega, who took center stage as Barachinha, João Paulo, and their supporting musicians sat behind him in a row of chairs arranged in a semi-circle. As Nóbrega led the evening with his guitar, performing examples of the *repentista* style of sung verse that has deeply influenced maracatu, the *mestres* from Nazaré and their musicians waited patiently for over an hour before being called upon to demonstrate their talents. In the middle of the *aula espetáculo*, the audience was also treated to a conceptual solo performance by a former member of the Mangubeat roots-revivalist band Mestre Ambósio on percussion and pre-recorded sound collage, an interpretive dance performed by Nóbrega’s daughter, and a film clip of Nóbrega in the 1990s interviewing João Paulo alongside the late Mestre Salustiano in Pernambuco.

How did Barachinha and João Paulo end up at this theatre 2,600 kilometers away from Nazaré da Mata, in Brazil’s largest, most cosmopolitan city? The answer to that question requires going back to the literary “Generation of the 1930s,” a group of writers who established the Nordeste as a space of suffering but also of resistance, and whose body of work molded popular

conceptions of the region through their reproduction in cinema and music for the next fifty years. This vision where “the Northeast” becomes metonymic for cultural authenticity set the stage for recurring cycles of elite interest in the artistic practices and creativity of the rural poor of the region. I will approach that legacy by beginning with a closer at this São Paulo stage where our two ambassadors of maracatu found themselves.

The Brincantes Institute was established in São Paulo by the Pernambucan expatriate Antônio Nóbrega in 1992 as both a venue for his own work and a space for performing arts workshops drawing from *cultura popular*. Antonio Nóbrega began his musical career as a classically trained musician, and commenced his engagement with popular culture when he was asked to be part of the Quinteto Armorial, a kind of chamber-music ensemble that fused folk themes to art music. This quintet was founded by writer, critic, and professor of literature Ariano Suassuna, who although he was not a musician supervised the selection of material and its development in accordance with the aesthetic vision of his Movimento Armorial. This movement - whose name refers to seigniorial, heraldic emblems - was comprised of a small cluster of artists centered on Suassuna, many of them his students, and aimed at creating “a national art based on popular roots.”⁵ Those roots were sought by researching the popular traditions of the interior of the Northeast, and expressed in the iconography of the backlands drawn explicitly from *cordel* literature, infused with a kind of magical realism that blends the mythical, the fantastic, and the farcical, and drawing explicit connections between that Northeastern aesthetic and the baroque styles of eighteenth-century Portugal. One basic supposition of the Armorial Movement was that the further one is from the urban centers clustered along the Brazilian coast, the more likely you are to encounter *cultura popular* in a pure, unspoiled form much as it existed hundreds of years

⁵ Suassuna, Ariano. 1974. *O Movimento Armorial*. Recife: Editora Universitária UFPE

ago. Suassuna held to this concept, with its spatial metaphors of distancing and implied “denial of coevalness,”⁶ well into the 1990s, when he asserted in an interview that by traveling just a few miles from the federal highways you can find people living as if they were in the eighteenth century.⁷

The work of Antônio Nóbrega – who is Suassuna’s best-known protégé – encompasses theatre, dance, and music, and he has produced dozens of productions for the stage, released many CDs and DVDs, and was producing a documentary about himself at the time of our visit to the Brincantes Institute. His attitude toward *cultura popular* is marked by a missionary zeal. It is the role of the erudite artist to elevate and transform the art forms of the popular classes, to recontextualize and refine them. In his own words, “The erudite artist is a person with a more all-encompassing knowledge, broader and universalizing,”⁸ whereas (in my paraphrase) popular artists, with their low level of formal education and socioeconomic condition, do not have access to the world of fine art and literature. Like his mentor was also fond of doing, he uses the frevo composer Capiba to illustrate his point, saying:

He [Capiba] recontextualizes and amplifies the meaning of the song, something that the common man – and I am not saying this to diminish him – is not capable of doing because his cultural apparatus is restricted to the world in which he lives, it does not allow for very elevated flights of imagination.

Nóbrega, in the similar attitude to the way his modernist ancestor Mário de Andrade regarded the “popularesque,” also does not find any redeeming qualities in musical genres like carioca funk, hip hop, or brega music – all popular genres consumed by the contemporary

⁶ c.f. Fabian 1983

⁷ Suassuna quoted in Ernst, Kirsten. 2010. "Not Reactionary, Just Late": The Case for Ariano Suassuna as Brazilian Modernist. *The Popular Avant-Garde*. Edited by R. M. Silverman. New York, NY, Rodopi.

⁸ Interview with Antonio Nóbrega in *Revista Raiz* No.5, “O Incômodo de Antônio Carlos Nóbrega,” http://revistaraiz.uol.com.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=137&Itemid=151, retrieved September 27, 2013.

“common people”. He explains the ubiquity of such “mass culture” by the miserable conditions in which the common people live and work, taking public transit to put in long hours at ungratifying jobs from which they seek escape and release, where their own aesthetic sensibility is atrophied. “In general,” he says, “these are people of a certain cultural crudeness.” This cultural atrophy can be remedied through concerted efforts to educate and incentivize people about their own traditions. He employs a metaphor of nutrition - if people eat garbage, their bodies are poisoned; but if their consciousness is culturally nutritional, they can have a stronger, cleaner, and more generous place in society.

A common refrain of revivalists like Nóbrega, and the young people who attend the classes and workshops at his institute, is that “Brazil” does not recognize or value its own cultural richness. *Which* Brazil is not specified, nor is the nature of recognition questioned. But the frequent mention of “mass culture” in these complaints is a keyword for the poor, who are seen as passively consuming anything and everything produced by the mass-mediated culture industry. The keyword then triggers the framework expressed above by Nóbrega, portraying education about popular traditions as a sacred duty of middle class artists, in which erudite art’s appropriation of the “popular” or “folkloric” is naturalized. This feat of reasoning can only be accomplished if the maracatuzeiros alternative engagements with modernity – their involvement in municipal politics, awareness and interpretation of national and international events, participation in sociopolitical struggles both local and broad, as well as their *active* consumption of “mass culture” – are sidelined and elided in favor of rekindling the trope of an isolated, picturesque rural “folk culture.” The culture elite of Brazil has an interest in maintaining a false distinction between an idealized “people” or *povo*, and “the multitude” or *povão*, a pejorative term used for the undifferentiated lumpen masses.

Taken as a whole, Nóbrega's body of work operates on an assumption that rural expressive forms are only palatable to an educated, national audience when they are transformed into "fine art," with their rough edges smoothed, their off-color vulgarities and political incorrectness buried. It springs from a theory of cultural uplift common to elite and middle-class engagement with the expressive forms of the "popular classes," and a historical practice of appropriating popular art that is explicitly hierarchical, hinging on a segregation of art from mere entertainment and artists from artisans that began in eighteenth century Europe.⁹ This mentality treats popular artists as *artisans*: workmanlike and imitative, rather than innovative, and largely interchangeable and anonymous, with occasional exceptions – for example the celebration of *mestres* like Barachinha and João Paulo considered here. Exceptions notwithstanding, he has been accused of registering compositions on his records as "public domain" when in fact they can be attributed to identifiable regional artists in the sertão and Zona da Mata.¹⁰ He denies any such plagiarism or theft, and in responding to his critics he places himself alongside other artists like Bach, Villa-Lobos, Mário de Andrade, and Chico Buarque who came from privileged backgrounds and yet found points of reference in the culture of "the people." He could also add Bela Bartók and Stravinsky to his lineage, to continue the logic. What is odd to me about this line of argumentation is that it was taking place on the cusp of the twenty-first century.

This elitist discourse is very much present in the statements and writings of Nóbrega, just as they were prominent in those of his mentor Suassuna. Nóbrega's institute in São Paulo has particularly developed Suassuna's concept of the *aula espetáculo*, or performance lesson: the

⁹ See the work of Larry Shiner (2001) and Peter Burke (various) on the historical development of "art" as an autonomous realm of activity in Europe; see Clifford 1989, Price 1989, Price and Price 1992, and Errington 1994 for anthropological approaches.

¹⁰ Personal communication with folklorist Robert Benjamin. Identical accusations have been voiced in editorial pieces such as the cultural magazine *Revista Raiz*

notion of using performances to punctuate lectures as a didactic device in order to encourage an interest in *cultura popular* among the educated middle class. The implications of applying this method to maracatu, and its consequences for the work of artists like Barachinha and João Paulo, are more easily understood in the context of Northeastern regionalism.

The Nordeste as the Refuge of Authenticity

Regionalism in Brazil, as in most places, appeared in the fissures of nationalism, often in response to attempts to unify a vast territory with disparate histories of settlement and immigration. Through the nineteenth century, the Northeast and Pernambuco in particular had been prone to outbreaks of political rebellion and separatism.¹¹ In the arts, Regionalism as a movement grew in the period spanning the end of the oligarchic federalism of the First Republic and into the Vargas Era, peaking with a number of important regionalist writers referred to as the “Generation of the 1930s.” In the Northeast, this generation drew from the same themes that filled the chapbook *cordel* literature common to the towns of the interior and which began to attract the interest of urbanites in the capitals precisely in that decade, as it was sold in newspaper stands where its sociopolitical stories proved particularly popular: tales of draughts and legions of dislocated migrants leaving their land; epics devoted to the Prestes Column, a revolt of military officers against the governing oligarchy that engaged in guerilla warfare and long marches traversing tens of thousands of kilometers between 1924-27; and the spread of *cangaço* or social banditry in the backlands were all favorite subjects. The striking visual style of the *cordel* chapbooks whose

¹¹ These include the Pernambucan Revolution (1817), the Confederation of the Equator (1824), the Praieira Revolt (1848-50), all in Pernambuco, the Quebra-Quilos Revolt in neighboring Paraíba (1874), and the War of Canudos in Bahia (1897). All of these events had different motivations and social makeups, but they shared sentiments of regional identity and desires for autonomy.

covers sported monochrome woodcut prints,¹² together with the rise of early journalistic photography of the harsh conditions and social unrest helped to create what would become a classic Nordeste iconography.¹³ The Nordeste was framed as Brazil's "other," dramatically contrasted with the Rio-São Paulo axis that dominated the nation's intellectual and artistic production.

The "Generation of the 30s" had its literary predecessors, most significantly Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902), an account of the Canudos rebellion. But the novels of Graciliano Ramos, Rachel de Queiroz, and others aided by rapid growth in the nascent domestic publishing industry further helped to establish the notion of the Nordeste as a region of suffering, attrition, dislocation, and loss. The word "sertão" itself, which originally designated the generalized interior or backlands of anywhere in the country away from the cities concentrated on the coast, began to be used at this time to refer chiefly to the *particular* backlands of the arid northeast.¹⁴ The symbolic power of itinerant prophets like Antônio Conselheiro of Canudos, the miracle-working but excommunicated priest Padre Cícero of Juazeiro (adored by the rural population to the present day, when people still perform pilgrimages to his parish),¹⁵ and bandits like Lampião and Maria Bonita was strongly felt in literature, music, and cinema dealing with the northeast throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. With most of these writers ostensibly oriented on the left of the political spectrum, the dominance of the powerful landholding families and *coronéis* or strongmen who waged internecine feuds, mobilizing private militias of *pistoleiros* or *capangas*, often formed a semi-feudal backdrop for their works. The regionalist aesthetic of the Nordeste

¹² Although these *xilogravura* woodcuts are practically synonymous with *cordel* today, the chapbooks at one time had both line-drawing covers like those found on popular almanacs, as well as photos poached from advertisements and early cinema. C.f. Slater, Amorim

¹³ For an analysis of the discursive construction of the Nordeste, see Albuquerque (2009), *A Invenção do Nordeste e outras artes*

¹⁴ Alves, Eldar Patrick Maia. 2011. *A economia simbólica da cultura popular sertanejo-nordestina*. Maceió: EDUFAL.

¹⁵ Of my associates, Manuel Pula-Pula (owner of Leão de Ouro) has made the pilgrimage or *romaria*, and artisan / caboclo-de-lança dreams of someday carrying it out. For an excellent treatment of this subject see Passar 2004

backlands would continue to find resonance in the poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto, the novels of Guimarães Rosa,¹⁶ the films of Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Glauber Rocha, and the massively popular recordings of Luiz Gonzaga. The stories they told were always embroidered with leather-capped cowboys, guitar-strumming troubadors (*repentistas* or *cantadores*), or fife-and-drum bands (*bandas de pífano*) typical of the area.

Although those writers dealing with the *sertão* are the most widely read Northeastern regionalist authors, the coastal Zona da Mata also contributed to this identity formation in ways particularly salient to the maracatu revival. José Américo de Almeida, José Lins do Rego, Gilberto Freyre - these authors constructed a different vision of suffering for the coastal sugar-growing interior. In their works the villain is not the harsh land or the feudal power of the *coronéis*, but rather the changes wrought by modernity and the “disorder” following the decline of the northeastern sugar aristocracy, whose national prominence in politics diminished in direct proportion to the industrialization of the south. Theirs was a nostalgic vision of plantations and paternalism, with the inequality of slaves and sharecroppers naturalized as part of the landscape.¹⁷ While portrayals of oppression and suffering are plentiful, they are mediated through a framework where ideology later expressed as “racial democracy” resulted from Brazilian exceptionalism and a “benign” slavery, imposed more by necessity than choice, and where the personalistic rule of the old sugar elite protected the less fortunate from the uncertainty and exploitation of industrial development.

¹⁶ Guimarães Rosa was from Minas Gerais and most of his work was set in the *sertão* along the northern frontier of that state. While not technically part of the Nordeste, his work partakes of the same iconography and is frequently grouped with the other writers mentioned here.

¹⁷ For a detailed exploration of the naturalistic vision of Freyre and Lins do Rego, see Rogers, Thomas D. (2010). *The deepest wounds: a labor and environmental history of sugar in Northeast Brazil*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

Although these regionalist novels and sociological works from the 1920s and 30s Nordeste are now commonly regarded as part of a turn to modernist realism in Brazilian letters, some of the writers chose to portray themselves in direct opposition to the modernist movement taking place in the industrializing south of the country. Published in part as a response to the polemical and experimental Modern Art Week of São Paulo in 1922, Gilberto Freyre's "Regionalist Manifesto" of 1926 called for defending the traditions and values of the Northeast, which should not be abandoned even though the region was "in large part arid and **heroically poor**, devastated by banditry, malaria, and even hunger." He railed against the importation of European fashions and tastes as nefarious symbols of this treacherous modernity, even though the tendency of the Brazilian elite to fetishize all things European long predates the twentieth century, a fact noted in Freyre's own later work. He writes,

There may be no other region in Brazil that surpasses the Nordeste in the richness of its illustrious traditions and the brilliance of its character. Many of its regional values became national after being imposed on other Brazilians, less because of the economic superiority that sugar gave to the Nordeste for more than a century, than by the moral seduction and aesthetic fascination of those same values.¹⁸

In his manifesto and elsewhere in his early work, the Nordeste becomes the repository of Brazil's pre-industrial virtues, resisting the progressive logic of a southeastern modernism. Freyre advocates for a uniquely Northeastern urbanism. He describes the *mocambo* huts of thatched palm and cane fronds, mud, and wood built by ex-slaves and sharecroppers – dwellings that were disparaged as miserable by Mário de Andrade when he visited Recife in the 1920s¹⁹ – and praises

¹⁸ Freyre, Gilberto. 1955 (1926). "O manifesto regional." Rio de Janeiro: Departamento Nacional de Imprensa. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Andrade, Mário de. 2002. *O turista aprendiz*. Belo Horizonte, Editora Itatiaia.

them as the ideal tropical habitation, in an early iteration of his theory of Luso-tropicalism.²⁰ He praises the narrow winding streets of the old sections of Recife and Olinda in direct juxtaposition to the broad avenues constructed in Rio in the nineteenth century, inspired by Paris and built to impress the Portuguese nobility. He calls for an architecture that celebrates local custom rather than neo-classical aesthetic values. He calls for a revival of artisanal production, an exaltation of *cultura popular* and carnival traditions, and museums full of items used by common men and women in their daily lives of heroic poverty - in descriptive terms that bear a striking resemblance to the museum he actually founded in 1979 (*O Museu do Homem do Nordeste*, or Museum of Northeastern Man, located in the wealthy Casa Forte neighborhood of Recife).²¹

A half century later another regionalist manifesto that drank from the same well would be offered up in Recife by Ariano Suassuna when he founded the Armorial group. Although his literary work is what most Brazilians will remember about him,²² in his adopted home of Pernambuco he was a political figure, public intellectual, and defender of (his particular vision of) the Northeast. He was appointed as Secretary of Culture for the city of Recife in 1975, and to the same post at the state level from 1995-98 and again in 2007. During his first term as Secretary

²⁰ Freyre, Gilberto. 1955 (1926) *ibid.* Freyre's idea of Luso-tropicalism was developed in his later work, c.f. *Sobrados e mocambos*, Brazil: an interpretation, and *New World In The Tropics*

²¹ This passage of effervescent prose is worth citing at length:

Querer museus com panelas de barro, facas de ponta, cachimbos de matutos, sandálias de sertanejos, miniaturas de almanjarras, figuras de cerâmica, bonecas de pano, carros-de boi, e não apenas com relíquias de heróis de guerras e mártires de revoluções gloriosas. Exaltar bumbas-meu-boi, maracatús, mamulengos, pastoris e clubes populares de carnaval, em vez de trabalhar pelo desenvolvimento do "Rádio Clube" ou concorrer para o brilho dos bailes do "Clube Internacional". Levantar-se contra o loteamento de sítios velhos alegando que as cidades precisam de árvores, de hortas, de mato tanto quanto de casa e ruas. Querer os grande edifícios públicos e as praças decoradas com figuras de homens de trabalho, mestiços, homens de côr em pleno movimento de trabalho, cambiteiros, negros de fornalha de engenho, cabras de trapiches e de almanjarras, pretos carregadores de açúcar, carros de boi cheios de cana, jangadeiros, vaqueiros, mulheres fazendo renda — e não com as imagens convencionais e côr-de-rosa de deusas européias da Fortuna e da Liberdade, de deuses romanos disto e daquilo, de figuras simbólicas das Quatro Estações. Desejar um museu regional cheio de recordações das produções e dos trabalhos da região e não apenas de antiguidades ociosamente burguesas como jóias de baronesas e bengalas de gamenhos do tempo do Império. (pages 26-27, *O Manifesto Regional*)

²² Ariano Suassuna had his first national success with the play "O Auto da Compadecida" in 1955, and was inducted into the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1990. He participated in the first incarnations of the MPC (Movimento da Cultura Popular) in the early 1960s.

of Culture of Pernambuco in the 1990s, Suassuna vigorously advocated for the promotion of rural maracatu and other forms of *cultura popular* as vital elements of Pernambuco's identity. He was a critical figure in helping the nascent Maracatu Association of Pernambuco, originally run out of Mestre Salustiano's home in suburban Olinda, to acquire a building of its own in Salu's home town of Aliança, as well as aiding them in establishing the resources to expand the Association's role. He even awarded Salustiano a post in his office of the ministry of culture.

Although he repeatedly utilized the two concepts in his many articles and essays, in some instances Suassuna argued that the distinction between "erudite" and "popular" art is a product of the Renaissance and the origin of elite discrimination against *cultura popular*, further advancing his aesthetic and ideological preference for pre-modern medieval romance and the baroque as a template for a uniquely "national" art. He emphasizes that the first music and literature he ever encountered were rural troubadours and popular legends as a child, while "raised on farms in a small city in the *sertão* of Paraíba," where his father had a fondness for such things.²³ This nostalgic reflection of an idyllic farm life is somewhat misleading. Suassuna came from a political family of wealthy landowners, and his father – who had been both a governor of Paraíba and a Deputado Federal (congressman) – was murdered in 1930 in a bloody series of intrigues that also claimed the life of then-governor João Pessoa, in events surrounding the rise of Getulio Vargas to power. Nevertheless, throughout his writings Suassuna implies a capacity to absorb *cultura popular* through emotional empathy – much like Mário de Andrade did in the 1920s – and a kind of geographical osmosis. Suassuna's belief that it is possible to inhabit and embody the cultural forms of the poor through affective ties, intuition, and empathy enabled him to transcend

²³ Suassuna, Ariano. 1962 (2008). "Teatro, região e tradição" in *Almanaque Armorial*, ed. Carlos Newton Junior. Rio de Janeiro: Editora José Olympio, p. 53

differences of race and social class by sidestepping them, in an assertion of shared cultural universals.²⁴

Suassuna's take on *cultura popular* and its role in establishing an "authentically Brazilian" aesthetic is very much linked to Mário de Andrade's modernism, notwithstanding his vocal antipathy towards the São Paulo modernists, and filtered through Gilberto Freyre's assertion of regional difference. In a 1951 essay about the *frevo* composer Capiba, who also produced songs in the style of maracatu nação, he writes, "Erudite music is therefore the sedimented fruit of the transcendence of popular music, realized by the great spirits across the ages."²⁵ Suassuna later described this essay as a "premonition" of his Armorial movement.²⁶ It presents a clearly hierarchical ranking of erudite art (which is "transcendent") over popular culture (which is "traditional," local, and time-bound) with an aesthetic justification for the erudite appropriation of the popular or folkloric as a natural result of a commonly-held origin. He argues that "erudite" art has popular roots, but the astute reader will note that this appropriation only works in one direction: popular culture, in Suassuna's formulation, is incapable of assimilating works of erudite art by way of its place in the evolutionary, geological succession of artistic forms. *Cultura popular* is the anonymous bedrock from which an autochthonous national art is developed through the sedimentations of individualized works created by "great spirits" of the upper crust, who elevate the crude content of the folk. He elaborates this further into a hierarchy of composers who base their praxis on "imitation" (popular artists) or reinvention (erudite artists), with an intermediate state of "transposition" that is "crucial for the creation of a national music."²⁷ This aristocratic

²⁴ See Dinneen (1996) pages 150-214

²⁵ Suassuna, Ariano. 1951. "Notas sobre a música de Capiba" in *É de tororó: maracatu*. Rio: Editora Casa do Estudante

²⁶ Suassuna, Ariano. 1974. *Manifesto do Movimento Armorial*. Recife: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco

²⁷ Suassuna, Ariano. 1951, *ibid*

aesthetic, modified and reformulated over the succeeding decades, is a constant that gives continuity to Suassuna's thought, artistic output, and policy interventions. The deliberate juxtaposition of "imitation" versus "invention" follows from the same European conception of art as an autonomous realm of contemplation and aesthetic beauty which Larry Shiner argues developed in the eighteenth century, fundamentally transforming subsequent debates and approaches to creativity.²⁸

There is a dissonance in the Armorial movement trumpeting *cultura popular* as an endangered symbol of authenticity while insisting on its transformation into something "more" by way of a national fine art. Suassuna apparently saw no contradiction in removing these traditions from their social context, where they are largely participatory genres with little or no barriers between audience and performers, and adapting them into musical, dance, and dramatic works for presentation at the Santa Isabel Theater in Recife. As Mark Dinneen writes:

... A vital part of popular art is the interaction between the artist and his community in the process of production, but all Armorial art has been created in virtual separation from the rural communities that produced the original material, and has been produced for a totally different audience with very different responses and perceptions. Improvisation, another important aspect in popular art, with musicians and poets frequently changing and developing their performance in response to audience reaction, is precluded in the case of Armorial art, where musicians present a pre-established repertoire and poets prepare work for publication rather than performance, to be read in silence rather than declaimed aloud. The crucial attributes which distinguished those popular forms – the dynamism, popular participation and improvisation, in other words, the social process that explains the particular nature of those forms – are lost, and only the formal trappings are left, frozen in the form of folkloric artifacts.

This extraction of content and symbolism from the social processes that created them was crucial to the Armorialists re-presentation of that material to audiences of "refined sensibilities." The

²⁸ Shiner, Larry E. 2001. *The invention of art: a cultural history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

stance of Suassuna, throughout the multiple roles played during his career, has sought to minimize or efface the particular histories of different groups – ethnic, racial, economic – and fit them under one umbrella of Brazilian identity defined in rigidly Northeastern terms. The notion of *cultura popular* as a frozen, timeless artifact captured in an implied state of purity, presented with the reverence of museum curators, was criticized by many observers during the 1970s.²⁹ Some of these critics also accused the Armorialists of being not only formalist and elitist but also exploitative, of appropriating the creative work of the poor for their own social and economic advantage while leaving its creators languishing in poverty. Suassuna responded to such criticisms by stating that socioeconomic change was not an artist's responsibility, and argued that the economic prosperity of a country does not guarantee cultural richness.³⁰ He unfavorably compared the United States as a materially rich but culturally impoverished nation to India, which he views as its opposite. This is an odd response to accusations that your artistic movement is profiting off the cultural production of the poor. The implication seems to be that if popular artists were suddenly to become wealthy, they would no longer be able to produce *cultura popular*, and hence it is preferable that the current hierarchy stays in place.³¹

Ariano Suassuna was initially involved in the Movimento de Cultura Popular in the early 1960s, but his ideas were significantly different from many of his collaborators.³² He rejected the notion of art at the service of any political ideology. He insisted, for example, that the rural poor

²⁹ See, for example, Ronildo Maia Leite, "A miséria da arte popular," *Diário de Pernambuco*, Sept.4, 1977 and the essays and interviews in the collection "Arte popular e dominação" (1977)

³⁰ Newspaper interview, 1977 (citation misplaced)

³¹ Maurício, Ivan; Cirano, Marcus, and Ricardo de Almeida. 1978. *Arte popular de dominação : o caso de Pernambuco, 1961/77*. Recife, Editora Alternativa.1

³² The MCP was established and run by intellectuals and artists on the political left, with state backing from the populist government of Miguel Arraes. MCP initiatives sought to engage the poor by using culture as a tool for education and conscientização (consciousness-raising through praxis and politicization), a technique developed by Paulo Freire who worked closely with them until the 1964 military coup brought an end to the experiment. A number of theatrical groups organized under the banner of the MCP staged productions in remote urban and rural areas, and occasionally incorporated local working-class people into roles as actors or stage assistants

did not support the aforementioned radical Prestes Column of the 1920s, as was commonly claimed by his colleagues. Suassuna's position went further, to the extent that he denied that *cultura popular* is even shaped by social existence at all, but instead was "religious, tragic, comic, and concerned with morality, mystery, metamorphosis and the miraculous."³³ Rather than viewing any of those qualities as also bound up with economic, political, or ideological issues, Suassuna opts for a view of "true" art as essentially universal and transcendent. His consciously de-politicized stance quite likely made him more appealing than his peers to the military government installed in 1964. While many Pernambucan artists and political figures (including governor Miguel Arraes) were exiled in the aftermath of the coup, Suassuna was appointed to a succession of government posts related to art and culture during the dictatorship years. Although he never openly criticized the military regime, he also did not voice any particular enthusiasm or support for it. This ambiguous stance perhaps made it easier for Suassuna to distance himself from the legacy of the regime's repression, and become appointed to important cultural policy posts during the second coming of Miguel Arraes' post-exile government in the 1990s.³⁴

Suassuna's Armorial movement had a subtle but sustained impact on middle-class awareness of Northeastern *cultura popular*. For example the musical group Quinteto Violado, inspired in large part by the Armorial project, brought Northeastern regional music to a wider audience in the MPB genre (*Música Popular Brasileira*) during the 1970s and 80s. Early in its career, the Quinteto Violado also served as a house band on the important multi-volume *Música do Nordeste* series of LPs released by entrepreneur Marcus Pereira in the 1970s for which Suassuna

³³ Suassuna (1961) cited in Dinneen

³⁴ Suassuna's ability to straddle the divisions of regime change can best be explained by his unwavering cultural nationalism. While the military dictatorship encouraged and protected foreign investment, Suassuna has always been vociferously anti-American. While at odds with the military government's actions in this regard, his rhetoric and presence in the administration gave a veneer of legitimacy to its own posture of cultural nationalism and protectionism. After democratization, Suassuna's cultural nationalism was still useful to the left-populist government of Miguel Arraes.

wrote the sleeve notes, wherein they expertly recreated rural folk styles and compositions alongside lesser-known “popular” artists.³⁵ The movement’s influence was also indirectly present as something to push back *against* by the Manguebeat movement which sought to incorporate rap, punk, rock and pop aesthetics into their own appropriations of regional sounds and rhythms in the early 1990s.³⁶ The Manguebeat artists, who embraced new technologies and celebrated hybridity in yet another manifesto document, were flatly condemned by Suassuna (then acting as Secretary of Culture) for being alienated dupes of mass culture, at the same time as they received national and international critical accolades. Kirsten Ernst has argued that Suassuna’s implicit critique of modernist developmentalism is itself not possible without first accepting the modernist premise, and more properly belong to the subset of “primitivism.”³⁷ It is also worth noting the irony of his romantic nostalgia for an eighteenth century aesthetic while still tacitly embracing notions of “erudite” art that developed much later.

The early backlash against the Armorialists - although small, localized, and largely drowned-out - has parallels in similar regionalist and cultural revivalist movements in Brazil. Ruben Oliven has written about the Gaúcho Traditionalist Movement (GTM) in Brazil’s southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, a movement founded primarily by descendants of small landholders or ranchers experiencing downward mobility, an “urban movement that tried to recoup the rural values of the past.”³⁸ This movement’s strict criteria of what constituted legitimate *gaúcho* music, dress, and language was institutionalized in an expansive network of cultural centers, educational

³⁵ For a thorough and engaging treatment of this project, see Sean Stroud’s *The Defense of Tradition in MPB*

³⁶ “Manguebeat” also encompassed visual arts and cinema. The best known example of the latter was the 1996 film “Baile Perfumado” which offers another treatment of the legendary bandit couple Lampião and Maria Bonita.

³⁷ Ernst, Kirsten. 2010. “Not Reactionary, Just Late”: The Case for Ariano Suassuna as Brazilian Modernist.” In *The Popular Avant-Garde*. Edited by Rachel M. Silverman. New York: Rodopi.

³⁸ Oliven, Rúben G. 1996. *Tradition matters: modern Gaúcho identity in Brazil*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.60. This book is a translation of *A Parte e o Todo: A Diversidade Cultural no Brasil-Nação* (1992)

programs, and folk festivals. Challenges to the hegemony of the GTM vision came to the forefront in music festivals of the 1980s, when a cadre of artists and journalists established themselves as “nativists” embracing heterogeneity and engagement with the present, in opposition to the traditionalists’ xenophobic, backward-looking “revival” of rural values. They framed the traditionalists as a reactionary movement struggling with the social changes of a rural exodus to the cities. In keeping with the Brazilian fondness for the issuing of manifestos, this opposition group published one of its own, targeting these

Ayatollahs of tradition, all well placed in the cities, [who] want to revive and maintain the music of the countryside, under the fleeting argument that it was there that the peons had a home, food, and happiness – a mystical ideal fed by farmers who lost a stable and disciplined labor force. But why did these people leave the country to become, today, unqualified workers in civil construction, paper workers, washer women, domestic maids, and prostitutes, bringing forth abandoned children and assailants, illiterates without roots, guerrilla fighters of the lowest class? Those who fled the countryside imagined they would find better days. And of course they did not find them. The ayatollahs want to sing of their ideal past, not of their drama.³⁹

The nativists criticized the regionalist movement for establishing a system of “cultural patronage” comprised of arts funding councils and their selection committees, functioning as “folkloric patrols” that censured any creative expression that was not consistent with their traditionalist vision. These criticisms find resonance in the role played by the equivalent institutions in Pernambuco since the 1980s, in particular FUNDARPE (The Foundation for the Historic and Artist Patrimony of Pernambuco), which was dominated by Ariano Suassuna’s ideological and aesthetic views for decades.⁴⁰ His cultural politics, programmatic aesthetic statements, and philosophy have at times been similarly retrograde, reactionary, and xenophobic, with his work

³⁹ Fonseca, Juarez and Gilmar Eitelwein, “Aiatolás de Tradição: Apontamentos para uma história natural.” *Zero Hora*, June 14, 1986, cited in Olivén, 1996, pages 102-104.

⁴⁰ The Fundação do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Pernambuco, or FUNDARPE, is discussed in greater detail in chapter six and in the conclusion.

described by historian Muniz de Albuquerque as “a struggle against history.”⁴¹ The militant stance of Suassuna in defending “tradition,” wherein he is the arbiter of what is and what is not truly Northeastern and truly Brazilian, has come to be viewed as an overbearing and suffocating presence in Pernambuco for many artists working in a variety of different mediums. The degree to which he was embedded in the state’s cultural programming apparatus means that much of this criticism is voiced outside of public forums, with artists afraid of being cut off from the spigot of public art funds.⁴² The institutional ties and debts of patronage between the cultural programming sector and the rural communities that produce maracatu are sufficient in themselves for the name Suassuna to be worked with reverence into many a maracatu rhyme. However it must be admitted that many *mestres* do genuinely consider him to have been a defender of *cultura popular*, and do not seem bothered by the restrictions placed upon the category in his ideology.

One important difference between the regionalist *gaúcho* movement of Rio Grande do Sul and the regionalism embodied by the Armorialists of the 1970s and 80s was that the latter also had high-profile individual artists who assumed the role of spokesmen for “The Northeast” in national debates, and mediated the perception of Northeastern *cultura popular* in their own work that was projected into a national cultural marketplace. The traditionalist aesthetic associated with the Northeast in the minds of other non-Northeastern Brazilians has, for many, become inseparable from the name of Suassuna, and to a lesser extent that of his protégé Antônio Nobrega, as well as the memory of traditional artist Suassuna helped transform into the most visible symbol of “authentic” *cultura popular*, Mestre Salustiano. These identifications live on in thoughts and

⁴¹ Albuquerque Jr, Durval Muniz de. 1999. *A invenção do nordeste e outras artes*. Recife : Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana.

⁴² Although there have been outspoken, published criticisms (Maurício, Cirano, Almeida 1978) and the Mangubeat Manifesto 1996, most misgivings about his legacy seem to be voiced privately.

sentiments of the young Paulistas at the Brincantes workshops where Barachinha and João Paulo held court.

Ninguém é melhor do que ninguém: equal footing at home and away

Fora / away

After one long afternoon of workshops during Barachinha and João Paulo's week at the Institute, I was talking with some of the Paulista students about what brought them there to learn about maracatu. Their varied responses had a common thread that tied them together – a desire to connect with Brazil's authentic cultural roots. They sought to shed the accumulated baggage of “imported” cultural artifacts with which they felt themselves to be surrounded since childhood. They sought to distinguish themselves from their peer group that turned a blind eye to the riches of “the people” in deference to an ersatz, alienated mass culture. Some of them first encountered maracatu as I had, as tourists to Recife-Olinda, typically during carnival season. They had brought news and enthusiasm and photos and recordings back with them to São Paulo to share with their friends and colleagues who could appreciate them. These friends would then look forward to the day when they too could make a pilgrimage to Pernambuco. Others only knew the state's *cultura popular* through the recorded works of intermediaries like Nóbrega, Siba Veloso, or Renata Rosa (all present at that 2001 carnival performance reported on at the top of the chapter).

The candor and sincerity of these young people were undeniable, and softened my inclination to see the southern, upper middle-class interest and appropriation of the culture of northeastern “others” as inherently extractive and exploitative. One student, an English major in college, had first been brought to the institute by his girlfriend who told him he was “the whitest black man she knew” and needed to get to know his own roots. The young man's family was not

from the Northeast, which goes to demonstrate the extent to which the region becomes a stand-in for authenticity, often with racial nuances (this is much more pronounced, and well documented, for Bahia). In three days of workshops these students had already learned more, for example, about the differences between *baque solto* and *baque virado* maracatu than is known by the average city-dweller in Recife. These young, urbanite enthusiasts were able to immerse themselves in rural maracatu because a respectable institution tied to the erudite art world had temporarily “lowered the barriers to their participation” to an art form previously tainted with the stigma of poverty.⁴³ The privileges of cultural tourism now include the “other” performing in their midst, as accessible as the next metro station.

As for my friends who were performing, the experience seemed to be totally positive. In addition to a chance to make some decent money for a week’s work, the interaction with the students was genuinely rewarding. The Paulista young people who came to learn about the intricacies of poetic verse and improvisation, and participate in the workshops centered on music and dance, were attentive and enthusiastic. Percussionist and *caboclo de lança* Ronaldo, twenty-five years old at the time, made many friends his own age who he has kept in touch with over social media, some of which visited him in Nazaré the following year. When we had all returned to Nazaré after the workshops, I asked Barachinha how he felt about performing maracatu for the São Paulo audiences. He stated without hesitation that he felt it much more rewarding to perform in Recife or São Paulo than in Nazaré. He felt that in those places he was treated as a “true artist,” embraced and applauded, whereas on his home turf people only found fault and criticized. When I asked if he thought the audiences in these other places really understood maracatu, he insisted

⁴³ Shannon Dudley uses this phrase in reference to college-based steelbands in 1950s Trinidad enabling upper-class people to participate in an art form associated with the poor. Dudley, Shannon. (2008). *Music from behind the bridge: steelband spirit and politics in Trinidad and Tobago*. New York: Oxford University Press.

that although they might not understand as much as his local audience, they understood enough, because “everyone knows that Pernambuco is culturally rich.”

Pressed on the issue of criticisms, Barachinha elaborated. “Instead of supporting *mestres* who succeed, as examples incentivizing other artists, people in Nazaré just criticize,” he said, citing complaints early in his career that his voice was too thin, that João Paulo was now “rich,” or that Zé Galdino (a frequent collaborator with Barachinha) was too self-important. These last two examples highlight dynamic distinctions of class within maracatu. Mestre João Paulo, who grew up on an *engenho* cutting sugar cane and spent decades working in construction, is now essentially retired from heavy labor (although he still does occasional contract work). He owns his own house, where he lives with his wife and grown children. It is not particularly spacious even by Nazaré’s standards, but it is comfortable, with a linoleum tile floor rather than cement. Whether João Paulo is asked by the mayor to perform at the opening of Nazaré’s new high school, or booked to perform in a large city halfway across the country, the audiences in Nazaré can always say that they remember when he built houses rather than owned one. When performing for an audience in Recife or at the Brincantes Institute in São Paulo, that personal history with its layers of familiarity and kinship does not exist. He may be considered an *artista popular*, with all the limits that hierarchical qualifier implies, but he is still an “artist” just the same.

Barachinha recalled another performance in São Paulo with Siba Veloso alongside Biu Roque, an older singer and multi-instrumentalist who mastered many genres and who had passed away in 2010.⁴⁴ After the performance, a member of the audience asked for everyone in the group to autograph his t-shirt. When it came around to Biu there was some awkward hesitation, and Barachinha spoke up.

44 Siba’s interventions in Pernambuco’s cultura popular are discussed in chapter five

I said to the guy, Bui doesn't know how to sign his name. And he answered – just make one mark up and another mark down and I'll know it's yours! He valued it, right? He was satisfied with two scratches that Bui Roque made. And here, would people do that? No, they wouldn't. There, the preoccupation people had to get their photos taken with us and all that, you know, it's a real incentive for us.

“The place to *live* is the Mata Norte, it's more calm,” Barachinha concluded. “But to be an artist, in a place like São Paulo it is much easier.”

Those *mestres* who have excelled in their art and received the accolades of outsiders often occupy an ambivalent space of cultural brokerage, mediating between two worlds. This notion of being more appreciated and valued outside of the Mata Norte than within it is a commonly held perception among those maracatu performers who have performed far from their points of origin. That appreciation, and its correlate in financial compensation, has fostered and probably deepened some norms of professionalization which were already well underway when maracatu was “discovered” by the middle class. These processes are sometimes conflated in talk about the state of maracatu today in contrast to times past. Mestre Manoel Domingos spoke to me of the new expectations and demands in performing for “a more evolved public,” educated people who would not be so tolerant of grammatical errors, “improper” Portuguese, and poorly executed poetry. Yet maracatu verse had already been undergoing an endogenous process of self-refinement by way of influence and cross-fertilization with the singer-guitarist tradition of *cantoria*, since the 1980s – a history that Manoel Domingos knows much better than me, and which is discussed at length in the next chapter.

The interactions with these cosmopolitan audiences are a counterbalance to their relationships with the audiences of the small towns where they live, where humility is emphasized as a virtue. The nominally egalitarian ethos within the maracatus, of “nobody is better than anyone

else,” is also what opens up the achievements of individual *mestres* to criticisms.⁴⁵ In both performance contexts, a similar construction of authenticity is operating which stresses the “honest soul” of the maracatu poet.⁴⁶ The maracatu poet is valued for being eloquent without putting on airs, for being creative without setting himself apart from his community. This aura of authenticity reassures the maracatu community that, in spite of whatever social and economic disadvantages two *mestres* might be afflicted with before they step into the ring of a *sambada* contest, they can engage with each other as equals. For the culture elite, recognition of this authenticity serves as a kind of self-flattery, that the soul of the Brazilian people lives on into modernity, while reassuring them that the creativity of the people does not threaten their privilege.

Em casa / at home

Skeptical as I may have been about their motives, I too was struck by the contrast in the way the São Paulo theater staff and students treated Barachinha and João Paulo with respect and deference, almost as dignitaries from the foreign land of Pernambuco, while back in Nazaré their presence was taken for granted. I asked Barachinha about the behavior of some Nazarenos who were not simply blasé or critical, but outright disrespectful toward maracatu. There are many cases where, as the observer from outside, I wondered when the virtue of humility might be slipping into

⁴⁵ This ethic of “ninguém é melhor do que ninguém,” was a favorite phrase of one the directors of Estrela Brilhante

⁴⁶ Trilling, Lionel. 1972. *Sincerity and authenticity*. London, Oxford, University Press.

the dishonor of humiliation. One example involves the tendency – common throughout the Northeast more generally - of parking a car with the trunk open, equipped with a massive stereo system oriented toward the outside of the vehicle, and blasting the latest pop styles and hits at an ear-splitting volume while a small group of people drinks, dances, and socializes in their own portable, semi-private parties. I was accustomed to these noisy displays in Pernambuco long before I began to work with maracatu; what stunned me about the practice in this context was that people would set up on the immediate periphery of a maracatu event, presumably because it was a festive party atmosphere, and blast their sound systems only a few hundred yards away from where the maracatus had set up to perform. I have been present at *ensaios* and *sambadas* where the singers were barely audible over the noise of the competing revelry. On a neighborhood street corner *sambada* in a shared public space, I could understand how it might not be worth approaching the adjacent party-goers, in spite of the maracatu possessing a permit to set up at that location. However, when this also happened at the official “Sambada in the Park” events sponsored by the Mayor’s Office of Nazaré and held in the central plaza, I was truly baffled that nobody asked these individuals to please take their party to the next corner. I asked Barachinha what he thought of this.

“It’s ignorance,” he said simply.

“But why doesn’t somebody do something about it, say something to them?” I asked.

“That would just lead to problems. Nobody knows what might happen, you go up to those people and complain, and they’ve been drinking, and that’s how a fight breaks out. You don’t know, somebody might even have a gun. It’s better just to leave it alone and ignore it.”

Implicit in this statement is a tacit acceptance of the social hierarchy: the people parking their cars are never maracatuzeiros, the majority of whom don’t own a vehicle in the first place.

Although they may not be particularly wealthy or educated, these groups are usually comprised of members of well-established, middle-class families – Nazaré’s bourgeoisie, as it were. A potential clash between one of them and a maracatuzeiro would likely result in the deployment of the infamous “Do you know who you’re talking to?” trope of Brazilian social relations adroitly analyzed by Roberto DaMatta.⁴⁷ The caution voiced by Barachinha is warranted inasmuch as any physical violence or disorder resulting from such a confrontation would almost certainly be laid at the feet of those with less status. While that scenario is a possible outcome, what is a certainty is that any confrontation initiated by a maracatuzeiro would be an abnegation of hierarchical relationships, and any number of other maneuvers to put the complainant in their place would be brought to bear – humiliation and teasing in front of their colleagues, appeals to their “superior” social standing, or simply a refusal to acknowledge the grievance.

This exchange with Barachinha also highlighted my own persisting cultural bias in the notion that all other activity should cease when the *mestre* sings, with the public giving their undivided attention. Maracatuzeiros, however, are able to apply what Goffman calls “disattention” to these epiphenomena, tuning them out of their experiential frame in order to focus on maracatu.⁴⁸ Within that focus there is also an ability to move in and out of active engagement with the sung poetry over the course of an event that lasts seven or eight hours. A tightly-packed crowd surrounds each *mestre*, varying in size depending on the event. But many people stay further back, conversing with their friends or drinking, with the poetry at the edge of consciousness, waiting for things to get good before they move closer to the action. One of the curious qualities of contemporary maracatu is that the poetic complexity and skill of its singers has taken on a level of

⁴⁷ DaMatta, Roberto. 1991. *Carnivals, rogues, and heroes: an interpretation of the Brazilian dilemma*. Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press.

⁴⁸ Goffman, Erving. 1974 *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper & Row

seriousness comparable to that of the singer-poets of *cantoria* where audiences are seated and generally quiet, yet has retained the festive, noisy, and chaotic elements of the street, with cheering sections for each side comparable to a football match.

Preservation From Below

The word “retain” in the above sentence could be read with overtones of a passive process devoid of agency. To the contrary, conscious effort on the part of principal figures in the Nazaré scene is exercised to prevent maracatu from capitulating to the aesthetic demands of cultural tourism and middle-class “cosmopolitanism.” An illustration of this can be taken from the same Sambada in the Park series mentioned earlier. The location for these events, the *Praça dos Lanceiros*, stands at the entrance to the city from the main highway. Its construction was inaugurated under the first mayor to promote maracatu with official support, Jaime Correia, who is said to have been a passionate fan of the *mestre’s* sung poetry. Subsequent administrations neglected the park, and it was only occasionally utilized for events until 2011 when a regular series of *sambadas* was planned for the space. When organizing the first of these events, city officials had proposed setting up a professional sound system on the raised cement stage that sits permanently at one end of the plaza. Barachinha was consulted during the planning process, and insisted that maracatu *mestres* must always sing on the ground surrounded by their audience and fans cheering them on, and with their amplification provided by a *carro de som*, the sedan-style vehicle used in the neighborhood maracatu events which is equipped with a dozen or more speaker horns mounted on its roof. This then became the format for the series. However, I have never heard a *maracatuzeiro* complain about singing on a stage at one of the frequent festival-style

performances, where abbreviated sets of maracatu are mixed alongside other genres of music or dance. Likewise, the city-sponsored *Encontro dos Mestres* held in 2010, which featured almost two dozen *mestres* from around the Mata Norte on a stage with a sophisticated sound system and 24-channel digital mixing console, seemed generally well-received by the maracatu public. These performances are expected to be abbreviated and generalized. Although fans may crowd around to hear one or another specific *mestre* who has their devoted admiration, nothing the *mestre* sings on those occasions would be subjected to the kind of rigorous scrutiny and rules accorded to the *sambada* contests. In contrast, the song contests and open street rehearsals are identified as embodying the core rituals and values of the art form, and should not be altered if it can be avoided.

Another instance of resistance to encroachments on those core rituals occurred in April of 2011. The Maracatu Association, which has had an uncomfortably close relationship with the state funding agency FUNDARPE, pressured Barachinha and Estrela Brilhante to hold a *sambada* with Cambinda Brasileira on very short notice. The impetus was a sprawling cultural programming initiative spanning multiple cities under the banner of the “Pernambucan Cultural Nation.” A number of other *sambadas* were also being scheduled, two more in Nazare itself and several others in neighboring cities. Normally months of planning go into a *sambada* by the two maracatus involved, generating word-of-mouth publicity and announcements on local radio. Scheduling conflicts with other *sambadas* are avoided whenever possible, as showing solidarity with other maracatus and *mestres* by attending their events is crucial to sustaining their network of relationships and alliances. As described in the third chapter, transportation is often arranged by a maracatu to bring people from one city to another to attend a *sambada*.

In addition to abrogating those standards, the Association also tried to convince Barachinha to hold his *sambada* on a Friday night rather than a Saturday due to the bloated programming

schedule of the event. As described in the last chapter, sambadas have historically been held on Saturdays to accommodate the exhausting work schedules of cane cutters. Although urbanization and changes in the sugar economy have changed the demographics, a great deal of maracatu's base does still work in sugar. Those who are not cane workers often work out of town, spending most of the week in Recife and returning on Friday evenings or Saturday mornings. Another significant contingent work at the open-air markets or *feiras* that happen twice a week in Nazare, where people sell produce, meat, garments and some household items. The maracatu community has many people who work at these *feiras*, either running a stall or working for someone else, and the Saturday morning *feira* is typically very busy.⁴⁹ Thus holding a sambada on a Friday would be a major inconvenience for all of these groups, none of whom can afford to miss a day of work. That inconvenience does not factor into the logic of the cultural tourism agenda promoted by the type of FUNDARPE events showcased in "Pernambuco Nação Cultural." Barachinha balked at the suggestion of a Friday sambada and held his ground, and the sambada took place on the traditional Saturday evening, drawing well over a thousand people to see him face off against the young Mestre Carlos Antônio (son of percussionist Cosmo Antônio, who played in Barachinha's band that night), at that time the mestre of Cambinda Brasileira.

Containing the "artisan"

On display

By far the most abundant and accessible representations of rural maracatu over the last two decades has been through photography and film. This last part of the chapter will deal with a

⁴⁹ It should be noted that different cities and *municípios* hold their markets on different days. For example the town of Tracunhaém, seven kilometers from Nazaré, has their weekend *feira* on Sunday rather than Saturday mornings.

sampling of them. The photography exhibit "Estrela Brilhante" had an opening reception in February of 2010 in a museum space inside the Instituto Cultural do Banco Real in Recife's old city. The photographer, whose work has been featured in exhibits and residencies in Europe, had been invited by recording artist Siba Veloso to document the rehearsals of Estrela as well as those of Cambinda of Cumbe and Estrela Dourada. I accompanied Siba to the opening, where a contingent of the directory of Estrela as well as Mestre Barachinha and Cabeça were present. The photographs were mostly portraits printed very large, some of them nearly life-size. In spite of this portrait-style presentation, none of the subjects were identified by name, and many were featured in poses that hid their faces from view. Although the exhibit program made much of the fact that these images were showing a side of maracatu rarely seen - apart from carnival, without the ornate and brilliant costumes - the maracatuzeiros were represented as anonymous, literally faceless in some cases. Among the photographer's previous exhibits was one project focusing on the working-class district of Brasília Teimosa in Recife, featuring portraits of people partying on the beach and listening to *brega* music, some examples of which were also included in this exhibit's brochure.⁵⁰ Although she had very little personal rapport with her subjects, with nearly all of her contact mediated through Siba, the photographer did courteously hand-deliver copies of her finished monograph to the directors of the three maracatus featured. This is in marked contrast to a project of carnival photography exclusively about Cambinda Brasileira that went public while I lived in Nazaré, when the photographer failed to notify the group about either the book release in Recife or an exhibit that ran for two weeks at the Winter Arts Festival of Garanhuns. This yearly festival takes place in the mountain town of Garanhuns two hundred miles from Nazaré, and Cambinda performed there at the same time as the exhibit, only a few blocks from the art gallery.

⁵⁰ "Estrela brilhante" by Bárbara Wagner was exhibited between February 9 and April 4, 2010, at Instituto Cultural Banco Real in Recife.

The vibrant visual aspect to costumed maracatu has also made it into a popular object for the medium of film. In 2006 the feature film *Baixio das Bestas* was released. Written and directed by Cláudio Assis, known for his visceral and graphic style of hyper-realism, the film is set in the Mata Norte and did extensive shooting in and around Nazaré da Mata. Siba contributed music to the film's soundtrack, and Barachinha was cast in a small role as a *mestre* of maracatu, while several other maracatuzeiros were cast as extras. The presence of film production during my time in Nazaré was more prosaic. In 2010, a small contingent of Estrela Brilhante attended the opening of the documentary *Doce Brasil Holandês* in Recife. The film explores the curious “nostalgia” for the brief period of Dutch occupation in Pernambuco during the eighteenth century, following the journey of a Dutch woman to trace her ancestry through Recife and meet others with the same surname.⁵¹

Although maracatu does not figure into the film's narrative in any significant way, Estrela had been contracted to perform for the film shoot in the previous year, and they had now received an invitation and a payment to attend the opening. Caboclos Ronaldo and Tony were among those arranged inside the foyer of the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation cinema, like guardians to the portal of a sacred space. Cabeça and I were enlisted to decorate the hallways with sugarcane stalks in the corners and palm fronds on the floor. An old cast-iron sugar cane press used to make the cane juice beverage found everywhere through the city (*caldo de cana*) had been rented and brought to the theatre on the back of a pickup truck. The event was catered with gourmet regional cuisine and we were all encouraged to fix ourselves a plate, while drinks and hors d'oeuvres were circulated by wait staff. Aside from seeing to our welfare, the *gaúcha* director Monica Schmiedt was busy with her guests, and our group was left more or less to ourselves. When enough people

⁵¹ Directed by Mônica Schmidt, two trailers for the film can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/10791018> and <http://vimeo.com/13837908>.

had arrived, Schmiedt asked that three *caboclos de lança* take positions on a concrete platform in the building's enclosed garden area where most of the reception was happening, and give a short demonstration, tossing their lances into the air and doing whatever leaps and twists they could manage in the restricted space.

At last people began to be ushered into the theater for the screening. My curiosity was even more piqued than when we had arrived, as nobody in our group had seen any footage of the film. It seemed rather anticlimactic for my friends: *Estrela Brilhante* is shown for a total of about one minute, performing in front of the iconic St. Peter's church in the Old City. Their scenes are spliced between long shots of rolling hills bursting with sugar cane, old plantation homes, palm trees swaying in the breeze, and stretches of immaculate beach. Maracatu became part of the landscape. The rest of the film focused on interviews done in Holland and Brazil with historians, artists, and some individuals who shared the family name of "Vanderlay." When the lights came back on, we patiently sat through a short speech from the director followed by a question and answer session. As the crowd left the theater, we packed our things into the rented Volkswagen van that was taking us back to Nazaré, but waited for another hour or so for Barachinha and *Estrela* director Biu Rosi to close out the business end of their arrangement with the event planners. On the ride home, I asked what people thought of the film, but nobody seemed eager to offer an opinion beyond "it was okay." Cabeça stated that he didn't like it and didn't really know what they were getting at. To fill the silence, all of us tired and half asleep, the driver put in a CD of an off-color comedy duo.

On another occasion, *Estrela Brilhante* was contracted to appear in a television advertisement to promote Pernambuco's "multicultural carnival" alongside dozens of other "folkloric" groups in the town of Igarassu, one of the earliest centers of Portuguese colonization

and site of Brazil's oldest church dating from the early sixteenth century. Each group was to be filmed alone for a few moments in the plaza during the shoot, and then all of the groups assembled together in one crowded, spectacular final scene to be edited together later into the promotional clip. We sat on the hill overlooking the plaza and watched some of the other groups perform while Estrela waited to be called. As we received word that we were next on the list, I took out my camera and audio recorder. A production assistant materialized next to me and insisted that I put them away. In spite of the non-commercial nature of my work and my affiliation with Estrela, I was forbidden to take so much as a photo.

These last two examples are notable because of their sheer banality: maracatu is trotted out as folkloric window dressing, and the practice has become so routine that it seldom warrants any commentary from maracatuzeiros. In December of 2010, we had a much more edifying interaction with a film crew from TV Brasil who came to Nazaré to produce an episode for a documentary series named *Sábados Azuis* (Blue Saturdays). TV Brasil is a relatively new public television station, founded in 2007 during President Lula's second term, and the series *Blue Saturdays* aims at showcasing "positive experiences of Brazilian civil society."⁵² The maracatu episode featured interviews with two *mestres*, once again Barachinha and João Paulo; an artisan and *caboclo de lança*, Thony de Lima; the president and *mestre-caboclo* of Cambinda Brasileira, Zé de Carro; and a member of Cambinda Brasileira, Jurandir Paulo da Silva, who holds the role of King in the carnival procession and whose family has a long history with that maracatu. A few weeks before the shoot, I had helped put together portfolios for Barachinha, João Paulo, and Thony to give to

⁵² Program description from <http://tvbrasil.ebc.com.br/sabadosazuissobre>, accessed April 2, 2014. Other subjects in the series have included cooperatives of family farms and artisans, programs in technology and the arts aimed at "at-risk youth," Italian immigrants in Brazil, and a cultural exchange program with Japan. In the realm of music, it is noteworthy that the two other episodes thus far deal with the genres of hip hop and techno-brega – both of which are genres suffering from middle-class prejudice, often racially-tinged.

the director. Ronaldo prepared one-page biographies on his computer at home, and I had enlargements of some of my photography made at a darkroom in Recife. When the crew arrived, I stayed out of the way on the first day as they filmed brief interviews in each of their homes, in Thony's case relocating to the more spacious *sede* of Cambinda Brasileira where there was room to spread out his artisanal equipment for display. A cane-cutting scene was staged, much like in the Globo Nordeste news piece mentioned in our second chapter. Finally, footage was shot at the original *sede* of Cambinda Brasileira on the plantation Engenho Cumbe, now the site of a Culture Center (*Ponto de Cultura*). This segment required a full maracatu in costume. A kind of makeshift group was assembled with members of Estrela Brilhante, Leão Misterioso, Cambinda Brasileira, and other groups all participating together. In part this made for a more equitable representation by not showing favoritism to one particular group, but it also reflected that any maracatu event scheduled in the middle of the work week required the groups to contract whoever was available at that time.



Figure 18: Thony de Lima and Maurício at work on a *gola* being made on contract for another maracatu

In contrast to the hectic and impersonal film shoot for the television ad in Igarassu, interactions with the Blue Saturdays crew were relaxed, congenial, and generally a lot of fun. The resulting twenty-five minute documentary also turned out remarkably well, although nobody would know this for many months.⁵³ While the producers promised to send copies of the finished edits to the groups involved, this was not done. Nobody in Nazaré seemed to have been informed when the program was scheduled to air on television either, most of us hearing about it the Sunday following the broadcast. Several months would pass before Tony managed to get a copy of the program from a friend in Tracunhaém who downloaded it off the internet and recorded it onto a DVD, from which I then made and distributed copies.

Ideas for a new script

Only a few days after the film crew had left, Barachinha arrived at my door with a notebook in hand. He wanted to type up his notes for a film idea that he had discussed with the producer. We sat at my desk and worked up a bullet-pointed document. Barachinha insisted that his life's dream was to make a dramatic film about the life of a *mestre*, provisionally named Nicolau. He emphasized that he was not interested in making a documentary. The pages he brought had short summaries of sixteen different scenes. Between them they roughly sketched a redemption narrative of this *mestre*, who fell into hard drinking at the peak of his fame, refused the help of friends and family, and jeopardized his maracatu. The conflict starts when the owner of the maracatu encounters him stumbling down the street in broad daylight on a Monday, and they

⁵³ The documentary, along with a brief write-up, can be found in its entirety at <http://tvbrasil.etc.com.br/sabadosazuis/episodio/maracatu>

exchange fraught words about an upcoming rehearsal and whether or not Nicolau will be in any shape to sing. Nicolau is adamant that he's not going to give up *cachaça* on account of maracatu. A scene shows the Catita, the cross-dressed trickster figure, stealing food from homes in the neighborhood. Some maracatu members talk about the *mestre*'s situation while working on a farm, saying that it had to be witchcraft that had driven our protagonist to drinking so desperately. Yet the *mestre* is still authoritative enough to prevent a troublesome *caboclo* from starting a fight at a rehearsal, laying down the law that he wouldn't tolerate any confusion in his maracatu. A city councilman contracts their group to perform on his birthday but the maracatu is in a shambles, and after the presentation he only wants to pay them half of what he promised, leading to an argument. One of the maracatu's directors calls a meeting with the intention of holding a vote to replace the *mestre*, but the owner does not accept the idea, principally because nobody had listened to him when he had suggested the same thing previously. Members of the maracatu try to convince the *mestre* to go to the house of a *catimbozeiro* (magician or healer) to cure his affliction. Another scene shows maracatu members seated around the *casa de farinha* (flour mill of a plantation) eating the food the Catita had procured for them earlier. In the maracatu headquarters, the core members are hard at work on that year's costumes and equipment for carnival, showing their devotion to the art. The *mestre* practices abstinence from his wife before an upcoming sambada. Finally, the *mestre* announces at their monthly meeting that he has given up his addiction and swears to do right by the maracatu, and is embraced and congratulated by everyone present.

There is a marked contrast between the tone of Barachinha's narrative, which follows a heroic trajectory of transcending personal demons and difficulties, and the feature film in which he played a small role, Cláudio Assis's "Baixio Das Bestas." That film is full of Assis's characteristically raw and bleak portraits of life in the Mata Norte of Pernambuco, with plot arches

involving the sexual exploitation of a minor, decadent booze and drug-fueled middle class youths, and a climactic violent revenge. Barachinha had only praise for his experience on the set of that film, emphasizing that the director and crew went out of their way to make him feel comfortable. A favorite story of his that I heard him retell many times involved the director, Assis, stopping the action after one of Barachinha's lines in the film where he had been making a conscious attempt to articulate the words with "proper" Portuguese elocution. Assis allegedly said to him, "I know you've never pronounced this word that way in your life. I want you to just talk the way you normally talk."⁵⁴ In spite of his fond memories of working on the film, which garnered accolades and awards internationally, Barachinha forbid his family to see it. He objected to its graphic depictions of violence, sex, and drug use, and worried that someday his son and daughter would inevitably see the film at a friend's house or on the internet. Tony, who was conveniently cast as an extra driving a truck, also told me he did not care for the film. He specifically did not like that costumed *caboclos de lança* were featured in the violent revenge scene at the film's closing, beating an old man who had been sexually abusing and exploiting his own daughter.

One could conclude from this general distaste or indifference to the film that maracatuzeiros in Nazaré are not particularly interested in the kind of 'edgy' realism being offered, perhaps similar to how Manoel Domingos verses about drugs and prostitution prompted mixed reactions. On the other hand, Barachinha's narrative ideas are drawn from his own experiences and reflect a moral vision where the protagonist's initial refusal to confront his personal vices has negative consequences for those around him. It is the devotion of those others to the art and ethic of maracatu that eventually bring Nicolau back from the brink and return him to a life of

⁵⁴ The line in question had Barachinha responding with "Really?" to another character in dialogue. In Portuguese, this would be "mesmo," but in the rural accent of the Mata Norte, the "s" is frequently not annunciated, sounding like "mê-mo".

righteousness. The characters in this story are not anonymized victims of class repression or impersonal, abstract forces but individuals who possess agency, responsibility, and the option to change their own narrative. Although we can only speculate, Barachinha's storytelling is likely to have a stronger resonance with his normal audience in Nazaré than the "visceral realism" of Assis. The maracatu community's receptivity to artistically-expressed social critique depends on the interlocutor, the intended or ideal audience versus the actually-present audience, the emotional valence of the critiques, and how those critiques reflect on the community.

We sent Barachinha's film outline to the producer and included Ronaldo's contact information for any follow-up, in anticipation of my eventual return to the United States. No response was ever received. To date, Barachinha still dreams of making this film, and has been working on a more formal proposal with a young São Paulo architecture and design student, Marcelo. Formerly active in both hip hop and skate subculture, Marcelo became infatuated with maracatu on a trip to Pernambuco in 2010. During the workshops at Brincantes, I had stayed at his apartment and had conversations long into the night about our respective journeys into this richly textured world. They have settled on a title for their future film: *Além do Cravo*, or "Beyond the Carnation," a reference to the iconic and mysterious flower held tightly in the lips of the *caboclo de lança* during carnival.

Conclusion: negotiating with gatekeepers

What are the possibilities and limits of using well-worn tropes of *cultura popular* in the sets of strategies and tactics employed by maracatuzeiros and their advocates? On stages performing for non-Nazarenos or in films, videos, or advertisements targeting middle-class audiences, Barachinha and João Paulo are embodying history in the absence of context, opening

“popular culture” up to participation across the divides of class, race, and geography. They are treated as cultural ambassadors for performing an “authentic” essence. At home, they are sometimes caught in a liminal space between prestige and critique by their traditional publics, both respected and envied. In the deeply hierarchical structure of Brazilian society, these accomplished maracatuzeiros are acting in a way as “cultural brokers” between the elites and their base communities, but without the social mobility wherein they would occupy the role of “cosmopolitans.”⁵⁵

Maracatu directors and *mestres* have over the years become adept at dealing with a variety of interactional frameworks that were not as significant a few generations ago: staging abbreviated performances of an art form that typically takes all night to unfold; tailoring the lyrical content to be more comprehensible or acceptable to middle or upper-class audiences; booking their own performances and managing their members to standards of professionalism. Yet a great deal of territory remains closed off to the practitioner of *cultura popular* – its artists are not held in the same regard as elite artists, are judged with different criteria, are less well compensated for their efforts, and have less protection against exploitation than their “erudite” counterparts. Notwithstanding the populist rhetoric in the technocratic social science language of Pernambuco’s cultural policy makers, the quotidian experiences of most maracatuzeiros are a reflection that Brazil’s elite has acquired a respect for the art, but not the artists.⁵⁶

Those involved in maracatu frequently internalize much of the patronizing discourse that diminishes their background and history, consistent with theories of cultural uplift and the attitudes expressed by regionalist artists like Ariano Suassuna and Antônio Nóbrega, theories that are in

⁵⁵ c.f. Turino, 2000

⁵⁶ This includes the recent encroachments and repression of civil and police authorities onto the core practices of the art, such as the selective enforcement of “silence laws” preventing the all-night events, as discussed in the epilogue.

many ways extensions of the modernist project of Mário de Andrade and the folklorists discussed in chapter two. This internalization of this dominant discourse comes to the surface when maracatuzeiros talk about their own “evolution,” their self-effacement around their “social betters,” and the degree to which resignation trumps mobilization when confronted with structural inequalities. Yet maracatuzeiros have also been pursuing their own alternative modernist project for decades, developing and deepening certain aspects of their expressive culture, going through periodic bouts of self-critique about the health and direction of the art form, and establishing new standards and expectations of technical ability, creativity, and professional conduct that are only tangentially influenced by the norms of erudite cultural production. The next chapter explores these developments and innovations.

Chapter 5: Talking Pretty in the Countryside

Introduction

Cantoria de viola or *repente*, a genre of improvised poetic dueling with rigorous standards performed by two singer-guitarists, is credited by today's maracatu mestres as the key influence on the refinement and increased complexity of their artform. *Cantoria* in terms of that tradition's popularity in the plantations and towns of the Mata Norte and the mediation of individual singers who worked in both styles. The strong presence of these cultural borrowings is worth investigating here, because it shines some light on the changing role of the wordsmith in a historically non-literate community, new attitudes towards erudition, and the distinction made between *mestres* who sing "*matuto*" (in a "hillbilly" style) versus those who perform in a more elaborate, sophisticated style in more "proper" Portuguese: those who can *falar bonito*, or talk pretty. This distinction is often more in the realm of ideation than practice, however: a great deal of maracatu verse can alternate between these two poles or blend them together in richly-textured ways. Nevertheless, the increased emphasis on *falando bonito* further distinguishes the mestre of maracatu as a cultural broker between worlds, a role that been present for some time. The mestre mediates between rural and urban, between the "elite" and the "popular," or between the past and the present.

Complementing this refinement is the maracatu mestres' talent for cultural pastiche, and the degree to which they draw creatively from points of reference located in "mass-mediated"

culture. In their day-to-day lives, when not singing maracatu, many mestres may attend sessions of *cantoria* or listen attentively and even study recordings of the accomplished singer-guitarists. But many also enjoy forms of common entertainment – “low-brow” comedy, telenovelas, and especially music associated with the urban laboring classes. The most prevalent genre of these among maracatuzeiros is *brega* music, a style that is even named pejoratively: the word denotes something low-class or tacky. Some recent social history of this music has analyzed its contributions to a critical counter-discourse in Brazilian society in the time that its popularity was ascendant during the 1970s, the worst years of the military dictatorship.¹ In spite of its ubiquity, the genre is overlooked in official histories of Brazilian popular music, considered unworthy of serious consideration, and evidence of the lack of discrimination and “good taste” of working-class Brazilians.

Both the incorporation of the techniques and stylistic complexity of *cantoria de viola* and the cross-referencing of popular music and mass-media are examples of the maracatu mestres’ creativity, eclecticism, and continual renovation of their own tradition. Yet when the artistic class champions maracatu, the influence of the former is highlighted as the formative element in their contemporary practice which it certainly is, while signs of the pervasive influence of *brega* music and other mass culture in the lives of the *mestres* themselves is occluded and hidden away. Maracatuzeiros, in turn, often strategically frame and present themselves to others as bearers of tradition while eliding their consumptive practices regarding mass-mediated culture. This example is chosen as one among many possible ways that maracatuzeiros tailor their own identities to accommodate the expectations of gatekeepers in the cultural marketplace.

¹ Araújo, Paulo César de. 2002. *Eu não sou cachorro, não: música popular cafona e ditadura militar*. Rio de Janeiro, Editora Record.

Maracatu refines itself: the influence of *cantoria*

The relationship between the sung verse of maracatu and that of the *repentistas*, the duos that originated in the *sertão* backlands playing *violas* and trading verses with origins in Iberian forms like the *décima* or ten-line stanza, has been brought up numerous times throughout this dissertation. The two styles are completely different in instrumentation as well as the social contexts in which they are played, even if the cadence and rhythms of vocal declamation can often be similar. Simply stating that a relationship exists leaves many unanswered questions, however, and a closer look shows evidence of a long and significant history of cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas between artists from the sugarcane lands of the Zona da Mata, the arid cattle-ranches of the *sertão*, and the intermediary scrublands (the *agreste*).

The *violeiros*, traveling as duos to different cities as well as appearing on live radio, have been extremely popular with *mestres* of maracatu for many generations.² Beginning in the 1980s, a number of singers who were respected *violeiros* or singers of *embolada de coco* (described below) also began to sing maracatu. Mestre Zé Joaquim, born 1952, described avidly listening to a regular broadcast of live *cantoria de viola* on nearby Rádio Carpina when he was young. While working alongside his brother Mestre João Paulo in the sugarcane fields, they would trade verses back and forth, emulating their favorite *violeiros* to help the hours pass more quickly. Whenever a duo came to perform in Nazaré, they would always try to go and hear them. Mestre Manoel Domingos of Buenos Aires, born 1969, told me that he and his brother would lay awake at night

² This style of Northeastern “folk” music is probably the most widely-known in the rest of Brazil, where its performers are typically known as “repentistas.” Although that word is also occasionally used in Pernambuco, the designation “violeiros” is much more common, and is what will be used in this chapter

exchanging improvised *violeiro* verses in the same way, until their father (who slept in the same room) scolded them to quiet down and go to sleep. Domingos brother went on to become a *violeiro* and moved to Belo Horizonte.

Cantoria is performed on the *viola*, an instrument tuned to five notes with ten paired strings. The northeastern *viola* is very similar to the *viola caipira* (country guitar) found in other parts of Brazil, with slightly broader body size and typically fitted with a resonating cone and chrome plate to aid its projection, much like the American dobro or resonator guitar. Although parts of every performance are framed as a challenge or *desafio* between the two singers, their professional partnership keeps the tone relatively congenial. The two players perform seated before an audience, with a basket or a plate on the ground before them to receive tips. The poets routinely create verses about people in the room (*elogios*), often having their names supplied to them by an associate whispering in their ear, after which the honored recipient is expected to tip – in fact, this often takes the form of an outright sung solicitation. The structure of *cantoria* is grounded in the *mote* (theme) and *glosa* (development) that goes through the permutations of 6, 8, and 10 line verses as well as less-common meters. The audience provides either general subjects for an improvisation or a specific, formatted *mote*, often scribbled on a piece of paper and left in the basket of tip payments.

An audience-supplied theme can take the form of just a general subject, or a well-known legend or morality tale, or a specific regional event or situation known to the audience. The *violeiros* then transform that idea into the formatted metric refrain that will be repeated at the end of every stanza by each singer as they trade turns back and forth. The verses follow rigid rules regarding the number of syllables and which lines are required to rhyme. It is very common for an audience member to provide a *mote* for improvisation that is already metrically formatted into

a refrain of two lines, which in itself demonstrates the immersion of *cantoria* fans with its formal structure.

There is also direct correlation between these patterns and those found in the Northeastern *cordel* chapbook or “string” literature as it consolidated around the turn of the twentieth century in Brazil.³ In *cordel* the *sextilha* (six-line stanza) is the most common format, followed by the *décima* – both of which are also found in the improvised song-poetry of *cantoria*, the latter being called *martelo agalopado*. Candace Slater points out that although a minstrel heritage of verbal dueling exists throughout Latin America (for example, in the *payador* of Argentina and Chile), only in Brazil was there “a fusion of the verbal dueling with the folktale tradition,” specifically in the Northeast where poet-singers were instrumental to the development of *cordel*. She traces the dominance of the *sextilha* form in the *cordel* to a particular “school” of singers in the state of Paraíba commonly acknowledged to have been the progenitors of the *cantoria* genre beginning in the late eighteenth century, and cites a number of famous *cordel* authors from the early twentieth century who were also professional singers.⁴ The vendors of *cordel* books in public fairs and markets were also known to sing a portion of one or another of their wares in order to call the attention of potential customers, although this practice seems to be rare today.

The duels of the singer-poet duos of the Northeast were a popular topic of research during the first part of the century, principally by folklorists who produced lengthy monographs of transcribed verse sparsely interspersed with their own commentary. Gustavo Barroso (1921), Leonardo Mota (1920s), and Luís da Câmara Cascudo (1930s) all produced works that continue to be points of reference. Many famous battles or *desafios* of improvisation were also the subjects

³ So named because the pamphlet-sized books were pinned and hung from coarse string or cord in the ambulatory stalls of its vendors in the *feiras* or market-day plazas of the interior.

⁴ Slater, Candace. 1982. *Stories on a string: the Brazilian literatura de cordel*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

of *cordel* chapbooks that purported to reproduce them as a dialogue between two narrators, where they are known as *pelejas*, some of them dating from the nineteenth century.⁵ In her fieldwork among Northeastern *repentistas* during the 1980s, Elizabeth Travassos identified different modalities that are also found in these older *cordel* chapbooks. These modalities include praise-singing (*louvação*), typically for the hosts of the event, rudeness (*malcriação*) or the trading of insults, and knowledge (*sabedoria*) which are displays of encyclopedic information about any number of often unconnected subjects.⁶ As we shall see, all of these modalities are also present in maracatu, with the “knowledge” modality recently growing in prominence in direct proportion to the influence of *cantoria*. In addition to continuing to play in their “traditional” settings of performances held in someone’s home or at a neighborhood bar, large gatherings or *encontros* of many duos are fairly common events in the Northeast. Many also record and self-release CDs to be sold at their own performances or in local shops.

Another genre of improvisational song poetry that has enriched the maracatu tradition is *coco de embolada*, of Northeastern origin but also conspicuous in cities with large emigrant populations like São Paulo. *Embolada* is sung by two individuals accompanied by their own *pandeiro*, a tambourine played with the fingers and heel of the hand, often as buskers in a public plaza or street corner. The verses are very rapid with almost no time lapse between when one *embolador* stops singing and the other picks up. Humor and wordplay infuse the improvisations, and the most ribald imagery or humiliating insult is taken in good fun. This extends not only to their singing partner but to the audience gathered around as well, who expect to be the object of

⁵ The folklorists seem to take the claims of faithful reportage of *repentista* challenges in *cordel* quite literally, but the consensus of contemporary scholarship is that they should not be regarded as historical documents but rather literary recreations, and in some cases original inventions of the *cordel* author.

⁶ Travassos, Elizabeth. 2000. "Ethics in the Sung Duels of North-Eastern Brazil: Collective Memory and Contemporary Practice." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9(1): 61-94

some jokes at their expense. As Barachinha explained to me, certain kinds of insult or teasing that would be appropriate in an *embolada* would be considered out of bounds in maracatu. As opposed to the complicated structures of *cantoria*, the skill of an *embolador* is displayed in their individual style and their ability to keep up a virtually uninterrupted flow of words. It is the regional style most deserving of a comparison to rap or hip hop freestyle.⁷

There are also compositions in *embolada* as well as improvised verse, and duos occasionally make commercial recordings of these: the duo Caju and Castanha, Pernambucan transplants to São Paulo, began recording albums of *embolada* in the early 1980s and are now the most nationally recognized practitioners of the genre.⁸ Although humor and cleverness dominate the improvisational displays of *embolada*, the composed variant can often express trenchant social critique, as in Antônio Caju and Caetano da Ingazeira's song "Cachorro do Patrão" (The Boss's Dog), in which the life of an impoverished worker is described as being worth less than the pet dog of his employer.⁹

Maracatu has had a number of prominent *mestres* who also worked as *emboladores de coco*, such as Mestre Jurití (now deceased) and Mestre Antônio Caju, both of whom were equally skilled in the world of *cantoria*. Other *violeiros de cantoria* who were also *mestres* of maracatu include Barra do Dia, Dedé Ferreira, João Limoeiro, and Zé Galdino. These last two also lead their own groups as *ciranda* singers, like Baracho before them and like Mestre Anderson today, who put together a *ciranda* group after I returned from fieldwork. The influence of these other regional genres on maracatu is not only on those *mestres* who began their careers within the last

⁷ Caju and Castanha are now mainstream enough to have been guests on different programs on MTV Brazil. A brief video, made by an advertising agency, depicting a staged "battle" of *embolada* versus hip hop can be found here: <http://youtu.be/1-EKWhppafw?list=UUfHBNKX7ee9S1sEfssFh-Zg>.

⁸ The original "Castanha" died some years ago. His son has stepped into his role and kept the name.

⁹ This song can be found on the CD "Antônio Caju e Caetano da Ingazeira - Poetas da Mata Norte 3: coco de *embolada*" released 2005

thirty years but on older *mestres* as well, who needed to adapt their singing style to stay contemporary. Mestre Zé Duda of Maracatu Leão de Ouro de Aliança, born in 1938, credits the younger Antônio Caju with having taught him how to improvise in rhyme.¹⁰

As Mestre Dedinha said in the previous chapter, in the “old days” maracatu *mestres* would sing “any old thing,” while today they are held to a different standard of linguistic competence. Dedinha, with one of the longest careers of any active *mestre*, can still occasionally be heard to sing “samba solto” in the less competitive ambiance of an *ensaio*. “Samba solto” was a catch-all term for any loose style of singing maracatu dating from the time when maracatu “did not have rhymes,” or at least did not adhere to the more rigid contemporary standards of meter and rhyme. This older style of singing was known to produce verses as long as twenty lines, with a structure that varied from singer to singer and night to night. Although the Portuguese of the interior is far from the normative grammar taught in classrooms, today it is fairly common to hear audience members criticize a *mestre* if he attempts to rhyme two words that clash or fails at the standardized rhyme scheme or meter. If he makes such errors frequently, a critic might say that the singer is too *matuto* – country or “hillbilly.” Although it happens occasionally to even the most skilled *mestres*, stumbling on a word or breaking the tight rhyme scheme during a competitive *sambada* is cause for the fans of the opposing maracatu to burst into jeers and laughter. Leniency is allowed at the beginning of a verse, perhaps the moment when *mestres* are most vulnerable to distractions: if the *mestre* falters slightly in the first line after an instrumental break, he can start over from the beginning without incurring criticism. Proficiency with the formal structure of maracatu rhyme is a requirement for present-day *mestres*, prized and prioritized much more highly than a pleasing vocal timbre or accurate intonation.

¹⁰ Zé Duda interviewed in “Brincantes da Mata,” a collection of photographic essays. (2010. ed. Roberta Guimarães, Rose Gondim, Tuca Siqueira. Recife: Imago Fotografia)

Falar bonito / To Talk Pretty

Conduits of information and moral authority

As the *mestres* themselves cite the influence of cantoria on the formal structure of maracatu, other influences can also be postulated: a broader influence on content, an emphasis on eloquence, and a transposition of the ethics of *cantoria* performance on maracatu. Whether the *mestres* engage in friendly bouts of verbal sparring in a *sambada de amizade* (sambada of friendship) or slip into a more adversarial, go-for-the-throat contest of insults and one-upmanship, there is an emphasis on parity – both *mestres* step foot into the ring as equals, with their social identities temporarily suspended.¹¹

While not codified in any formal rule, more and more prestige is also being attached to those singers who can tackle subject matter that extends beyond the daily experiences of the Mata Norte. Although we lack recordings of maracatu verse prior to the 1980s, anecdotal evidence from conversations and interviews points to at least some changes in the subject matter of maracatu verse over time. Antônio Alves recounted hearing Mestre Zé Demésio arriving at Nazaré's

¹¹ Travassos, Elizabeth. (2000). "Ethics in the Sung Duels of North-Eastern Brazil: Collective Memory and Contemporary Practice." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* . 9(1): 61-94.

carnival stage in the 1960s and rhyming about the economic output of Engenho Petribú where his maracatu was based – the size of the harvest, how many sacks of sugar were produced, the sweat of the laborers. Mestre Baracho of Engenho Santa Fé is said to have been in sambadas where he sang about constructing an *usina*, naming all the pieces of equipment that would be needed. The frames of reference were largely dominated by the boundaries of the plantation.

The maracatu verse of that time probably did contain what James Scott has called “hidden transcripts.”¹² Because the majority of audio and video recordings of maracatu date from the 1990s, generalizing about the existence or nonexistence of such coded messages would be a presumptuous exercise. There is nothing polemical, however, in saying that maracatu verse today broaches more cosmopolitan and global territory than in previous eras. This can be attributed in part to the urbanization discussed in chapter one of this dissertation. But it also can be viewed in relation to the value attached to “knowledge” in oral-poetic traditions as a core trait of the “man of words,”¹³ and the increasingly more diverse contexts where maracatu takes place. Contemporary *mestres* are often expected by fans to convincingly sing about national and international news. Failure to do so, especially in a mixed audience, is likely to be seen as a poor reflection on the community. Maracatuzeiros make use of the trope of the rural and the regional as embodying certain values that some feel are threatened by modernity, but they also seek to cast off the stigma of being seen as *matuto* and ignorant, unable to grapple with broader societal issues. Not all *mestres* embrace this new sensibility. Mestre Zé Joaquim, for example, prefers to sing about more quotidian subjects from his personal life, because in his view a mestre should not sing

¹² Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven, Yale University Press.

¹³ Abrahams, Roger D. 1983). *The man-of-words in the West Indies: performance and the emergence of Creole culture*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

about subjects he does not really know, lest he make a fool of himself. Hence Zé Joaquim often sings about minutia such as his favorite foods, his favorite radio station on which to listen to football, or his childhood fear of wolves and current fear of hospitals. Other verses assert his identity in terms like these:

Meu signo é escorpião	My sign is Scorpio
E minha cor é escura	My skin color is dark
Trabalho na prefeitura	I work for the city
Na área da construção	In the field of construction
Pedreiro é a profissão	Bricklayer is the profession
Que eu trabalho todo dia	That I work at every day
Com a minha sabedoria	With my knowledge
De cantar improvisado	In improvised singing
Breve eu serei coroado	Soon I will be crowned
O Príncipe da Poesia	The Prince of Poetry

In Zé Joaquim's view, a lot of *mestres* today are too concerned with showing off, whereas for him the notion of valorizing "our culture" means to sing about the humble details of their lives. The context is urban and proletarian, rather than rural and "*matuto*," but his style seems reminiscent of an older way of singing as described to me by those who still remember it, situated in the points of reference of the day-to-day.

But the contemporary dramas of globalization also form part of the maracatu repertoire, and this too is a commonality with the same *cantoria* tradition that Zé Joaquim grew up listening to on the radio. A number of headlines made their way into *ensaios* and *sambadas* during my fieldwork. The January, 2010, earthquake in Haiti elicited verses of sympathy and sung prayers for the victims. When the police laid siege to the Rio favela Complexo do Alemão in November of the same year, maracatu *mestres* sang verses condemning drugs and drug dealers. None of the *mestres* I heard, however, criticized the police for their military tactics that criminalized and terrorized the poor for simply living there. A school shooting in Rio de Janeiro in April of 2011, the first of its kind in Brazil, also drew strong and unequivocal condemnations of the perpetrator.

Apart from these sensational examples, singing out against everyday violence and misfortune in Brazil is very common in maracatu. An example of blurring where old and new approaches cohabit can be found in the largely prepared verses that *mestres* bring into recording studios when they decide to make a CD. Mestre Antônio Paulo Sobrinho, an experienced *mestre* who recorded his first compact disc in 2011, has a seventeen-minute track devoted to local personages who have passed away.¹⁴ The causes range from health problems, accidents, and old age, but also include the murder of a relative. For nearly all of them, he includes the day, year, and location where the different events happened, and also names the family members who have suffered the loss. These kinds of specificities are unlikely to be of much interest to an audience in Recife or São Paulo, but are tremendously important in building a bond between the *mestre* and his regular audience. Later on the same CD, there is a pair of tracks titled simply “Violence” and “Nature”, one running seamlessly into the other. The first begins with Antônio Paulo lamenting the lack of “security” in Brazil, the sentiment that anyone is subject to a violent assault at any given time, and then goes on to denounce the tragedy of family members killing one another. At the end of the “Violence” track, he makes a link between all the violence in the world, natural disasters and pestilence, and the overcrowded hospitals teeming with the sick, concluding that only Jesus can save in the final hour. The next track, continuing with the same melody and rhythm, launches into a lament over the pollution of rivers, and goes on to sing about the natural wonders of the earth created by God.

Some of the critiques of violence and social problems found in maracatu are oriented toward a possible future rather than an actual present. I asked Manoel Domingos about some verses he sang during his turn at the microphone of an open rehearsal for Leão Mimoso, where he

¹⁴ “Homenagem a quem se foi,” on the album “A Força da Poesia,” self-released 2011.



Figure 19: Mestre Manoel Domingos in attendance at a rehearsal for Maracatu Estrela Brilhante in 2009

painted a rather graphic image of a young girl reduced to living on the street, addicted to drugs, engaged in prostitution, and suffering from venereal disease before she has had her first menstruation. He felt the verse did not go over too well with that particular audience (and in a separate conversation, Barachinha agreed, indicating it might have been a bit too “heavy.”) Domingos admitted that, in a city of barely 13,000 people, drugs are not a major social problem. But the news of violence surrounding drugs enters their awareness every day through the media. The maracatu verse about the dangers of drugs is a warning against the path the community might take if they are not vigilant, issued with the moral authority of the *mestre*. Domingos feels that the *mestre* of maracatu can provide a positive role model for the youth of the small towns, hoping that one or another verse he sings might reach someone “at risk” of heading down that path and inspiring them to do something better with their lives, perhaps even become an artist.

The moral critiques voiced by many *mestres* are often at variance with the sensibilities of educated, nominally-liberal audiences in cities like Recife or São Paulo. Two examples listed above – the militarized occupation of the favelas of Rio, and the hypothetical imagery of a teenage prostitute – exhibit religious overtones of sin and wrong-doing that would, in the parlance of the politically-engaged, be considered “victim blaming.” Chauvinist double-standards regarding women of “loose morals” are also common in Northeastern cultural expression. The *cordel* literature, for example, has historically portrayed prostitutes in a decidedly negative light.

It should be noted that the more recent subject of drug violence does not necessarily arrive solely through the mass media. Adjacent cities are also a source of this information. Nazaré, with a population more than double that of Buenos Aires, has had a startling number of violent murders since the time I began my fieldwork, many of them drug-related, to say nothing of larger cities like Carpina and Goiana. More startling than the crimes themselves is the general reaction to them among my friends and colleagues. The vast majority of killings seem to go uninvestigated, and any information or rumors that a victim had been involved with drugs, petty thievery, or more serious crimes is essentially taken as evidence that the killing was justified and the victim unworthy of sympathy. There is a kind of pragmatism among my Nazaré friends that frames meeting a violent end as more or less inevitable once a person has gone down the “wrong road” of criminality in life. The notion that “the only good thief is a dead thief” is taken accepted as common sense by broad swathes of the Brazilian public. More salient, perhaps, is the notion held by many maracatuzeiros that poor people almost never receive justice when they’ve been wronged (for

example, in a robbery), and therefore “extra-judicial” measures are viewed with a certain degree of acceptance.¹⁵

Returning to Manoel Domingos’ verse about the adolescent prostitute, the fact that Domingos was a guest at a rehearsal rather than a main singer at a *sambada* contest may have been a factor in the lukewarm reception to his verses. Alternately it could have just been that this particular crowd was unreceptive. As he explained, maracatu has within itself multiple publics, people who come to hear different things: some just come to hear “rudeness” or *malcriação*, while others might want to hear you sing about the economic crisis, and another wants to hear some verses about his favorite football team. A good mestre of maracatu tries to size up the crowd and satisfy them all by singing a little about everything. This demonstrates a markedly different relationship between artist and audience than that found in “erudite” art since modernism. In erudite art and poetry, the emphasis is on the inventiveness of the artist as an autonomous individual not beholden to (and indeed often antagonistic towards) their public. Like the *cordel* authors and *cantoria* singers, the mestres are not anonymous but known artists with specific histories, yet their work is community property, tailored to the demands and expectations of their audience.

¹⁵ I experienced this attitude in a more personal sense when the house where I lived was burglarized on two consecutive weekends while I was engaged in fieldwork. When describing the way in which the perpetrator had managed to squeeze into the house through a barely cracked-open window located on the second floor, several friends and neighbors chuckled and said I had been robbed by “Spiderboy”, Menino Aranha, a teenager already famous for burglarizing houses and apartments in the part of town where I lived. According to local gossip, this young man seemed to look at break-ins as a challenge and a thrill, but he was also selling the stolen goods in order to sustain his household, where his single mother was reportedly addicted to crack cocaine. Several months after the robberies of my house (and when I had relocated to more secure accommodations in a neighborhood with more foot traffic) I was approached at a *sambada* by several maracatu colleagues who had some “good news” to communicate. The petty thief Spiderboy had been killed, in his own home, along with his mother.

What elicits a response in the crowds of maracatu enthusiasts from the Mata Norte can sometimes fail with an audience in Recife or São Paulo in more mundane ways than its conservative morality – some colloquial humor or extensive references to local personalities, locations, and events would be references lost on a non-local audience. Manoel Domingos’ notion that an urban, middle-class public expects more “proper” Portuguese from maracatu mestres than their own hometown public is debatable, and perhaps a misreading of the role they play in national conversations about authenticity: appropriations like those of Antônio Nóbrega are likely to include intentional grammatical errors in efforts to appear “folksy.” But this awareness of multiple audiences highlights one of the characteristics that most clearly differentiate the mestres whose careers matured during the 1990s: the increased likelihood that they would play a role as cultural brokers between different publics. Barachinha has captured this succinctly in an example he uses: a *mestre* must be able to sing about things in a way that pleases both the engineer who designs the house and the worker who builds it.

The cultural broker in its classic formulation denoted an individual capable of mediating between local and national communities of belonging. Originating in paradigms concerned with the effects of modernization on traditional authority and the integration of peasants into “complex societies,” this brokerage was conceived in largely vertical terms, concerned with the flow of practices and skills between urban elites and the rural poor.¹⁶ This understanding of cultural brokerage led to my having initially misunderstood one of the main modalities of maracatu song at the outset of my fieldwork, by assuming that it was developed in direct response to the new audiences that Domingos described as “more evolved.” The *sabedoria* or “knowledge” mode of poetry is in fact a carry-over from the duels of the *violeiros*, and has much more to do with pleasing

¹⁶ c.f. Eric Wolf (1955), Clifford Geertz (1960), Irwin Press (1969)

their own “traditional” public than any outsiders. One example of this mode is found on a studio recording made in a sambada style between Barachinha and Zé Galdino, who also has a career as a *violeiro*. On the track “Answer If You Know,” they sing:

Barachinha

Me responda sem moleza
Quinze poetas escritores
Romancistas, sonhadores
Das coisas da natureza
Mas se não tiver certeza
Peça pra alguém lhe ensinar
Cuidado pra não errar
Senão fica de castigo
Se não responder eu digo
Pra não lhe desmoralizar

*Answer me without hesitation
Fifteen poets and writers
Novelists and dreamers
Of the things of nature
If you aren't certain
Ask someone to teach you
Be careful to make no mistakes
Or else you will be punished
If you don't respond, I will
So you aren't demoralized*

Zé Galdino

Gênios que deram alegrias
Ao Brasil do passado
Castro Alves, Jorge Amado
Camilo e Romano Elias
Camões e Gonçalves Dias
Augusto e Graciliano
Castilho e Rogaciano
Souza e Macedo Teixeira
Laurindo e Manuel Bandeira
E Olegário Mariano

*Geniuses that gave joy
To the Brazil of the past
Castro Alves, Jorge Amado
Camilo e Romano Elias
Camões e Gonçalves Dias
Augusto e Graciliano
Castilho e Rogaciano
Souza e Macedo Teixeira
Laurindo e Manuel Bandeira
E Olegário Mariano*

The challenge issued by Barachinha is answered by Zé Galdino with a list that mixes erudite writers and popular *cordel* poets. This could be read as a deliberately subversive effort to put all of these artists on equal footing, to say that “our culture” is every bit as valid as that produced by the trained and educated members of the Academy of Letters. However, it also suggests that the distinction between “erudite” and “popular” itself means very little operationally to the audiences

of maracatu. Literacy symbolizes status within maracatu's base community, where formal schooling has historically been minimal. Their engagement with the "elite" novelists and poets listed above is mediated through the work of *cordelistas* who have adapted their work for a popular audience, a practice that encompasses the plays of Shakespeare to twentieth-century Brazilian literature, and which itself often depends on further mediations such as film and *telenovela* adaptations of the "classics."

Literacy and the "New Harvest"

The narrative within maracatu that stresses progress, development, or evolution becomes very visible around the issue of literacy. The Nordeste has historically had the highest illiteracy rate of any area in the country aside from the far northern and Amazonian regions. At mid-century, 72.5% of Pernambuco and nearly 83% of the population of Nazaré da Mata was illiterate.¹⁷ The statewide rate of illiteracy had dropped to 18% in 2000.¹⁸ However, the rate of illiteracy in Nazaré da Mata (17.3%) is more than double that for the Recife metropolitan area (8.6%).¹⁹ When broken down into age groups the decrease becomes more dramatic. Of individuals under 25 years of age, 5.3% percent could not read or write in the 2010 census, in contrast to 17.5% for ages 25 to 59, and 42.4% for persons 60 and older.²⁰ To be a young person who cannot read or write in the Mata Norte today may be more rare than a generation or two ago, but still not an impossibility. It was quite some time into my fieldwork before I realized my friend Luiz could neither read nor write.²¹

¹⁷ Enciclopédia dos Municípios Brasileiros, Volume 18, 1958. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, p. 174

¹⁸ http://www.ibge.gov.br/estadosat/temas.php?sigla=pe&tema=indicsoc_mun_censo2010

¹⁹ Data from the Department of Health, at <http://tabnet.datasus.gov.br>

²⁰ The census data for 2010 appears not specify literacy for individual cities and municipalities like Nazaré, choosing instead to specify how many years individuals have spent in school by age group— a statistic that, given the quality of public education in semi-rural Pernambuco, tells very little about actual literacy. The statewide figures have purged the word "illiterate" from their data, instead using the phrase "Individuals who cannot read or write."

²¹ This name is a pseudonym.

After an awkward interaction where it became apparent, my tentative questioning of a mutual friend revealed that illiteracy was Luiz's open secret. He was born on an *engenho* outside Nazaré in a family with thirteen brothers and sisters. He passed his childhood shuttling between there and another *engenho* about an hour away where an older brother lived. By adolescence my friend was by all accounts essentially a street kid, or *menino de rua*, in one of the small *municípios* that had previously broken off from Nazaré. In his later teenager years, he began to show a penchant for athletics, and eventually became part of a local running team with city sponsorship, traveling by bus to compete across Brazil. In the house where Luiz lived with his girlfriend and her children during my fieldwork, he had a wall hung with medals from all the races he'd run in cities like Rio and São Paulo. He told me that his dream was to one day fly in an airplane, because bus rides lasting two and three days to these other cities are exhausting. Although athletics and training are a big priority for him, he mostly credits maracatu for showing him the "right way of life."

Luiz participated as a *caboclo de lança* in several area maracatus for some years. He briefly sang for a *boi de carnaval*, a smaller antecedent of maracatu that is still found on the rural *engenhos* and in the small towns. Luiz has been a *contra-mestre* for many years now, and he has aspirations to front a maracatu as a *mestre* in his own right. His responsibilities as *contra-mestre* involve having a keen ear and sharp memory, accurately repeating back the lines of a stanza that require repetition. These lines are also commonly sung back to the *mestre* by whoever is gathered around listening. A designated role of *contra-mestre* respondent is itself an example of developments within maracatu, as it has not always been an established role. New performance contexts no doubt contributed to its formation. Firstly, the crowd surrounding the *mestre* does not always get the repetition correct, which can throw him off in the improvised composition of the rest of the verse. Secondly, traveling from town to town during carnival and singing on stages – even when these

stages were merely the flat bed of a truck – presupposed more physical distance between audience and performer than when a maracatu performed in its home territory, meaning that an impromptu chorus was no guarantee.²² Today the role of a good *contra-mestre* is perhaps underappreciated, and in some ways they are more conspicuous when absent: a poor *contra-mestre* or chorus interferes not only with the composition of the *mestre*, but with the active listening of the audience who can become confused and thrown off by an error-filled repetition of his words. Many *contra-mestres* will take a portion of the “break” period of an *ensaio* to do their own improvising while the group’s *mestre* recoups his energy, and some *contra-mestres* go on to eventually become *mestres* in their own right.

Luiz was always eager to inform me of any nearby maracatu events and accompany me to them. He looked at them as performance opportunities to practice and refine his technique in front of an audience. He described these open rehearsals and *sambadas*, where he might get a chance to sing during the middle break, as “his school.” When the *estre* of his maracatu made the decision to leave it for another, Luiz had some hopes and expectations that the directorate would offer the position of *mestre* to him. What happened next is not exactly clear. At first Luiz told me that they would not pay him enough for a fair carnival contract, but eventually began saying that he simply decided to remain a *contra-estre* because he still felt like he was learning so much. Conversations with the directory of the maracatu, however, revealed a consensus that they felt Luiz was “not ready” to lead a maracatu, and their reasoning for this hesitation boiled down to the issue of literacy. Examples were given of hypothetical scenarios that would cause embarrassment for the group. The maracatu arrives in a town for carnival and there are posted signs dedicating the year’s

²² It still occasionally transpires that a *contra-mestre* respondent is not available or sometimes “indisposed” in contemporary maracatu, in which case the *mestre* is not above simply repeating the appropriate verse that would have been echoed by his respondent or the chorus.

festivities to one or another respected figure in the community, and the *mestre* would be expected to improvise some verses about them. Or the maracatu is contracted by a producer to perform at an event in Recife, and the *mestre* is asked to read and sign a contract. In these cases, the deficiency of a *mestre* reflects poorly on the whole group. The illiterate *mestre* of maracatu has become the exception rather than the rule in the space of a few generations.

One aspect to this situation that surprised me was how unequivocally and unanimously people rejected my suggestion that the community, or Brazilian society more broadly, had failed my friend in any way. I was told on several different occasions, “The only person who can’t read in this day and age is somebody who doesn’t want to learn.” These people insisted on how much education had improved in the last generation, and perhaps sensing some incredulity on my part, noted the existence of free adult literacy programs. The only obstacle to his learning to read, I was assured, was his own stubbornness and pride.²³ These opinions were, it should be added, often balanced with praise for Luiz’s brilliance, that he had a “mind like a calculator,” was articulate and verbally gifted, and had a strong grasp of maracatu and its history. He was in fact the first person to explain 10-line samba to me in a way that I could understand. In these explanations of why he was “not ready” to be a *mestre* in the spotlight, the emphasis was placed on individual responsibility and uplift. Although while on a public stage it would be a negative reflection on their group, in ordinary social life the aspiring *mestre*’s deficiency was a personal failing. The tension here is more than just an isolated case. While this chapter has argued that eloquence and “knowledge” have a long history of prominence within the internal dynamics of maracatu, at

²³ Pride and reputation in a small town, with its concomitant lack of anonymity, may indeed play a role. According to IBGE data, the number of adults who have attended public literacy education programs is relatively small – 100 to 300 people in a total population of slightly over 30,000. (IBGE census data, 2010: <http://cod.ibge.gov.br/MIW2>)

present there are particular kinds of knowledge instilled with prestige, and the ability to articulate that knowledge in turn places certain individuals in more powerful positions.

Ivanildo Ferreira, an older *mestre* who is illiterate, sings:

Não estudei
pra falar bonito,
mas meu apito
é meu camarada
Minha jornada
foi comer pão francês
Porque me criei
no cabo da enxada

*I didn't study
to speak pretty
but my whistle
is my companion.
I spent my days
eating crusts of bread
Because I was raised
Working in the fields.*

Não estudei
hoje tá fazendo falta
Minha voz alta
hoje tem aprovo
Que eu resolvo
estou reconhecendo
Assim vou vivendo
No meio do povo

*I had no schooling
and now it would be useful
My loud voice
is now appreciated.
Because I can manage,
I recognize that
this is the way I'll go on living
among the people*

Mas eu queria
agora estudar
Para aprender
e para mim sair
Pra discutir
com os mestre graúdo
Acabar com tudo
E depois ir dormir

*But now
I would like to study.
To learn
so I could go out
and discuss things
with the important mestres,
show them how it's done,
and then go home to sleep*

In this elegant exploration of the issue, Ivanildo acknowledges these new aspects of the Mata Norte, and wistfully reflects that he could have benefited from them. But there is also a refusal to fade away quietly in these verses, and an assertion that he is every bit the equal of the new generation. Luiz also defends his identity as “country” in one of his own verses:

Quem me vê matuto assim
Não sabe que sou atleta
E muito menos poeta
Mas também não acho ruim
Que eu dou o máximo em mim
‘Tando correndo ou cantando
Eu não ando me mostrando
Nem soltando pabulagem
Que aonde tem matutagem
Existe moral sobrando

*Whoever sees me as a hillbilly
Doesn't know that I'm an athlete
Much less a poet.
But I really don't mind
Because I give everything I've got
Whether I'm running or singing.
I don't go around showing off
Or putting on airs
Because where you have a hillbilly
There is character and confidence.*

During my work with Estrela Brilhante, there was one individual who I tried unsuccessfully to interview for over two years. This man was a veteran *caboclo de lança*, one of the founding members of Estrela, and was known for his gregarious demeanor. When he was not at his job, he was a constant presence at the *sede*, always ebullient with jokes and stories. He seemed to take a particular liking to me, and his easy-going charm had made me feel relaxed since the first awkward day when I met all of them in the tiny garage of Barachinha's father. I wanted to know more about his life story, his history and memories, in a relaxed conversation apart from all the noisy camaraderie of the Sunday barbeque-and-beer sessions at the Estrela headquarters. Pinning him down to a time where we could sit and talk proved difficult. There always seemed to be something in the way. He worked driving a truck delivering propane gas from the industrial port of SUAPE up through the Mata Norte, working long hours that left him little free time during the week. He often evaded my requests for a semi-formal conversation by suggesting we could do it sometime in the indefinite future when things weren't so busy – after carnival, or after São João holiday, or after a particularly hectic month of work. I didn't push the issue insistently, but I also didn't give up trying to cajole him into sitting down with me. After over a year of this courtship ritual, he finally leveled with me. "I don't know how to talk pretty (*falar bonito*), who you really want to talk to is Baixinha," referring to another founder who often held court with emphatic, impromptu

speeches during those Sunday get-togethers. I was momentarily taken aback by this frank expression of inferiority, and then attempted to assure him that it had nothing whatsoever to do with “talking pretty,” that I just wanted to talk to him about the experiences of his life, and nobody knew how to tell that story better than him. He demurred again, and I let it drop. After all, he was under no obligation to speak with me, and there were plenty of other maracatuzeiros willing to give semi-formal interviews.

Nevertheless I was surprised that someone so outgoing, with so much enthusiasm for maracatu, felt shy about sharing his insights. I mentioned it to Barachinha one afternoon. We had been talking about the film he wants to make some day, described in the last chapter. He was recounting his experiences working on a feature-length film in which he was cast in a bit part, which planted the seed for wanting to create a film of his own, and I asked whether or not he would use Nazaré maracatuzeiros as actors. He expressed doubts, stating how important it would be, with a full production crew on site, to have people who wouldn’t “yellow” in front of the camera and clam up. I mentioned my experience trying to get an interview out of our mutual *caboclo* friend. Barachinha said I wasn’t the first person to run up against this particular barrier. He had seen this target of my ethnographic affection wilt before the lens or microphone of multiple inquisitors.

Poor Taste and Cultural Nutrition

Maracatuzeiros’ worries about being judged by outsiders are also reflected in discussions about their own consumption habits and taste in popular culture. In the early stages of my fieldwork, when I would ask younger informants about what kind of music they listened to when

they weren't playing maracatu, I would receive an almost formulaic list of "traditional" musical styles: *farró pé de serra*, *ciranda*, *cavalo marinho*, *frevo*, *samba*. But as we became more relaxed around each other, I realized that the music that typically played from their radios, TVs, or cell phones was often quite different – sometimes foreign artists such as Michael Jackson or Beyoncé, but more frequently the contemporary styles and hits like those played on local radio or by the *trios elétricos* during carnival.²⁴ These styles are consistently referred to by the educated middle and upper classes in Brazil as low-quality music ("música de baixa qualidade" or "mau gosto", bad taste) in contrast with what is consumed by those with more "refined" sensibilities, namely samba and MPB ("música popular brasileira" which, in spite of its moniker, has never represented a large share of music sales in the market). There is a palpable sense that maracatuzeiros are very aware of this, and know what kinds of music they are expected to like when questioned by a journalist, academic, or a foreign researcher – i.e. folk music or *cultura popular*, and not the commercialized "low-quality music."

That younger maracatuzeiros should be concerned about how their tastes are perceived by outsiders is intriguing, as changes in popular music since the 1970s have eroded the saliency of old dichotomies about "quality" for many in the recent generations of urban, middle-class consumers. Brazilian appropriations of jazz in the 60s, soul music in the 70s, rock music in the 80s, and rap and hip hop in the 90s have resulted in broader, more inclusive notions of "Brazilian-ness." Why then should young people in Nazaré feel the need to disguise their preferences around me?

Musical hybrids in Brazil have always come with a fair amount of debate and polemic in the press and in round tables of intellectuals. "Popularesque" music was attacked by Mário de

²⁴ For a discussion of the *trios elétricos* and the polemic surrounding their presence in Pernambucan carnival, see chapter six.

Andrade in the 1930s. Bossa nova, now the most widely recognized global cultural export of Brazil, was condemned by some critics at the time for being openly influenced by North American jazz. Tropicalia's avant-gardism and insistence that one could simultaneously enjoy The Beatles, bossa nova, and samba provoked similar ire. American soul music and disco influenced a variety of artists and caused more polemic about cultural imperialism and alienation in the 1970s. In the early 80s, an avant-garde and post-punk scene flourished in São Paulo that would have more subtle reverberations. The massive Rock In Rio festival in 1985 brought Brazilian rock into the mainstream spotlight and forced the cultural establishment to come to terms with its staying-power. In the 1990s, the *Manguebit* scene in Recife rankled regional purists as it simultaneously went on to drive an increase in national and international attention to the city's cultural production, and today Brazilian rap and carioca funk continue to be the target of vociferous, racially-tinged persecution by elites.

Stroud (2008) has characterized the attitudes of the elite intellectuals and critics regarding popular music as one dominated by a profound anxiety centered around the loss of national identity.²⁵ This is changing as newer generations with different ideas about Brazilian identity come to occupy posts in a critical capacity, but such figures continue to exert some influence, particularly in cultural programming. The notion of the "artistic class" is one where exclusion is not only a matter of prejudice but also a matter of policy: those who create works "for the masses" are excluded from the elaborate system of cultural incentives in Brazil (discussed in greater detail in the final chapter and conclusion) which is reserved for the production of creative works deemed "of little commercial value." The origins of these categorizations can be traced to the nationalist

²⁵ Stroud, Sean. 2008. *The defence of tradition in Brazilian popular music: politics, culture and the creation of música popular brasileira*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate

cultural policy of the military regime during the 1970s, when government policy essentially subsidized the genre of MPB to “protect” their indigenous music industry while ironically encouraging foreign investment that flooded the market with imported music. This genre, short for “Música Popular Brasileira” (Popular Brazilian Music) has never accounted for more than a modest percentage of the music sold in Brazil, but is held up as exemplary due to the level of instrumental and especially lyrical sophistication of its most notable singers and songwriters.

The musical styles preferred by both young and older maracatuzeiros belong to categories that have been essentially written out of the history of Brazilian popular music, considered unworthy of serious consideration: *brega* music and its offshoots. The term “brega” is often considered pejorative – according to some etymologies, it was first used in reference to the music played inside bordelos or *cabarés* – although some MPB fans and some artists have embraced it, along with “música cafona.” The genre is primarily based around love songs and stories of rejection, with antecedents in both romantic *samba-canção* and the teenage *jovem guarda* of the 1960s. Mestre Dedinha told me he knew the lyrics to every song by Roberto Carlos – the only such romantic singer to achieve both critical and commercial success – while also voicing his admiration for the sambistas Martinho da Vila and Bezerra da Silva, the latter of whom had drawn criticism by figures in MPB during his early career due to his irreverent and satirical sambas about life in the *favelas*. Zé Joaquim and João Paulo, in their fifties and sixties respectively, unabashedly proclaimed their adoration of artists like Roberto Carlos, Reginaldo Rossi, and Amado Batista. These singers are now the old guard of romantic pop and “brega.” Roberto Carlos is one of the top-selling recording artists in Brazilian history, and his compositions have been rerecorded by such a broad range of performers that he has eventually been included in a broadened definition of the elite-centered MPB category. Reginaldo Rossi – Recife’s most famous contribution to the

brega genre - was eventually embraced by a new generation of the young and hip there before he passed away in 2013.

Although perhaps more acceptable or at least innocuous to the cultural gatekeepers now, the “old guard” *brega* artists were subject to critical discrimination and neglect during the 1970s and 80s, as well as censorship by the military regime.²⁶ Although there were dozens of *brega* artists with careers spanning the 70s and many that were commercially successful, the style was quite literally unknown to journalists and critics until the 1980s.²⁷ For middle-class urbanites, this was music that played on the AM radio stations listened to by their *empregadas domésticas* (or housekeepers, who often lived in cramped quarters on the premises). One possible reason why older maracatuzeiros do not hesitate to express their enthusiasm for these artists is that they were already veterans at their art form before maracatu was “discovered” by the cultural establishment in the late 1980s, and were somewhat shielded from those discourses surrounding authenticity and “poor taste.” They do not see any contradiction in their appreciation of *brega* alongside more “sophisticated” samba like Martinho da Vila, as well as traditional regional styles such as *ciranda* or *farró pé de serra*. In contrast, younger maracatuzeiros, particularly those under the age of thirty, have developed in an atmosphere encircled by the new patrons of maracatu – intellectuals, cultural planners, and producers tied to arts funding who have more rigid notions of what the “popular classes” should and should not enjoy. This is not to imply that they do not appreciate or truly enjoy the “regional” styles and attend events where such music is played. But they do not see anything inherently wrong or contradictory in also appreciating the new styles that tend to draw

²⁶ Araújo, Paulo Cesar de. 2002. *Eu não sou cachorro, não: música cafona e ditadura militar*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record

²⁷ Araújo, Samuel. “Brega: Music and Conflict in Urban Brazil.” *Latin American Music Review* (9):1, 1988

larger crowds, and are more capable of engaging with different genres on their own terms than many professional music and culture critics.

The problem is not confined to the anxieties of cadres of critics obsessed with defending an idea of “truly Brazilian” music, nor of taste and distinction. It is also about how maracatuzeiros, as those who produce “the authentic,” are not permitted to cast doubt or aspersion on their romanticized image by any overt engagements with modernity and consumption while in the spotlight of an elitist “stage,” much like how wrist-watches or Nike shoes were cropped out of ethnographic photos from another era where “history has been airbrushed out” of the frame.²⁸ A deliberate intervention is necessary to isolate the “primitive” artist from the incursions of modernity, or at least create the illusion of that isolation. As Sally Price writes, “Primitive artists are imagined to express their feelings free from the intrusive overlay of learned behavior and conscious restraints that mold the work of the Civilized artist.”²⁹ The notion that “primitive”, “folkloric,” or “popular” artists also consciously push their work in new directions (as well as occasionally pull it back again) is inconvenient to this schema. An actual, concrete history of the circulation of ideas and people between different communities lumped together as *cultura popular*, such as one suggested by the pages above regarding *cantoria* poet-singers and maracatu *mestres*, would run counter to the modernist redemption narrative.

If noticed and remarked upon by researchers or the media, the maracatu poets’ admiration for singers of *brega*’s romantic pop songs would be a cause for shame, a reflection of the “poor cultural nutrition” of the people paradoxically assumed to also be spiritual embodiments of

²⁸ Clifford, James. 1988. *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 202

²⁹ Price, Sally. 1989. *Primitive art in civilized places*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p.32

authenticity.³⁰ You would be unlikely to find Ariano Suassuna drawing attention to maracatu's name checking of popular singers in their verses or the lifting of melodies from hit songs. The horn refrains played in the breaks between a Capella verses are often a variation of the melody sung and sometimes authored by the *mestre*. But throughout the course of a night's *sambada* the musicians will begin changing up the refrains to include melodies from pop radio, as well as songs from popular TV *novelas* and famous films or even cartoons. Melodies evoking victory or triumph are, understandably, natural choices to show support for your maracatu: during my fieldwork, some of the most frequent were the themes from popular Hollywood films like Superman, Chariots of Fire, and Popeye. An organizer with the Maracatu Association once told me that they would like to put a stop to these kinds of pop-culture references, because they "are not traditional." I have already mentioned the absence of maracatu *sambada* recordings prior to the late 1980s or early 90s, but the inclusion of such borrowings on those recordings prove that this practice of appropriation goes back at least a quarter-century, and is very likely to be much older.

This engagement with "mass culture" that so troubles the serenity of the traditionalists is not an unreflective one of rote consumption. It can demonstrate appreciation for pop culture alongside sentiments of regionalism, but not necessarily of the same sort espoused by regionalists like Gilberto Freyre, Ariano Suassuna, or Antônio Nóbrega. One example is found in a 2014 *ensaio* where Barachinha and Zé Galdino sang together as invited guests:

Zé Galdino:

Mandela morreu lutando	<i>Mandela died fighting</i>
Pelo seu povo africano	<i>For his African people</i>
E Waldick Soriano	<i>And Waldick Soriano</i>
Morreu ainda cantando	<i>Died still singing</i>
Senna morreu pilotando	<i>Senna died driving</i>

³⁰ "Poor cultural nutrition" was a phrase used by revivalist Antônio Nóbrega in his explanation of why the popular classes gravitate towards "low-quality" music; refer to chapter four.

Seu carro na Fórmula 1
Zacarias e Mussum
Morreram fazendo graça
Que ninguém levanta a taça
Sem sacrifício nenhum

*His car in Formula One
Zacarias and Mussum
Died making us laugh.
Proving nobody takes the trophy
Without some sacrifice*

Barachinha:

Elvis Presley com seu grito
Conquistou fama e respaldo
Nelson Ned, Reginaldo
Rossi, cantava bonito
Gonzaga foi nosso mito
No forró, xote e baião
Mas na nossa região
Quem esconder seu talento
Fica no esquecimento
Sem crescer na profissão

*Elvis Presley with his yell
Won fame and adoration
Nelson Ned, Reginaldo
Rossi, sang beautifully
Gonzaga was our legend
In forró, xote, and baião
But in our region
He who hides his talent
Stays in obscurity
Without growing in their profession*

In Zé Galdino's verse, the recently-deceased father of modern South Africa is placed along a singer of *brega* music, a famous Brazilian race car driver, and two famous comedians from the group Os Trapalhães, all of whom passed ten to twenty years ago. Barachinha's verse mixes Elvis Presley with two *brega* singers who died within the previous year and the greatest icon of Northeastern music, Luiz Gonzaga, with an admonition that creative artists need to assert themselves if they want to succeed. The Brazilian personalities listed in this mash-up are from a variety of different regions, but all of them are popular and familiar to the working-class public of maracatu. An older example of this engagement with popular culture that historicizes regional figures and contextualizes them is found on a 1973 *ciranda* recording made by Baracho, the Nazareno singer of maracatu who emigrated to Recife, mentioned in our third chapter. On one track, titled simply "Roberto Carlos," he sings:

Roberto Carlos
É o rei do iê-iê-iê
Jamelão cantando samba
Faz o morro estremecer

Roberto Carlos
Is the king of “yeah-yeah-yeah”³¹
Jamelão singing samba
Makes the slums tremor and shake

Lia na ciranda
Também é de primeira
No baião Luiz Gonzaga
No frevo Nelson Ferreira

Lia singing ciranda
Is also top-notch
So is the *baião* of Luiz Gonzaga
And the *frevo* of Nelson Ferreira

In these verses, Baracho juxtaposes two extremely popular singers from Rio de Janeiro with regional treasures: the *ciranda* singer Líá de Itamaracá who remained relatively unknown outside Pernambuco until the late 1990s; the undisputed king of *fórró* and *baião* music Luiz Gonzaga; and *frevo* composer and arranger Nelson Ferreira (who also happened to produce the record). Baracho does not appear to be saying that these stars from Rio are not any good; to the contrary, he seems to think they’re just fine, but that “here in Pernambuco” we also have our stars worthy of praise. These are sentiments of regional identity and pride, but ones which seek inclusion in the national narrative rather than its rejection. It is these transgressive aspects of *cultura popular* – an indifference to elite preoccupations with “art versus mass culture,” and a questioning of the terms of both regional and national identity - that seems to have generated an affinity between rural popular artists and a cadre of urban (and eventually “cosmopolitan”) Recife artists that coalesced in the late 1980s, known as the Manguebeat movement.

³¹ “Iê-iê-iê” was the name given to Brazil’s national rock artists in the early 1960s, taken from The Beatles’ song “She Loves You.”

Mangue mediation

Another kind of cultural bricolage took place in Manguebeat, initially a small group of musicians, filmmakers, visual artists, and writers. This dissertation would not be complete with some recounting of its history; in fact many casual accounts of rural maracatu *start* with the surge of interest sparked by Manguebeat, in a clever bit of teleology. In my respects, this artistic movement was a different sort of intervention and appropriation of popular culture than those already discussed here, one that was a sorely-needed counterpoint to the traditionalism and xenophobic regionalism which had long dominated the optic in which maracatu was seen. The spelling given here is a slight Anglicization, but one found in most English-language literature on the subject. The neologism in Portuguese is actually MangueBIT. “Mangue” for the mangrove trees that famously retain the mud, silt, and urban refuse along the river Capibaribe traversing Recife; and “bit” to signal their affinity for new digital technology, which happens to be pronounced similarly to the English word “beat,” adding an additional layer of meaning. This movement helped propel a general revival of interest in regional *cultura popular* among an urban and largely middle-class audience in a very different way than the Armorialists, and with more direct consequences for rural maracatu. The role that one of these individuals, recording artist Siba Veloso, would play in the lives of Barachinha and João Paulo, justifies a digression into its back story, as it forms an important component in the construction of Nazaré da Mata as “the land of maracatu.”

The band credited with starting the Manguebeat movement, Chico Science & Nação Zumbi, was inclined to appropriating the thunderous drums of urban maracatu *nação*, the tightly-

clipped beats of *fornó pé-de-serra*, and other regional genres, and juxtaposing them with sounds and textures drawn from pop, punk rock, funk, and hip hop. Mundo Livre S.A. created a similar hybrid but with traditional samba as its root, while Mestre Ambrósio took its inspiration from the more rural genres of *cavalo marinho*, *ciranda*, *fornó* and *maracatu de baque solto* as well as Recife's most famous musical export, *frevo*. There have been DJs, electronic music artists, and "sound systems" combining Jamaican dub with Nordeste music involved with the movement.³² Even as the *manguebeat* label has fallen into disuse, a variety of eclectic groups formed since the 1990s heyday have continued to combine all these elements as well as searching further north for inspiration, to genres particular to Pará like *carimbó*, *guitarrada*, and *techno-brega*, or styles popular with Brazil's neighbors, such as Colombian *cumbia* and Peruvian *chicha*. In another time, the deviation of these artists from the rather conservative standards of MPB (and the dominance of that category over the tastemakers and music critics) would have excluded most or all of them from national press coverage. An all-female group named Comadre Fulozinha had ties to *manguebeat*, performing at many of the same venues, but had a more traditional "folk" band aesthetic and were even enlisted by revivalist Antônio Nóbrega as the backing band for one of his projects. The 1997 death of Chico Science in a car accident at the age of thirty interrupted the momentum of the movement. An irony of Manguebeat putting Recife "on the map" of contemporary music is that many of its artists relocated to São Paulo by the end of the decade, where pursuing full-time careers as professional musicians has many logistical and financial advantages.

³² Examples of these include Buginha Dub, who produces records as well as "performs" live on stage doing mixes in the vein of King Tubby or Lee "Scratch" Perry, and DJ Dolores. Dolores (Hélder Aragão) has put together several band projects that incorporate live bands with sampling and electronics, and has done a prodigious amount of film scores, most recently *O Som ao Redor* (Neighboring Sounds) and *Tatuagem* (Tattoo).

Many of the musical experiments of the *mangue* collective incensed the purist who dominated the state's cultural institutions at the time, Ariano Suassuna, who publicly referred to their work as "pure alienation." The acts of cultural appropriation of this loose collective of artists were of a fundamentally different orientation than those practiced by Suassuna and his disciples.³³ Here there was no concern over the "purity" of a tradition, no assuming of didactic roles, and no insinuations that they were producing work that should be considered representative or even reflective of such traditions; rather, adulteration and recombination of traditional elements with hi-tech sounds and imagery was often foregrounded. Their musical approach and lyrical content was deliberately iconoclastic and politicized, rejecting the clichés of Northeastern regionalism while snatching back some of its stylizations that had become the provenance of a neo-salon culture of folklore patronage.

Nação Zumbi signed a contract with Sony Records in 1994 and videos from their first album began to get regular airplay on the relatively new MTV Brasil, including one ("*Maracatu Atômico*") that featured the band dressed as *caboclos de lança* in the opening scene and elsewhere. The manguebeat sound was soon touted as the "next big thing" in contemporary music, not entirely dissimilar to the hype created around grunge music in early 1990s Seattle, similarly tied to a specific location and region. Although the musicians in Nação Zumbi had less privileged backgrounds than Suassuna's Armorial orchestra, with some of them having grown up in the poorer, peripheral regions of Recife, the music they created did eventually become embraced by an audience of predominantly middle-class, educated young people. Many of the movement's protagonists became friends while students at the Federal University, and several members of group Mestre Ambrósio had attended the Pernambuco Conservatory of Music.

³³ See chapter 4, pages 170-179

Mestre Ambrósio was also the group that most conspicuously set out on a trajectory similar to many well-known recording artists who have incorporated research into their practice throughout the world. After making three records together, the various members began to spend more time pursuing separate projects that deepened their interest in one or another aspect of the group's sound. One of them, Siba Veloso, had already begun to accompany an American ethnomusicologist on his fieldwork, refining his proficiency at the rural fiddle or *rabeca* at the feet of various masters living in the interior.³⁴ He also began more seriously exploring the world of rural maracatu at this time, and in 2002 made the decision to move back from São Paulo (where he had relocated from Recife) and into a house in Nazaré da Mata, putting together a new band project with local musicians called Fuloresta do Samba.

Although he had participated in the Salustiano family's Maracatu Piaba de Ouro in Olinda, it was while living in the Mata Norte that Siba began his apprenticeship in the poetry of maracatu. He spent time in Maracatu Estrela de Ouro of Aliança with Mestre Zé Duda before eventually settling on the recently-founded Maracatu Estrela Brilhante. All of the principal directors of Estrela had years of experience with other, well-established maracatus like Cambinda Brasileira, Leão Formoso, and Leão Misterioso (João Paulo's group), and within a year of their founding in 2001, they managed to coax Barachinha to leave his post with Cambinda and sing for them. Soon after, Siba began singing as his *contra-mestre*.

A crucial difference in the approach to cultural change is one trait that distinguishes the engagement of Siba from that of Nóbrega or Suassuna, as is the sense of engagement and indebtedness to the maracatu community. There have of course been critiques of his involvement. This includes both some skeptics among Recife's music scene - particularly when he formed

³⁴ This was ethnomusicologist John Murphy, whose 1994 dissertation deals with the open-air theatrical / musical tradition of *cavalo marinho*. There are also several pages devoted to Siba and Barachinha in his *Music of Brazil*.

Fuloresta, which eschewed electronic instrumentation for brass, percussion, and fiddle - as well as among maracatuzeiros who allege that the benefits brought to the community by Siba's involvement always go to the same small group of people. However, this criticism is also leveled against other cultural intermediaries. Although rarely expressed openly due to their influence, the Salustiano family is thought of as clannish by many, with a disproportionate amount of power, while other maracatus like Estrela de Ouro of Aliança are well-connected to the press and a production company that stages cultural events. Siba's critics, however, seem to be in the minority in Nazaré. In contrast to musicians and researchers who extract what they need and never return to a location, he has maintained a significant relationship with the city. He enthusiastically helps outsiders who show an interest in maracatu, including this author, by sharing his contacts in the area and helping make introductions. Some of his younger musicians as well as his arranger for Fuloresta were drawn from the city's musical societies, Banda Revoltosa and Capa Bode. They have toured extensively across Brazil and Europe, and the group has also included several older maracatu and *cavalo marinho* musicians. Barachinha was frequently part of Fuloresta but eschewed touring outside Brazil for family and work-related reasons. Siba produced a six volume series of albums in 2004, titled "Poetas da Mata Norte," that presented artists from maracatu, ciranda, and embolada de coco. Approachable and unassuming, his production style was similarly non-invasive, refraining from adding any stylistic flourishes and recording the groups in an essentially "live" setting without overdubs. That series received funding from state and federal funding agencies as well as Petrobrás, the national oil company. Siba has also produced other CDs released independently by Barachinha and Manoel Domingos, and Nazaré's only roots-rock band, Ticoqueiros.

In his interviews and in articles he has contributed to magazines and books, Siba never fails to mention his debts to the singer-poets of Nazaré and the Mata Norte, mentioning them by name and detailing their contributions (including, it should be added, many poets with whom he has no significant personal history). He has emphatically argued that *cultura popular* is in a constant process of reinvention and should not be tied down to a static notion of tradition. Although he now divides his time between São Paulo and Recife, he can frequently be found at *sambadas* and *ensaios* during the summer months leading up to carnival, and never refuses an invitation to sing. He has performed at Nazaré's main stage at all but one carnival over the last decade. In contrast to a figure like Antonio Nóbrega who insists he owes nothing to popular artists, Siba has gladly allowed some of his compositions to essentially become public domain in the area, with horn arrangements that he authored now forming part of the standard repertoire heard during *ensaios* and *sambadas*. However, for all that Siba has attempted to share the spotlight by drawing attention to individual artists with their own unique histories and contributions, the tendency of the media and his primarily middle-class target audience has been to focus on him as a stand-in for the *cultura popular* of Pernambuco. There have been two documentaries made about Siba's career, one by a French team of directors and another by Siba's own producers – which highlight the region's rich musical culture but, of course, foreground his story above all else. How to promote regional or “popular” artists without those efforts appearing self-serving is a conundrum that few, if any, professional recording artists have resolved. There are also many other opportunities for publicity and exposure that have come to Barachinha and João Paulo by way of Siba's involvement or indirect influence, and some of them – like the photography exhibit and feature film described in chapter four – have their own problematic issues of representation and mediation.

The maracatus unique and particular way of embracing and appropriating new technology while staying “rooted,” as well as creatively mobilizing patronage and favors, demonstrates how they straddle many of the dividing lines sketched out in the last two chapters. One of the ways this manifests is in the relatively recent phenomenon of mestre-poets recording CDs to promote their careers and raise money for their maracatus. I will provide one recent example of this to close out the chapter.

First, it bears mentioning how the lack of documentation in the field (or the technological limits therein when it did occur) may have allowed maracatu to better resist standardization imposed by outsiders, and aided its own self-directed development. In the parallel context of the United States, early blues and jazz recordings were restricted to three minutes in length due to the limitations of the recording medium available at that time, although we know that *in situ* performances could go on for much longer. The impact of that limitation on the praxis of singers and musicians is complex – at the same time that recording technology altered the “natural” appearance of the music as normally performed for an endogenous community and imposed some conformity, it also challenged singers and composers to develop new techniques, not only adapting but also spawning musical cross-fertilization and hybrids, as songs and styles were able to reach wider audiences. Maracatu, as a musical-poetic genre that unfolds over the course of an entire night and whose “compositions” are not intended to ever be repeated, would likely never have fit into a format that imposed a three-minute limit.

Before the dawn of digital recording technology, the only rural maracatu to appear on a commercial recording is a short sample of a *marcha* (quatrain-style song) that appeared on the multi-volume *Música do Nordeste* series released in the 1970s. By the 1980s, portable cassette recorders had were being used by maracatu enthusiasts to document the all-night *ensaios* and

sambadas on tapes that circulated within the community. By the time of my fieldwork, handheld digital recording devices had only just begun to proliferate, and fans of a poet-singer could frequently be seen crowding around, thrusting gadgets toward him – the most common being cell phones. As a result, when maracatu singers began to enter studios and make their own CDs at the turn of the twenty-first century, there was neither commercial pressure nor technological necessity to fundamentally transform their approach to performance. A single track on a maracatu CD is rarely under ten minutes in length, and the first recording made by veteran Mestre Dedinha was released as one continuous piece of music without any gesture towards naming individual tracks.

On the other hand, many other maracatus poets take a more formal approach to composition, carefully working out separate pieces and writing down the words before entering a studio. The mestre-poets avail themselves of contemporary recording and editing techniques, such as using multiple takes to get a performance they like and cutting and pasting in digital editing software. This kind of traditional-modern dialectic was central to a recording session carried out in January of 2015 for which I was recruited as the engineer. Mestre Barachinha and Mestre Zé Galdino, who had already recorded a CD together a decade earlier, wished to have a new recording to promote themselves and their respective maracatus during the upcoming carnival performances. They settled on a way to record a CD as cheaply and “authentically” as possible, by bypassing recording studios altogether but using the same skill sets: performing new material in a “live” setting, a technique that has been used by scores of professional “name” artists ranging from jazz to rock over the decades.

In this case, a place for the recording was arranged – the flour mill of a sugar *engenho* outside the town of Buenos Aires - a sound car was rented for their “traditional” amplification and self-monitoring, brass musicians were contracted, a *pro bono* recording and mixing engineer was

contracted, and financial support was obtained from a local city councilwoman who is rumored to be preparing a campaign for mayor. Barachinha and Zé Galdino prepared new material in a few all-night meetings of binge composing, the brass arrangements were done on site the same morning as session, and seven tracks were recorded in four hours. Siba Veloso, who has worked extensively with both artists, volunteered his time as a producer overseeing the session. The horn parts were unsatisfactory due mostly to the acoustics, and additional overdubs were done a few days later. Cover artwork was volunteered by a maracatu aficionado from São Paulo, rough mixing and editing was done on the engineer's laptop, and 400 copies were manufactured the following week by the town's resident videographer who owns duplication equipment.

None of this would be conceivable if *cultura popular* existed within the restraints of static, eternal categories still imposed on it in some quarters. But it also would not have been possible without the skill of the maracatus at taking advantage of the systems of patronage in place for so many generations, enlisting producers, engineers, artist, and local political figures to make it happen. Perhaps this reflects that the "popular" artist still remains subordinate and dependent. Yet subordination has its limits too. In the middle of the recording session, the city councilwoman and would-be mayor showed up with a small group and made a display of shaking hands, making sure they were seen, and nearly interrupting a live take by walking into the *casa de farinha* to greet the mestres. She had asked them to compose and record a few verses singing her praises in exchange for the money she had donated. They never did.



Figure 20: Recording session in the *casa de farinha*, Engenho Boa Fé, February 2015

Conclusion: grassroots revitalization

The most important innovations in rural maracatu have been generated from dynamics and processes within the community itself, rather than by outsiders, even when considering the influence of broader societal pressures and changes. The elaboration of their expressive forms (poetic improvisation is highlighted here, but similar arguments can be made for costume design and artisanal work) and a more inclusive and egalitarian ethos has been driven by maracatu's own social actors, rather than changes imposed onto a passive, complacent mass. Conversely, elite interest in maracatu has tended to serve its own agendas and narratives – modernist and regionalist, cultural nationalist and vanguardist – about which *maracatuzeiros* can often be indifferent. The imbalance of power in the politics of representation is a problem that this writer, engaged in an anthropological and historical analysis from outside the culture, thinks is of critical importance. Some maracatuzeiros share that concern, some of the time. But maracatuzeiros are as adept as anyone else at bracketing their experience into different fields of context. When an opportunity for advancing the interests of one's group or career as a singer presents itself, the politics of representation can be pushed into the edge of the frame.

Reframing maracatu for the tightly-controlled and scripted performances of “elite” theaters (as in the São Paulo experiences described in chapter four), or pushing their groups further into the bureaucracy and machinery of social control that is “official carnival” (addressed in the next chapter), involves compromising many of the things that distinguish rural maracatu as unique. When this is done at the organization level, it is obviously not a simple hegemonic imposition but something which the maracatus consciously manipulate – perfecting “tailored” performances to be more competitive in the cultural marketplace of shows, festivals, and carnival prizes. When the

reframing is done at a more personal, interactional level, it can involve the concealment of elements of maracatuzeiro's identities, as people who like "low quality" music, watch telenovelas along with the rest of Brazil, or laugh at off-color jokes. On one level this can be viewed as classic alienation, the separation of cultural workers from the fruits of their labor and the sublimation of class interests to those of the dominant power elite. From another perspective, these are creative appropriations of master narratives and a way to negotiate more sociopolitical leverage within the available system. Whether or not strategies useful for short-term gains can also yield long term advantages is an evolving question that maracatuzeiros can only answer for themselves.

Chapter 6:

Every Day Is Carnival

“A cultura como estandarte de sonhos. Política Pública, direito de todos, instrumento de luta. Cultura como consolidação do um novo modelo de desenvolvimento inclusivo e sustentável. Cultura fincada na potencialização dos processos democráticos, no respeito às identidades e diversidades.” // “Culture as the symbol of dreams. Public policy, the right of all, a tool of struggle. Culture as the consolidation of a new model for inclusive and sustainable development. Culture linked to the strengthening of democratic processes, with respect for identity and diversity.”

– PowerPoint presentation of FUNDARPE, 2010

The paradox of the nationalist entrepreneur or entrepreneur of nationalism is that in order to intensify the commodification of the Carnival, it must be presented as though it is actually “authentic” or “noncommodified.”

– Garth L. Green

Introduction: Carnival 2010 – The Star Rises

Sunday evening: Marco Zero

The bus trip to Recife was faithful to carnivalesque suspensions and inversions of everyday experience, in that it was the most pleasant traversal of those seventy kilometers I had ever undertaken. In place of the tedium of the normal commute was camaraderie and revelry. The percussionists maintained a beat virtually nonstop at the back of the bus, keeping themselves

warmed up. Some cachaça and whisky were broken out for those who cared to partake of them. I sipped a beer that quickly turned warm in my hands and marveled at the energy level, wondering how they could possibly keep this up for three days. As we approached the edge of the city, even Recife's perpetually congested traffic became enjoyable. We approached downtown through the dimly-lit streets of the Afogados neighborhood that always had an air of neglect about them and even now seemed impervious to the carnival engulfing the rest of the city. Soon I understood the bus driver's logic as we came to the docklands area and bus terminal called Cais de Santa Rita behind the old abandoned sugar warehouses, and proceeded to park the buses near the market area behind it. This put us a little more than a kilometer from our destination alongside the port at Marco Zero – the “zero” point where the state's entire network of roads and highways began its numeration.

The costumes were collected from the storage compartments under the bus, and after a bit of stretching and recovering from the long ride everyone began to dress. We were a little ahead of schedule, so some people went off in small groups in search of a snack before the trek to the city center. While the old city of Recife was closed to traffic during carnival, the area around the docks was not, leaving the maracatu to navigate the characteristically broken sidewalks, at times forced to walk in the busy street. The normally impatient and belligerent city motorists mostly yielded to the presence of a hundred-strong carnival troupe on the march while they sat trapped in their vehicles, some of them perhaps reliving memories about fearsome *caboclos de lança* of childhood carnivals that had sent them hiding behind a parent's leg.

Entering the old city, we pushed through some side streets that became more densely packed the closer we came to Marco Zero. The directorate went ahead of us to check in with the contacts for the stage, men and women with clipboards who crossed the group's name off a list

and directed us to the end of a peculiar line of costumed maracatus snaking through the general public. There were only a few groups ahead of Estrela, leaving enough time to take in the other presentations without becoming exhausted from standing still. A white woman, her face adorned with the requisite carnival glitter dust, asked to pose for a photo with the feathered *caboclo de pena* Péu and he obliged. I photographed them being photographed by her friend, Péu's inscrutable expression contrasting with her smile.

The time came for Estrela Brilhante to take the stage. Cabucha told the stage personnel that I was with them and they allowed me to slip behind the crowd barrier, free to move and take photos from up close. Suddenly I found myself filling with emotion while watching them climb the ramp and step into the bright stage lights, admiration mingled with pride at seeing them move into position in front of thousands of strangers, with gigantic video screens behind them on which flashed close-ups filmed by the professional camera crew. There was no hesitation in their steps, no halting in Barachinha's voice as it boomed out across the sound system, echoes bouncing through the twisted streets that had been here since the sixteenth century.

Sunday morning: The Chegada

Jerônimo had opened his bar early that morning in expectation of the crowd that Estrela Brilhante draws to their *chegada*, the ceremonial performance with which every maracatu opens its carnival. It was on the corner directly across from his bar where Estrela always held its rehearsals during the year, in front of Dedé's sawmill. For many in the neighborhood, this could be their only chance to see their local maracatu in all its splendor. Estrela was scheduled to perform in six municípios and towns over the next three days, with two trips to Recife for

performances there, including the one described above. There would be one other scheduled performance in Nazaré for the city's sponsored maracatu event. But while the Monday *encontro* performances are a quick twenty minutes to half an hour, with dozens of maracatus from around the region passing through from morning until night, for Sunday's *chegada* the neighborhood has its maracatu all to itself, and sometimes it can take up most of the afternoon. As a few curious onlookers gathered, members of the directorate met the audio technician with the small sound system they had contracted for the afternoon and showed him where they wanted the equipment.

With the musicians and microphones in place, for the first three quarters of an hour or so Cabeça did all the singing, the sound drawing people out of their homes while Barachinha attended to various last-minute details of the group preparing to make its grand entrance. The other directors stayed busy as well. Biu Rosi, Cabucha, Biu Porfiro and his son Sandro - darting in and out of the crowd, shepherding all their members into the waiting area, helping to adjust their costumes. I was impressed with the size of the audience that began congregating. Finally Barachinha took his place at the microphone and began to sing.

In the *chegada*, the *mestre* sings salutations and praises for a succession of maracatu personages as they come out into the broad, open space, arranged in a quasi-military formation. The caboclos de lança have designated commanders and lieutenants to maintain order in the formation, which when complete is split into two single-file lines that encircle and protect the *miolo* or *baianas* and the royal court. The caboclos receive the lion's share of attention during the *chegada*, called upon to twirl and leap and toss their lances into the air, eventually ending their dance at the foot of the *mestre* in a posture of obeisance. There is a protocol, beginning with the "master caboclo" (*mestre caboclo* or *boca da trincheira*) who performs the longest and most

elaborate dance, followed by the second-in-command (*segunda boca*), who is greeted by the master caboclo in mock combat before he is permitted to do his “solo” performance. The *mestre*



Figure 21: The chegada of Estrela Brilhante on Sunday of Carnival, 2010









calls them forward by their name, eventually calling them in groups of two to facilitate getting through the ranks if the maracatu is large. The directorate helps in pairing them up and getting them ready to be called, as well as frequently having to whisper in the *mestre's* ear the names of the next *caboclos*. It is difficult to see their faces clearly at a few hundred yards away, shadowed by the massive *chapéu* or headdress and sunglasses. In the larger maracatus (especially when the *mestre* is a contracted performer, rather than an owner or director like João Paulo or Barachinha), the *mestre* may not know everyone's name and require the directorate's help to add this flourish of individualized recognition. With few exceptions, the *caboclo de lança* is a role filled by men.¹ The *baianas* are introduced as an anonymous group, although the Dama do Paço who bears the *calunga* doll gets called upon individually although usually not by name. In addition, one of the noteworthy differences between rural maracatu *de baque solto* and urban maracatu *nação* is that the *calunga* does not possess a specific name or personality like those connected to the terreiros of xangô in Recife, although she is treated with deference and ritual preparation as a spiritual entity and representation of ancestors.

I did not realize at the time the profundity of what I was seeing. Not only was it a chance for elaborate and stylized performances by individual members of the group as they each made their entrance, but it would turn out to be the last *chegada* I would see Estrela Brilhante perform during my fieldwork. Although I had begun my work with maracatu in the final quarter of the previous year, I had only recently found a place to live in Nazaré, relocating there from Recife in the months before carnival. I still felt like a neophyte, and when the subsequent carnivals'

¹ One exception to this exists with an NGO-created maracatu, Coração Nazareno, founded by a cultural entrepreneur or "producer" with funding from a Swiss philanthropist and drawing upon Nazaré's women's association, AMUNAM. This group advertizes itself as "the only maracatu made up entirely of women" in all of its promotional materials. Although there have been notable figures that have been in and out of its ranks, the group itself has little interaction with the other maracatus in the region aside from participation in folkloric festivals.

chegadas were cancelled under contentious circumstances I would come to look back on that Sunday with a kind of nostalgic regret, wishing that could relive it with benefit of the intervening two years of experiences among this complex group of people.

Monday: Performing in the municípios

Monday began early. A few lucky people had been designated to go down to the Parque do Lanceiro at 4 a.m. to claim Estrela's place in line for Nazaré's presentations. For decades the city had set aside the Monday of carnival exclusively for the maracatus, who lined up along the main artery going from the *Lanceiro* park to the Cathedral Plaza where the main stage was set up. Rather than show favoritism, the presentations ran on a first-come basis. Since they had a full itinerary of appearances booked in neighboring towns and municípios, and because many maracatus often ran over the informal twenty minute rule of allotted time, Estrela preferred to get its Nazaré presentation out of the way first thing in the morning, leaving them free to travel the rest of the day. Our scouts secured us the third place in line. Still groggy, I caught up with the group at 7:30 as the performances were about to begin. I walked down part of the street and back again, admiring the variety of costume designs and brilliant colors in the early morning light. Then it was time for Estrela Brilhante to shine. As they came out to execute the choreographed *evoluções* of interlocking circles moving in opposite directions, I noticed that Barachinha and the band – usually in the center of that cyclone – seemed to have vanished. They reappeared, climbing the stairs to the stage that looked out over the main plaza in front of Nazaré's oldest church. The *mestres* sang from there while the *caboclos* and *baianas*, the king and queen and standard bearers, continued their undulations below them. In fifteen or twenty minutes it was all over, everyone

making their way down the street designated for exiting the stage towards a parallel avenue where a bus was waiting to take us to the next town's carnival.

The municipalities where Estrela Brilhante performed during 2010 ranged from fifteen to twenty-thousand people, from Aliança to the north of Nazaré to the southwest at Lagoa de Itaenga. Performances are set up months ahead of time between the directorate of the maracatu and officials of the town in question. These arrangements can be personalistic and are often described as being made directly with the mayor, who is generally known to the directorate, even if the arrangements are actually made through administrators. The presence or absence of the mayor's favor can be a formidable factor: during the time of my fieldwork the city of Carpina, only 15 kilometers from Nazaré, did not host any maracatus as part of their official carnival, as the evangelical mayor was notoriously opposed to the art form. Although it is necessary to pass through Carpina to arrive at many of the smaller towns that have popular maracatu stages, Estrela Brilhante never performed there once during the three carnivals I spent with them.

One of those nearby municipalities was our first destination on Monday after the presentation in Nazaré. At Lagoa de Itaenga, I saw what I imagined carnival in the interior might have commonly looked like a generation or two ago. Although a professional stage intended for amplified, popular bands was erected at one end of the town's central square, the maracatu stage was located on a cross street and mounted on the back of a flatbed truck, much like how maracatuzeiros had described the Nazaré carnivals of their youth. The band climbed onto the back of the truck, which was also outfitted with a sound system, while a slightly lower platform placed directly in front of the long edge of the flatbed held the *mestre*, *contra-mestre*, and the MC holding the microphone.

The contrast with the previous night's spectacular Marco Zero production could hardly have been more marked. In addition to the staging practices, the type of audience and their receptivity to the maracatu was a different order. There were maybe one hundred people milling around the maracatu stage when we arrived around mid-day, as opposed to the thousands assembled in Recife. In an audience that large and with so many groups assembled, on that night it had seemed impossible to gauge what, if any, particular impression had been made by Estrela Brilhante's appearance. Lagoa de Itaenga, however, was the first small town I had visited with Estrela and it seemed as if a palpable murmur of prestige passed through the small crowd as some recognized their trademark all-golden headdresses, their identity confirmed when the MC announced that the next group was Estrela Brilhante and Mestre Barachinha from Nazaré. With this crowd, Barachinha was a celebrity, albeit a populist one who would receive his humblest admirer with the same dignity with which he greeted the mayor.

The city of Buenos Aires, where we ended the evening, was a little different. The layout of that city required that we park our buses near the town's entrance and walk directly through the crowd amassed before the main stage in order to get to the designated maracatu stage. The maracatu group Estrela Dourada, which maintained very cordial relations with Barachinha and Estrela Brilhante, has their headquarters near the entrance to town. Parking there proved an auspicious rallying point even though Estrela Dourada was out making their own performance rounds, as many of neighborhood residents recognized Estrela Brilhante and came out to greet and converse with us. As we made our way towards the town center, we could hear a group playing contemporary forró and axé hits on the main stage. Quite a few of Estrela's younger caboclos and baianas could be seen singing along or at least mouthing the words. As we approached closer, everyone seemed to become more guarded against the curious looks and drunken calls from some

in the crowd around the stage. We pushed our way through to the other side of plaza and in the process I was embraced by a man who appeared to have had a bag of flour emptied on him earlier in the evening. The maracatu staging was a professional affair, although it was set up on a street that appeared too narrow for it. Like Lagoa de Itaenga there was no plaza or roomy public space for an audience to gather, in fact there was only barely enough room for the maracatu to execute its *evoluções*. By now night had fallen. Cramped quarters notwithstanding, the presentation was well-received. I noticed Barachinha had fans here too, several of them risking collisions with the twirling caboclos in order to get as close to the stage as possible and hear his singing.

After the performance, the group returned to Nazaré. After storing away their costumes and instruments in the *sede*, a few small groups headed to the center of town to take in the carnival festivities there or to follow one of the *trios elétricos* circulating through the streets. Most people, however, went to their homes to get some well-deserved rest. The maracatu would reconvene at 7 a.m. for another full day. I was beginning to learn that carnival was hard work.

Tuesday: The *encontro* and the avenue

Although some maracatuzeiros do enjoy it, in general the maracatu “*encontro*” or festival held by the Association in Aliança is regarded more as an obligation and even a burden, a legacy of the coronel-like power wielded by the Salustiano family over the maracatu groups and their ties to government funding. All groups in the association are required to appear during carnival at either the Aliança location or the park established near the headquarters of Salustiano’s own Maracatu Piaba de Ouro in the suburb of Tabajara, Olinda. In the three carnivals I spent with Estrela, they never performed in Tabajara but always in Aliança. The festival in Aliança takes

place at the site of the Association building, located at the edge of town on a plot of land donated by the Miguel Arraes government to Mestre Salustiano in the 1990s. Because it is located at the bottom of an extremely steep hill that descends for over a kilometer from the center of town, many maracatus park their trucks and buses close to the center and hike down to the Association building rather than face the risk of getting stuck in heavy rains that always seem to come at least once during carnival.

After the long hike, the groups take their place in a long line of maracatus that stretch along the dirt road behind the performance area. If it has been raining, this road becomes mostly mud. When it is dry, then it is a relentlessly hot place for the maracatus to stand around waiting to perform, without any shade to shelter from the summer sun. The neighborhood where the Association is located is rather run down, and I knew of at least three assaults and robberies that took place on the periphery outside the building at different maracatu events during my fieldwork. Ironically for an organization whose existence is owed almost entirely to government patronage, there seemed never to be any police presence at their large and sprawling events. The general feeling among the maracatuzeiros I traveled with was that it was not a safe place, and vigilance was heightened as people looked out for each other.²

The wide and open performance space is enclosed by a fence on the back and one lateral side, by amphitheater-style seating on the opposite lateral side, and on the front by the Association building itself that has a large terraced porch area looking down onto it. During carnival this terrace functions as a kind of VIP area: political dignitaries are offered seats, press and photographers claim prime vantage points for capturing the action below, and a great number of

² These comments are in reference to the period spanning 2009 to 2012. This edge of the city of Aliança appears to be undergoing development, with an Assembly of God evangelical church having been constructed a stone's throw from the Association building during late 2013.

officials and bureaucrats involved in cultural programming and tourism are present. Although purporting to represent the interests of the maracatus, promote their activities, and defend their tradition, the Association sustains itself through patronage and political favors, and has positioned itself into being the chief intermediary between the local groups and state power in the form of funding, performance opportunities, and bureaucratic assistance. The Association has made conquests in carving out a particular kind of prestige and social space for maracatu among the bountiful variety of *cultura popular* in Pernambuco, but the gains of those conquests have gone mostly to enrich the fame and coffers of a select group of people linked to the Salustiano family and the FUNDARPE state arts council. Once aware of the webs of relationships that have brought about the Association, the physical space that it inhabits, and the institutional power that it wields over the thousands of maracatuzeiros gathered on the Tuesday of Carnival, the celebration there seems less like an egalitarian ideal of social inversion than a massive exercise in self-congratulation, with the upper crust and their middle-management servants congregating on the veranda of the Big House while the black and brown multitude below dances and sings for their entertainment.

The encontro provides some opportunities for conversations between friends participating in different maracatus during the long wait, and for commentaries on the relative merits of one or another group's costume design and that year's *estandarte*.³ Estrela's performance went well and it was good to see them perform in such a wide open space that allowed for full and free motion, with the members spread out enough for everyone in the audience to appreciate the brilliant costumes and the hard work that went into them. The tiered seating held a sizeable crowd but it was by no means full to its capacity, and it was difficult to tell how many of those might be

³ The flag or banner containing the name and symbol of the maracatu (a star, a lion, etc), the date of their founding, and the date the banner was made. These days a new bandeira is typically made for each new carnival.

affiliated with the other maracatus. In a strange way this reminded me of the years I spent working as an audio engineer in independent music venues when the owner would book more groups than really made sense for a single night, and most of the audience consisted of other musicians who were also scheduled to perform.⁴

When their time was up, we quickly headed back up the unforgiving hill towards the buses and began packing up the equipment and costumes again. “Climbing this hill is like a punishment (*castigo*),” said José who played the *burrinha* or man “seated” on a wood and paper mache donkey. We had just enough time to stop back in Nazaré da Mata for lunch before heading once more on the long road to Recife for the annual competition competition. Lunch for over a hundred people is no simple matter. Arrangements are made ahead of time with the local grade school, and cooks are recruited to prepare food that had been donated by the town’s biggest employer, the Mauricéa chicken processing plant. People stashed pieces of their costumes in hallways or in classrooms before getting in a single-file line to grab a plate of rather flavorless chicken stew served on top of either boiled *macaxeira* or cous cous, washed down with a cup of soda.⁵ The same lunch routine had taken place on Monday. People commandeered the cramped, uncomfortable student desks, some dragging them into the common areas to create a more sociable dining experience. The demanding performance of the morning had created quite an appetite for most members in spite of the intense heat. Some went back to the counter for a second helping. After about an hour, the directorate began herding everyone back towards the buses. Although it wasn’t quite 1 p.m., the

⁴ Based on anecdotal accounts of the Tabajara *encontro*, as well as newspaper accounts like the one cited in chapter 4 (page 173), the situation there seems substantially different: its proximity to Olinda and Recife means that a lot more urbanites and tourists come to enjoy the festival. Many of these stay for a few hours and then move on to other carnival activities in those cities. This is in contrast to the parallel *encontro* in Aliança, whose remote location translates to a certain amount of commitment from tourists who would be sacrificing other opportunities in order to spend several hours traveling to and from the festival. For these reasons, many tourists opt to take in the Monday festival held in Nazaré, which is easier to find and closer to the highway.

⁵ *Macaxeira* is the name for the manioc plant in this part of Northeastern Brazil. It is known elsewhere in the country as *aipim* and *mandioca*.

maracatu had to anticipate traffic delays on its journey to the capital, and this time there was no possibility of being late. To be late to the competition was to be disqualified.

The carnival competition presided over by the Carnival Federation of Pernambuco has long held its maracatu competition on Tuesdays, the last day of carnival. During my time there, each year there were complaints from maracatuzeiros at the Association meetings, asking the directors to petition the Federation to move the competition to another day. The arguments presented stressed that many of the other types of carnival groups were based in the city of Recife and spent most or all of carnival there, whereas the maracatus traveled hundreds of miles between small villages and moderately larger cities of the interior, leaving them exhausted by the time the competition came around. Many maracatuzeiros questioned why they couldn't compete on Mondays when they were still fresh.

The competition itself took place on several different streets, segregated by the division of "second," "first," and "special" qualifying placement. Estrela was competing in the First division, whose competition was on Guararapes Avenue, where the city's central post office occupies an entire city block. Groups are required to check in with the commission by a predetermined time or else forfeit their chance to participate. We arrived with ample time to do this and take our place in the line of groups waiting to present. Around us Recife's carnival pulsed with energy and chaos. At least a dozen maracatu groups were in loose formation along the street, their drummers staying warmed-up by ceaselessly beating out rhythms. Along the Rua do Sol that runs parallel to the Guararapes River, a city worker was welding some stage scaffolding directly off the sidewalk where the maracatus were waiting, sparks flying everywhere into the crowd. I was relieved that no costumes caught fire. As the next group



Figure 22: A pause before preparations at the concurso competition

advanced to the Federation staging area, we moved a few hundred feet away from the free welding demonstration and people began to collect themselves and focus. Estrela was next.

The directorate readied themselves to guide the group into the performance area as the caboclos, baianas, royal court, mestre and terno all positioned themselves, their expressions drawn and serious. But only moments after a city representative came to the edge of the roped-off entrance to confirm Estrela's name and cross-check it to her clipboard, an unexpected interruption took place. From out of one of the cross streets a samba school emerged, with musicians playing guitars and cavaquinhos amplified by a small sound system mounted in a car, over which a singer barely managed to be heard, followed by a fair number of drummers and percussionists. The group

marched down the middle of the street where the maracatus were lined up, forcing everyone to make way, dissolving their formation, pushing caboclos and anthropologists alike to the sidewalk. This was carioca-style samba, and Recife's samba schools are famously middle class in composition.

At various points since the 1930s, carnival commentators of a regionalist orientation have criticized the Recife samba schools for their imitation of southeastern traditions. But at that moment on Avenida Guararapes, the only thing on my mind was that Estrela being asked to hold back their presentation while everyone let the parade of samba pass. I thought I detected a look of impatience on the faces of some caboclos and baianas, and I looked at Lilo and his grandfather Heleno questioningly as I nodded at the extended interruption happening in front of us. They shrugged it off. The cordoned-off avenue, meanwhile, was completely empty, since the previous group had finished their performance and exited. Most of the spectators who had come to see the maracatus would have been unable to see the samba school congesting the street and cutting off our access to the competition area, and I wondered just how patient the spectators would be, and how many would wander off after more than five minutes of nothing happening. I looked at Barachinha and tried to make eye contact to no avail. His eyes were fixed straight ahead but his focus was inward, his normal composure seemingly unaffected by the delay.

The samba school passed and disappeared down another street. The signal was given for Estrela to move onto the avenue. I made my way to the viewing area, and was both relieved to see that there was still a very sizeable crowd as well as frustrated, because this meant I had trouble finding a good place of my own to document their performance. The jury boxes occupied the most central and advantageous spot, depriving the general audience of prime spectator real estate. Unwilling to force myself into the dense crowd of people who had claimed their spots earlier in

the evening, I settled further down the corridor to take some photos and video. The distance and the lighting resulted in subpar documentation, but there was nothing lacking about Estrela Brilhante's performance. They came out into the avenue with such a burst of energy that it seemed like the first day of carnival rather than the last. Although they would not know it for another three days, they had won first place in the competition, which meant that in 2011 they would participate in the elite, special division. The following Saturday most of the maracatu boarded a bus to Recife once again, this time to attend an award ceremony, and return to Nazaré as champions.

The Spaces Between Cycles

Keeping a maracatu running between carnivals

The period after carnival is sometimes generally referred to as a *ressaca* or hangover, a period of exhaustion after the built-up tensions of the last several months has been dissipated. This is even truer for carnival societies and groups who have devoted so much energy and resources into planning and organization. With the exception of festivities held on Easter Sundays, traditionally there have not been maracatu performances between carnival and the harvest season beginning in late August, although an increase in "off season" maracatu events was notable during my fieldwork and appears to be only increasing with time. Although carnival is the climax, after a brief pause the cycle begins all over again, albeit at a much less hurried pace. From the perspective of the organizers and directorate, the work never truly stops but only slows down.

This sense of exhaustion and regrouping is evident in the first Association meetings held after carnival, as always on the first Sunday of the month. The associated maracatus are obliged to send a representative each month, and to facilitate this the Association arranges for collective

transportation: a couple of buses that pass through the largest towns and bring everyone to its headquarters in Aliança. At these meetings, held in the school-room sized main area of the Association building with rows of folding chairs and a pair of tables at one end, matters related to all aspects of running a carnival society are addressed and resolved. Seated at the tables, a committee comprised of maracatu members and cultural mediators present relevant news and updates. Assistance to the groups is frequently offered to navigate Brazil's notoriously difficult bureaucratic red tape. For the most part, however, the Association's main function seems to be holding meetings and scheduling more meetings.

For example, each maracatu is required to register with up-to-date information as a civic organization, establish a tax ID number, and open designated bank accounts to ensure the groups can participate in Recife's official carnival, and the Association helps with this. A pair of open microphones is set up at the front of the room for anyone to voice questions, concerns, or grievances. In the first meetings after carnival, there tend to be more complaints than during the remainder of the year. Unhappiness about the scheduling of events such as the Encontros in Aliança and Tabajara and the competition in Recife was common, as were comments lamenting the perceived second-class treatment by the mayor's offices of some of the smaller towns. I marveled at Barachinha's shrewd sense of diplomacy when he did not bring up Estrela Brilhante's experience of being interrupted by a samba school while preparing for their competition, but instead waited until a member of another maracatu's directorate, who had witnessed it first-hand, brought it up as an example of the prejudicial treatment of the Carnival Federation towards maracatu.

While at least one representative of each maracatu would remain seated in the room for the meetings that could last between two and four hours, an equal or greater number of people would

congregate in the patio space outside the room, taking in the fresh air, engaging in conversation, and buying *picolé* or fruit-suckles from the cart of the neighborhood vendor who never missed this monthly business opportunity. One gets the impression that the informal exchange of information and camaraderie between maracatuzeiros residing in different towns is just as important as the official proceedings conducted inside. The meetings could often be tedious and bureaucratic, but every so often they were livened up by the dramatic or humorous. One month, news that a new maracatu had been founded and chosen a name with a raunchy double entendre was placed on the agenda for discussion. Many of those present chuckled when they heard the name, but most also agreed that it was undignified and reflected poorly on maracatu in general. The group was asked to change it and several months later they returned with a proposed new name, which was voted on and accepted by the associated maracatus. On another occasion, the agenda included a discussion about a fire that had nearly destroyed the headquarters of one maracatu, destroying most of their equipment and costumes for that year. A vote was taken and a hat was passed around the room for donations, with several hundred *reais* raised on the spot to help them rebuild.

Such scenarios can lead to the impression that the Association represents an organization run by and for maracatuzeiros. However, I found that the majority of maracatuzeiros seem reluctant to take the microphone and speak their mind before the assembly. A large part of this can be understood in terms of the “tradition” of humility before authority by people who had spent at least a portion of their lives as cane cutters or doing other manual labor. Indeed, certain members of the directorate frequently lectured the maracatuzeiros seated before them in the room as if they were errant children. While the directorate of the association is comprised largely of members of long-standing maracatus, the final word on any issue was always had by Manoel Salustiano, who has become a political figure. The board of directors also counted in their ranks outsiders from

different class backgrounds, for example a current employee of FUNDARPE (who later resigned from that organization in the wake of scandals there, discussed in the conclusion), and a former president of that organization, Dona Leda Alves. The only woman on the directorate at that time, she has had a storied history as an actress and director at Recife's principal fine arts theatre, a colleague of Ariano Suassuna, and a collaborator and wife of dramaturge Hermilo Borba Filho. Several times during my fieldwork, Estrela Brilhante and other maracatus were called upon to perform at events held in her honor. The first was a ceremony in the main square of Aliança at which she was made an honorary citizen of the town; the second was her 80th birthday, when probably half of the Association's 120 maracatus participated. For those groups in the town of Nazaré, Buenos Aires, and Aliança, there was a feeling that to refuse these "invitations" would be to jeopardize their relationship with the Association. After my period of fieldwork, Dona Leda Alves would become the Secretary of Culture for the city of Recife, at the age of 81.⁶ Besides all these other accomplishments, she is also well-known for her ties to former Governor Eduardo Campos (PSB), as well as her friendship with his late uncle, Governor Miguel Arraes.

Arraes's framed portrait hangs on the wall behind the directorate at meetings, almost as if presiding over the proceedings with beatific sanctity. Governor Arraes had been widely popular in rural Pernambuco for his support of progressive initiatives such as popular education, literacy campaigns, and agrarian reform during his first governorship from 1962-64, positions that cost him dearly: he was one of the first political figures stripped of his rights when the military seized power, briefly imprisoned on the island of Fernando de Noronha, and exiled. When he returned as the first governor of Pernambuco under democratization during the 1980s, he returned as a

⁶ Diário de Pernambuco, December 14, 2012. "Leda Alves é a nova secretária de Cultura do Recife."

legend, with popularity that has arguably never been matched by another political figure in the state.

During his second chance as governor, Arraes called upon writer and cultural figure Ariano Suassuna to serve as Secretary of Culture – a post he had previously held during the military government of the 1970s.⁷ Suassuna’s vision of *cultura popular* was unflinchingly attached to notions of orthodoxy, purity, and a persistent anxiety over the “threat” posed by modernity. It was Suassuna who “discovered” the artist Mestre Salustiano, a *rabeca* player (instrument similar to a fiddle) and founder of his own cavalo marinho and maracatu. The figure of Salustiano galvanized a growing interest in *cultura popular* among the middle class, charming a broad swath of the public as well as intellectuals and artists from different backgrounds. His life story – a former cane cutter who moved to the big city and initially made his living selling *picolé* popsicles as a street vendor - and artistic proficiency made him an iconic symbol of the resilience of rural cultural expression. He became equally treasured and embraced by cultural conservatives who saw in him an embodiment of tradition as well by the vanguardist “Mangue Bit” movement who found a symbol of resistance, especially when one of his own fourteen children became an active musician in that scene.

During my first conversation with Manoelzinho Salustiano, an interview conducted at the *sede* of Maracatu Piaba de Ouro in Tabajara, he explained that the Association existed to promote the culture of maracatu and defend its tradition. When I asked if the Association acted in any way like a union representing the collective interests of the maracatus, he adamantly negated the idea, eschewing any such notion with insistence that they are not a political organization. This puzzled me at the time, given the visibility of their ties to political factions. By the end of my fieldwork

⁷ See chapter four, pages 229-231

this pronouncement made more sense. In spite of its frequent rhetoric about the defense of tradition, the organization refused to jeopardize its patronage in the process. Sometimes that manifested as listening to the maracatuzeiros grievances about poor treatment in Recife's official carnival but not taking any action, or in other occasions such as refusing to take a stand on the police oppression of the maracatus core practices of local ensaios and sambadas that took place from 2011 to 2014. Instead, as will be shown below, they devote their energies into drawing the maracatus more and more deeply into the capitalist marketplace. Hence they could never be seen as a political organization in the classic sense like a labor union, but rather as a neoliberal corporation that mystifies and obscures their political power while speaking the language of "community."

"Multicultural" Carnival and preserving traditions

One afternoon I was sitting at the tourist information center where Barachinha worked, making conversation while schoolchildren came and went to help themselves to the free drinking water. At one point we began talking about the carnival, and I asked him how he felt regarding the massive popularity of *trios elétricos* in Nazaré's carnival celebrations. These are trucks equipped with sound systems on top of which live bands play, a practice originating in the city of Salvador da Bahia in the 1950s. Over the decades these trucks have become popularized throughout northeastern Brazil, where they are now massive commercial enterprises with

corporate sponsors, and sound systems that rattle windows of homes from blocks away.⁸ Although in decades past, *trios elétricos* existed in Nazaré with local groups playing *frevo* music, since the 1990s it has been more common for touring bands from other northeastern states like Ceará and Bahia to be contracted during carnival, when they play the latest hits in the styles of axé, electric or stylized forró, brega, suingueira, or Brazilian calypso. One local trio organized by the Clube Jacaré is still active every season, but they too now perform the same styles and songs as the touring groups. *Orquestras de frevo* circulate on the streets during the daytime hours of carnival, and at night they perform at a fixed stage at Praça do Lago, in front of the Capa Bode music society building. Another, larger stage occupies the Cathedral Plaza in the center of town, and all manner of musical styles and groups can be found there, including national acts of everything from pop-sertaneja duos like Bruno & Marrone to esteemed national samba stars like Leci Brandão and Alcione.

When the trio elétrico trucks move down the main streets of the town, they are followed by a train of people walking or dancing, often singing. Unlike Salvador, nobody is required to pay money to be near the *trios* although many do buy a t-shirt. Any other carnival activities nearby – including the shows on the fixed stages with PA systems – are forced to essentially stop and take a break as the trucks pass, as the decibel level drowns them out. Each year brings a new crop of songs, whose lyrics push the boundaries of double entendre and the sense of decency of each successive generation. During the carnival that had just passed, the most-played song was titled “Putá Que Pariu,” which is roughly equivalent too “Fucking hell.” In this case, the lyrics aren’t racy but simply silly and somewhat nonsensical, with the title serving mostly to shock. It also provided some entertainment on Estrela Brilhante’s bus for that carnival as Mauro, who plays the

⁸ One popular *trio elétrico* was reportedly banned from returning to Nazaré da Mata when several cracks appeared in the walls of its oldest church during one carnival performance.

clownish “lost woman” figure Catita, began to sing it in a screechy falsetto every so often during the long rides between towns.

Some maracatuzeiros frequently commented to me about the popularity of these *trios* as part of an invasion of “coisas baianas” that drew an audience away from more traditional ways of commemorating carnival in Pernambuco. And yet when Estrela Brilhante returned from its travels during the three nights of carnival, there were always members who would go out and spend a few hours unwinding by following the *trios*. I asked Barachinha what he personally thought about their popularity.

“I prefer frevo myself, but I don’t mind the *trios*. It’s what the people like and that’s fine. Sometimes I even go check them out.”

I brought up how the city councils of Recife and Olinda had banned the *trio elétrico* bands from participating in the official carnival, with legislation aimed at promoting a more traditional, multicultural, and family-friendly celebration. “I’m in favor of that,” Barachinha responded.

“But you just said you were okay with the trios,” I challenged him, laughing.

“Well yes, because we need to promote *our* culture.”

This seeming contradiction in Barachinha’s logic exemplifies some of the tensions involved in issues of culture, taste, and identity throughout Brazilian history. Barachinha’s populist streak inclines him to sympathize with the tastes of Nazarenos, particularly the poor and working class, while his role as a respected artist and engagement with maracatu compels him toward a “defense” of popular culture. This dynamic is not particular to Barachinha, to Nazaré, or to Pernambuco but is consistent with Brazilian struggles over the territory of culture that began in the early twentieth century. These have taken the form of ongoing, acrimonious, and often tedious debates over “authenticity” and its meaning in cultural production, the influence of mass media

and “mass culture,” and anxiety over a perceived invasion by foreign cultural elements that threaten traditional values and sensibilities. These debates spill over into cultural policy, from heavy-handed measures like the banning of *trios elétricos*, to the creation of incentives programs aimed at “preserving” and fostering traditional culture. The institutionalization of carnival into a nationalist mold during the 1930s was touched upon in chapter two. The promotion of a respect for “tradition” became tied to narratives about national identity and developmentalist progress, expressed in thematic parade floats and the genre of praise samba (*samba-exaltação*) that celebrated national unity and the achievements of the increasingly authoritarian Vargas regime. While “traditional” cultural practices and carnival societies have often faced genuine crisis, the severity of such crises are frequently overplayed for dramatic effect by state actors who seek to impose “necessary” interventions to insure their survival. Although coming from an ideological position diametrically opposite that of the Estado Novo, the recent surge of cultural preservation and revitalization initiatives since the end of the twentieth century contains many traces of this legacy. The rest of this chapter explores the linkages between the institutions of “official carnival” celebrations, public-private arts incentives projects during the rest of the calendar year, and how these relate to the internal dynamics of maracatu groups.

Although much has obviously changed since the 1930s, the basic structures of containment and social control persist in aspects of “official” carnival such as the Recife competitions. Accolades are awarded to the groups that best exemplify a vision of traditionalism tied to the state’s interest in representing itself as an inclusive, tolerant, and heterogeneous reflection of society. Moving up through the annual competition rankings translates to more access to resources. In their first year of existence, every registered carnival group begins in the entry-level “access group.” If they score well enough, they can gain entry into the Group 2 division for the

following year, which in turn is superseded by Group 1 and then the exclusive *Grupo Especial*. As a group climbs through the hierarchy of division categories they are allowed more time to perform before the commission, and are also awarded bigger stipends with which to develop and refine their presentation throughout the calendar year. In this way the city's official carnival accomplishes the containment of conflict that was intended by the structures put in place during the Vargas era: rival carnival groups that may have clashed and even fought on the streets now have their energies and tensions redirected into competition. The ludic spectacle of carnival, a potential site of contestations over the "meaning" of expressive practices and *cultura popular*, becomes an opportunity for the aggrandizement of regional, state, and national unity.

The impact of that totalizing narrative celebrating both unity and competition is reflected in the logistical and economic struggles for both new and veteran carnival societies to stay afloat. The particular maracatus that receive the most focus in this dissertation are in many ways exceptional and atypical. Groups like Estrela Brilhante, Leão Misterioso, or Cambinda Brasileira represent an ideal from which other groups draw inspiration: well-organized, with a long pedigree, and respected within and beyond the community. Both their large size and the inclusion or involvement of one or more persons who serve as "cultural brokers" make them more accessible to researchers or to cultural tourists. Thus they have come to be ambassadors and representatives, but that representation can be misleading in that the majority of registered maracatus are smaller and more modest affairs. The larger maracatus' access to resources has a cumulative, snowball effect that begins to contribute to their economic stability and their *fama* (fame or reputation), although the price of this security can be tallied in other ways. Much can be learned by looking at how the smaller maracatus struggle to get by in this relatively new environment.

Mané Pula-Pula (Manoel Coelho de Souza), president of Maracatu Leão de Ouro in Nazaré da Mata, founded his group in 1995 when there were only four other maracatus in the city.⁹ Pula-Pula, who walks with a cane and sometimes uses a wheelchair at home for his injured leg, has had a trajectory similar to Heleno (in chapter one) and many others, moving to different cities in search of work before eventually settling back in Nazaré. As a teenager he worked locally at Engenho Morojó, where his grandfather was a *feitor* and his father a *contador*.¹⁰ Later he moved to Recife and lived there for five years, working in a supermarket, as a custodian in a hospital, and in construction. He then moved back to the interior, to the town of Paudalho halfway between Recife and Nazaré, where he first became involved with maracatu and eventually became president of Maracatu Leão Formoso of Paudalho.

Pula-Pula told me that in spite of all the government incentives it was more difficult to run a maracatu now. He remarked on the pressure to grow bigger all the time. “We can’t add more people because it’s too much cost. In the old days people played at maracatu for love, they helped out. Not today – now they only play for money... for too much money.” When Leão de Ouro first started they had 25 caboclos de lança, 14 baianas, 2 standard bearers, 1 caboclo de pena (or arreimá) in addition to all the single personages like King, Queen, Mateus, Catita, and Burrinha. In sixteen years they had added to this number only slightly, barely reaching 70 members. In contrast to maracatus that spend most of carnival traveling, they only perform in three cities outside of Nazaré. Pula-Pula keeps costs down by enlisting his family’s labor, who get involved making the costumes, serving in the directorate, and playing in the band without receiving any payment.

He expressed cynicism about Nazaré holding the title of “The Land of Maracatu” when in his opinion the city helps the groups very little. As Leão de Ouro does not often get contracted for

⁹ These were Cambinda Brasileira, Leão Formoso, Águia Misteriosa, and Leão Misterioso.

¹⁰ Both supervisory positions on an engenho or usina.



Figure 23: Mané Pula-Pula at home working on a gola

professional performances, they are more dependent on the small stipend that the city allocates to its registered groups. He complained that they did not receive their money in 2011 until the beginning of March, with only two weeks left for carnival.¹¹ The funds were only useful for last-minute expenses, as all the materials for costumes and other preparations had been paid for long ago. The group relies heavily on the support of the community and its members. When they hold their ensaios in front of the bar of Seu Luiz, Luiz pays the contracted horn players and often throws in a tip to the maracatu if he does a brisk business that evening. The maracatu also has a patron in

¹¹ This is a less severe variant of the long delays involving payments from FUNDARPE or Recife's carnival association, which involve substantially larger amounts and can create very serious problems for the groups.

writer and researcher Maria Alice Amorim, who developed a relationship with the group and especially Pula-Pula when she lived in the city and continues to support them with donations. For one carnival year, they asked her to participate as the Queen in their procession, but she felt it inappropriate and declined. Leão de Ouro's budget is only a fraction of some of the other groups in town. They keep a small membership, and they paid their mestre-poet roughly half of what some of the more prestigious groups were paying at the time of my research. For Pula-Pula, there is a risk of over-reaching in being too ambitious. "It's better to have a well-organized, well done maracatu that is small, than a large one that is an ugly mess," he told me.

Mané Pula-Pula's words reinforce the commonly-held sentiment that maracatu today is rarely performed for the sheer love of it. This complaint may be hyperbolic, but it draws attention to the bifurcation in how maracatu is experienced by its practitioners: although connected by a variety of relationships and continuities, it can sometimes seem as if maracatu in its carnival articulation exists in an autonomous realm from its local expressions in sambadas, where two different "tribes" or "nations" battle against one another through the figure of the mestre-poet, or in ensaios where all "tribes" are welcome to come together in parity. Those local events do, of course, involve market relationships: the payment to the visiting maracatu, the contracting of musicians and sound cars, etc. They also involve patronage, such as local business owners or middle-class patrons. Estrela Brilhante receives support from artist Siba Veloso, who while now living mostly in São Paulo is considered a member of the maracatu, and they schedule their sambadas and annual pre-carnival rehearsals around his schedule.

When and how often to hold ensaios or sambadas are decisions that are made by directors balancing a multitude of factors. If the group needs a boost of energy during a given cycle, a rehearsal might be held early in the season and then again before carnival. Or if they hold an

ensaio early in the season, they may opt to not have one at all before carnival; not holding one at all is not really an option. Sambadas are not obligatory and many groups do not have them in a given cycle; many cannot afford the payment they would need for the visiting group. Motivating factors for a maracatu holding them can include having a new mestre-poet who they are feeling good about and want to pit against an opponent. Another motive can be sponsorship, on both a small and large scale: a bar owner who is a friend to a maracatu may encourage or urge an event so that he or she can host it, or a mayor or cultural programmer may organize a sambada as a public event. Another motive can be friendship or the desire for mestres to stay “in shape” poetically: something not really discussed in this dissertation is the *sambada de amizade* or “friendship sambada” between two mestres that have mutual admiration and an amicable relationship. Consistent with the self-romanticizations described elsewhere, some maracatuzeiros will frame this phenomenon as a new thing that is a break from tradition – that a “real” sambada needs to be a merciless battle in the true sense. My conversations with middle-aged and older mestres, in contrast, showed that such sambadas between friends go back to at least the 1960s.

All of the above practices involve exchange, negotiation, and strategizing that involve the intersection of art with commerce. Nevertheless, the sentiment juxtaposing “love” against “money” resonates loudest when carnival season comes around, at least in Nazaré da Mata.¹² When I asked friends why they chose to perform with one group rather than another – or why they changed groups over time – the responses typically involved family relationships, friendships, preference for a particular mestre, or the sense of belonging to a particular *nação* or “nation.” Yet none of these motivations need be separate from economic reasoning. Today the standard practice is that maracatuzeiros sell their labor in an increasingly competitive marketplace – as caboclos,

¹² Mostly anecdotal evidence from my fieldwork indicates that maracatus in the smaller towns may be less integrated into the market discussed here.

baianas, musicians, and mestre-poets. In addition to affective and kinship ties, upon further questioning the motivations cited for switching groups begin to resemble any other contractual relationship: a person may leave a group after carnival because they don't like a particular director's organizational or management style, or because they felt they were not being paid in a timely manner. Rare is the maracatuzeiro who would admit to me with candor that they left for another group simply for the opportunity to make more money.

Founding a maracatu in this environment requires a sizeable initial capital investment. Zezinha, one of the first women to be a cabocla de lança in the area, founded a maracatu with her husband Macarrão in their town of Tracunhaém. Macarrão drives a truck during the week, and formerly was a bus driver for the intra-city transit company that connects the towns of the interior. When he had an accident and personal injury on the job that left him unable to work for some time, they won a workers compensation settlement that they subsequently invested in a small restaurant and bar adjacent to their home. This place, the Bar de Cabocla, functioned as the location for their first *ensaio* rehearsal in 2011. For that carnival cycle, they contracted Mestre Manoel Domingos, who was just returning to singing after having been living away from the Mata Norte for several years. The investment for their first year's expenses were expected to reach R\$50,000 (roughly \$20,000 USD). Their first ever rehearsal had a moderate turnout for a new group, ending early both because the recent implementation of new "silence laws" and because the crowd had begun to thin out by late evening. Like all new groups they competed in carnival at the entry level category for their first year, as "aspirants" who receive no paid compensation, but by 2013 they had advanced through the second group ranking and on to the first.

These two examples, of one smaller group that has preferred to keep a small profile in an environment that consistently encourages maximization and growth, and of a brand new group

whose owners have drawn on their personal savings as an investment in the future of their *brincadeira*, illustrate some of the challenges facing maracatus that lack the prestige of other groups with more guaranteed access to public and private sector funding. However, as the example of Estrela Brilhante's 2011 carnival will show, such prestige and financial security does not ensure success nor make them immune to disorganization and even disintegration.



Figure 24: Caboclo de lança Ronaldo Armando de Souza with Estrela Brilhante

The Star Falls - Carnival 2011

The next carnival season presented a number of challenges to Estrela Brilhante. First was the ill health of its president, José Porfiro, Barachinha's father. Porfiro had suffered a few episodes of severe disorientation and wild swings in temperament shortly after I had settled in Nazaré. Barachinha was taking him to doctors in nearby Carpina and became very protective, including rebuffing my proposal to have a recorded interview with him. The eventual diagnosis was dementia, and his health began to deteriorate rather quickly. By year's end it was known that Porfiro would not be going out with the group during carnival for the first time in Estrela's history. Meanwhile Barachinha and his brother, *mestre-caboclo* Biu Porfiro, were splitting the duties of caretaker for their father. A sense of the gravity of his illness became more widespread after news circulated that the presidency and ownership of the maracatu had passed from José to Barachinha, officialized by a notary.

Family tensions and stress on friendships seemed to percolate beneath the surface of the dense network of relationships that sustained the maracatu. From my observer's perspective it seemed that Barachinha had hoped the other directorate members would step up to assume more responsibilities as he was required to devote more energy to his father's care. Since becoming involved with Estrela in their second year (2002), Barachinha had assumed a variety of roles wherein he became intimately involved in every aspect of the maracatu's day to day operations. He designed most of the costumes worn during carnival, went to Recife to procure the best materials at a cheaper cost than what was available locally, and arranged for welders, carpenters,

and artisans to maintain the *arrumação* (costumes) of caboclos who did not own their own. His wife Lucia worked as one of several seamstresses on clothing for the band as well as repairing *golas*.

Such extensive involvement is not required of a maracatu *mestre*. In fact the hands-on approach of Barachinha and his older cousin João Paulo – who was a role model in this regard – is the exception to the rule for most *mestres*, who typically view themselves as contracted poet-singers whose chief responsibility is to perform well at ensaios, sambadas, and at carnival. Many *mestres* switch maracatus frequently during their career, much like the other “component” members of the group and for similar reasons. As the highest-paid single individual in a maracatu, they are the figure most likely to be swayed by an offer of higher payment from another group, rather than following the movements of friends or alliances. However, even *mestres* who have maintained decades-long relationships with the same maracatus, such as Dedinha or Zé Duda, do not necessarily involve themselves with the minutiae of running the organization.¹³

As has been shown here, the attraction of larger and more prestigious maracatus who can offer both more money and more performance opportunities often lure both *mestres* and rank and file members away from smaller groups. Larger groups like Estrela Brilhante, Leão Misterioso, or Cambinda Brasileira are impacted by this cultural marketplace in a different way: they become not only competitive with each other, but with themselves. When Estrela Brilhante passed from the “first tier” classification to the elite category of “special” groups in Recife’s carnival competition, the new designation also came with new demands. The size of the group needed to expand from 100 to 125 members to compete in the “Special Group.” This required the

¹³ Mestre Dedinha’s long affiliation with Maracatu Cambidinha of Araçoiaba dates back to when he followed Mestre Antônio Alves in that role (see chapter two), while Mestre Zé Duda’s name is practically synonymous with Maracatu Estrela de Ouro of Aliança.

recruitment of new members, often from other area maracatus, to augment the ranks. One result of this growth was the presence of many new individuals who had not had the extensive socialization with existing members of Estrela Brilhante, who had developed intimacy across successive carnivals and the many rehearsals, sambadas, parties and barbeques during the year. There was a palpable sense of awkwardness on the bus during the 2011 carnival – a feeling of restraint from veteran members around new faces, which along with other contributing factors made for a less festive atmosphere. The women’s bus erupted into chaos when a verbal and physical fight broke out between one new member and another *baiana*. On the second day there was an unscheduled break along the side of the highway as the bus driver pulled over, and the new member was eventually placed on the men’s bus – breaking a taboo against men and women traveling together during carnival - in order to separate the pair.

Another point of tension developed around the *chegada*. A week or so before carnival, Barachinha received a call from Manoel Salustiano asking for Estrela Brilhante to perform at a carnival stage in the Recife neighborhood of Brasília Teimosa. The one major “catch” was that the performance was scheduled for early afternoon: this meant that Estrela would have to forego its traditional *chegada* ceremony. Barachinha expressed reluctance to break with this tradition. In ten years of existence Estrela Brilhante had always performed the neighborhood *chegada*. Salustiano continued to pressure Barachinha, bluntly asking him whether he wanted to make money or not that carnival. No doubt reflecting on all the new members that the maracatu would have to pay after Ash Wednesday, Barachinha acquiesced, and broke the news to the rest of the group, which was received unenthusiastically. Some members felt that the question should have been put before the entire directory for deliberation, while others felt that they could in fact use the money. In their neighborhood of Juá, however, at least one small business felt the economic

impact of the cancellation. After carnival, Jerônimo – the bar owner from the beginning of this chapter who hosted all of Estrela’s rehearsals and chegadas - was quite angry about the situation, since he had stocked his bar with extra beer for the annual opening ceremony, and lost one of the most reliably lucrative days of his year.

Although I was quite disappointed in the cancellation of the chegada, I felt fortunate that I had someone in Estrela offer to have me be present at their ritual preparations on Carnival morning. This was Péu, the caboclo de pena who would let the Recife woman get her photo taken with him later that same evening. I met him at 7 in the morning and he was already out on the corner, sitting in the shade talking to a neighbor. After a few more minutes he decided to get started. The rooms in his home were so small that I had to watch him through the doorway as he went through a deliberate process of cleansing himself with an herbal-infusion bath, the water for which was partially prepared by his wife, slowly and deliberately put on each piece of his elaborate costume, and offered some prayers to his patrons. However his tolerance of my presence stopped there. The custom for caboclos after their *saída* from their home was to circulate through the neighborhood, performing in the street and asking for tips from anyone who likes what they see. But Péu halted me with a hand signal not to follow him, and told me he was going to Alto da Sé, a neighborhood on the other side of the highway and that was home to Maracatu Leão Formoso. I knew Péu had once been part of that maracatu. I also knew that some caboclos would make a visit to their personal *mãe* or *pai de santo* and ask for blessings and protection. I watched as he began his long trek in private.

I was now a bit at a loss of what to do with myself for the next four hours or so until Estrela Brilhante left for Recife. Péu’s preparations had been much simpler and more modest than I had expected, having had my head filled with stories of elaborate rituals charged with mystery and

carried out according to rigid spiritual precepts. Some of those stories are no doubt true. But they obviously were not universal.

I began to walk back toward my home after leaving Péu's, but changed my mind and sought out Thony instead. Although one of my closest friends and a former member of both Leão Misterioso and Estrela Brilhante, Thony was at the time a member of a completely different maracatu, Águia Dourada of Tracunhaém. We did not expect to see each other that Sunday. He was having some breakfast when I arrived, fueling up for the day's demands. I asked if I could watch his preparations and he gladly granted my request, provided that I filmed him. Thony was at times didactic, explaining to the camera the names of the pieces in his costume, and definitely more dramatic than Péu, assuming a gravitas while making his oration. He asked his mother for a blessing before we left the house. Watching him tear down the streets, some six feet and three hundred odd pounds, leaping and twisting, tossing his lance into the air, was the high point of my day. There weren't too many people around to offer tips, but he made enough to pay for some refreshment later in the day. From there it was on to Estrela's headquarters, where people were preparing their costumes to load into the two buses and one truck that was needed for transport.

Estrela Brilhante's Brasília Teimosa performance was fairly unremarkable by comparison. It was a small folklore stage situated on a street that bordered a beach area. There was a vicious wind from the sea that made it especially difficult for the flag-bearer to keep the *estandarte* banner aloft. The crowd seemed more intent on their drinks and conversation than on the presentation. During the pauses in the band, when Barachinha sang his verses, I could hear the booming drums of a maracatu nação nearby. Indeed, as we were leaving the area we encountered a nação group in the line of folkloric conglomerations waiting to present. It all seemed very routine and not terribly carnivalesque. Spirits seemed low as people packed their things onto the bus. Missing the

chegada had clearly put a damper on some members' enthusiasm, and others seemed irritated at the directorate for their demeanor towards the rank and file members in trying to maintain discipline on and off the bus. In particular Biu Rosi, who is not known for his delicacy or diplomacy, rubbed some of the new members the wrong way.

Events took a nervous turn on the way back to Nazaré. The bus at the front of our caravan was hit by a car that had spun out of control after having been hit by a reckless driver, most likely attempting to pass on the treacherous single-lane highway. Costumes went flying and reportedly several baianas on the women's bus were thrown from their seats as the driver slammed on the breaks. Amazingly, nobody was seriously hurt, and it was a minor miracle that our two buses did not collide and cause a multi-vehicle pileup. However, the driver of the car that caused the accident fled the scene, quite likely either intoxicated or driving without a license. The accident meant that we spent nearly two hours on the side of the road, first waiting for the police to arrive and then for an accident report to be filled out and everyone's information taken. In the days to come, some members of Estrela would say that the accident represented a kind of curse or cosmic warning, a punishment for having neglected to perform the chegada ritual to open carnival. But for the moment, the incident provided Barachinha with new material to sing to the audiences of the remaining cities, where he thanked God that nobody died.

The following day saw the group performing in the same smaller towns as the previous year. The percussionists still kept a beat going in the back of the bus, but it seemed to lack any spark of inspiration. I reflected that maybe this was just a banalization effect of my having spent two carnivals with the same people doing the same things, the brilliance of novelty fading to the patina of routine. I struggled to ground my perceptions in more objective facts. Yes, the drummers kept up a steady stream of rhythm, keeping limber, but hardly anyone stood up and volunteered to

improvise some verses to go along with it, as had happened frequently in 2010. During that carnival, it didn't matter at all if a person had any knack for poetry or singing on the bus, the only requirement was the courage to be heard and the goodwill to be laughed at or bested by other participants. This year, it sounded like warm-up exercises you would hear around any ordinary musical situation. A few times during the day, one of the trumpet players made an effort to sing some improvised rhymes, but nobody seemed really engaged. Otherwise, it was just the drummers keeping time.

In one of my post-carnival conversations, Danilo – one of the teenage members of Estrela and a good friend of Barachinha's son Carlinhos – put it succinctly when he said that the bus seemed more like a funeral than a carnival procession. I also learned later that director Biu Rosi had forbidden drinking on the bus, perhaps related to the fighting incident of the baianas. No wonder morale was low.

The competition

For Recife's competition on Tuesday, Estrela Brilhante would be on a different street where all the carnival groups in the "special category" would present themselves. By way of their new ranking, they had extra time to perform, twenty five minutes from the entrance to exit. On the bus, I talked to Cabeça about a topic that had been mentioned as an insignificant afterthought by various people during the year: the competition rules for what mestres are allowed to sing. There was a short but vital list of prohibited topics that included contemporary politics and football, two common subjects during ensaios and sambadas. The reasoning was that a mestre-poet should not be seen as making political propaganda or advertising, even with something as simple as a

compliment to the mayor of the city, a practice that was a courtesy (if not a de facto obligation) when performing in the small towns of the interior. Similarly, mentioning your favorite football team might be interpreted as trying to influence either the crowd or the judges, a concept that I found absurd as it implied some sort of paranormal telepathy to gauge the favorite teams of complete strangers. I questioned whether Cabeça thought the Recife commission truly understood the type of poetry that the maracatu mestres sang. He expressed reservations about offering an opinion one way or another. “After all,” he asked me, “I’ve never met anyone who’s served on a commission, so how would I know what they do or don’t understand?”

It seemed a moot point when Estrela performed. The microphone was feeding back most of the time, although on the recording I made it was still possible to hear Barachinha relatively well. The group performed and danced competently. When the final scoring was made available a week later, some members were surprised to see that the commission had apparently not noticed that one of the baianas had lost a piece of her costume while on the avenue, a blunder that should have incurred a penalty. There is a long list of infractions for which the maracatu can lose points. The mestre singing about a prohibited subject loses points. The group falling short of the required number of participants (x number of caboclos, y number of baianas, for example) loses points. Inconsistencies in costumes (beyond wardrobe malfunctions) can lose points. For example, if one baiana chooses to wear tennis shoes instead of sandals, points would be lost. However if they *all* wore tennis shoes, then no points would be lost – the emphasis is on aesthetic uniformity.

When the results were revealed the following Saturday, we learned that Estrela Brilhante had fallen in the rankings from the elite “special group” back to the “first group” out of which they had climbed the previous year. There was no particular sense of surprise or shock, and nobody seemed inclined to look for someone to blame. Estrela had simply had a lackluster year: the lack

of enthusiasm and pride in their work was visible on the avenue on that final day of carnival, the exhaustion and stress evident in the body language of nearly everyone. Predictable or not, the news cast a further pall over what seemed like an ill-fated carnival.

After the Recife presentation, we made our way back to Nazaré where Estrela performed one final time in the city center. Barachinha and Cabeça were joined on stage by Siba Veloso, who sang a few verses before handing back the microphone. Nobody was aware of it at the time, but this was the last performance of Barachinha at the helm of Estrela Brilhante. Or perhaps he already had some idea of his inclinations, as the ambiguity in his final verses with the group can be interpreted in a variety of ways:

Ao caboclo, ao diretor
À baiana, rei e rainha
Receba agradecimento
Do poeta Barachinha

To the caboclo, to the director
To the baiana, king, and queen
You have the thanks and appreciation
Of the poet Barachinha

Mas não posso assim dar nome
Para não esquecer ninguém
Nazaré adeus, adeus,
Não sei agora quem vem.

But I won't call you by name
So that I don't forget anyone
Goodbye Nazaré, goodbye
I don't know now who comes next.

Producers, *Pontos*, and Mediators

A systematic analysis of the impact on maracatu of the new cultural policy initiatives begun since the first term of President Lula, the first Worker's Party president, had never been an objective of my research. These initiatives reinforced and built upon the work of previous institutions oriented towards the preservation of culture such as FUNARTE, PRONAC, and

IPHAN, and created new programs such as cultural centers or Pontos de Cultura early on.¹⁴ More recent initiatives include the Patrimônio Vivo or Living Patrimony program where individual artists are nominated and (if approved) receive an annual stipend from the federal government, and the Immaterial Patrimony law of 2000 where designated forms of cultural expression are given legal recognition and certain protections. The Lei Rouanet – established in 1991 but receiving more emphasis under Minister of Culture Gilberto Gil than previously - encouraged the creation of “cultural incentives” through public-private partnerships, allowing tax breaks for corporations that sponsor events and activities deemed to qualify as “cultural.” Taken as a whole, this aggregate of policy initiatives and public arts funding seeks to protect forms of cultural expression that have little commercial value in the marketplace. For the many types of performing groups in Brazil founded and run by poor people such as maracatu, who in many ways only become “visible” to the middle classes during carnival, this has facilitated new economic opportunities by which they can sustain and grow their organizations throughout the year.

Although several “cultural production” companies and two Pontos existed in Nazaré when I arrived there, for methodological reasons stated in my introduction I deliberately chose not to align myself with such institutions while carrying out my research. The critiques here are based on my own ethnographic observations of maracatu groups’ participation in events sponsored by these programs, and on the many anecdotes and opinions of those individual *maracatuzeiros* who have been involved at one level or another. As “cultural producers” working in the rural or semi-urban Mata Norte are increasingly ubiquitous, this pool of informants is relatively large. The portrait drawn from these stories and my own peripheral presence is one that is considerably less

¹⁴ These acronymic organization names stand for the Foundation for Historical and Artistic Patrimony of Pernambuco (Fundação do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico de Pernambuco or FUNDARPE), National Program for the Support of Culture (Programa Nacional de Apoio à Cultura or PRONAC) and the Institute for Historical and Artistic National Patrimony (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional or IPHAN).

romantic than the ideal put forth in official rhetoric. As with all government initiatives, regional and local political realities have tremendous effects on how such programs unfold on the ground. I suggest that the northeast of Brazil, so historically linked with an entrenched system of *coronelismo* or patronage based on access to land and political power, is a particularly tricky place for the implementation of such projects. In addition, the politics of recognition dictate that cultural centers built around expressions of specific places, ethnicities or histories are better situated to reap the benefits of such social programs than are groups that have been systemically stripped of such signifiers.¹⁵

All of these incentives programs require a formal project proposal that must be submitted by a *produtor cultural* or “cultural producer,” a position that requires a licensed certification from the state.¹⁶ In the overwhelming majority of cases involving rural maracatu, this role is filled by someone from outside the group.¹⁷ The most visible and obvious example in the Mata Norte is the Pontos de Cultura cultural centers program. Several maracatus in the region have gained an affiliation with a Ponto that becomes adjunct to their normal operations, with the help of a “cultural producer” who has submitted them as a likely candidate for hosting such a center. Typically, this happens when a cultural producer approaches a maracatu, rather than the reverse. Once approved and underway, the influx of funds coming in to support the Ponto de Cultura associated with a particular maracatu is likely to produce the impression of a “rich” or privileged group. The distinction between the operating budget necessary to hold events and workshops, which is part of

¹⁵ French, Jan Hoffman. 2009. *Legalizing identities: becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's northeast*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁶ It should be noted at the outset that this designated occupation of “cultural producer” does not solely involve events involving rural, “folkloric,” or collective forms of expression, but can also include someone who plans events and concerts involving “name” artists with national profiles (visual artists, filmmakers, or recording artists).

¹⁷ In my personal circle of associates in maracatu, the first “cultural producer” to emerge from within a maracatu itself was approved only in late 2014.

the mission of the culture centers and supposed to remain separate from the budget of maracatu group itself, is often lost on rank and file members. From the perspective of some of them, what they see is a significant influx of funds and outside attention without a corresponding increase in their own payments for carnival or performances throughout the year. In addition, since the cultural producer frequently has close ties and even employment with local political administrations, others might begin to see them as the object of favoritism.

While it is true that certain individuals in the group might accumulate personal prestige as a result of having a cultural center, and that some individuals can make that new social capital work for them in both material and immaterial terms (being singled out for interviews, participation in festivals, appearances in documentaries), the perception that some maracatuzeiros are getting rich off of cultural centers at the expense of other members is erroneous. Such misperceptions can have a ripple effect among the membership with resentments, jealousies, and disaffections developing within and between groups as a result. In one maracatu in the town of Buenos Aires, the president continued to feel bitterness years after another group received a cultural center and his did not. Cambinda Brasileira lost some old, seasoned members when they gained their cultural center; naturally, they gained new members as well due to the increased publicity and prestige. With such disruptive effects among the membership and its institutional memory, the Ponto de Cultura program can be seen as a mixed blessing for the maracatus. When I asked Barachinha and Ronaldo if they had ever thought Estrela Brilhante could benefit from becoming part of a cultural center, Ronaldo deferred to Barachinha, his face showing the beginnings of a smile parting his lips. Barachinha, sorting through the fabric for the baianas' hoop dresses for that year, barely glanced up from his work as he said, "*Deus me livre...* / Lord, have

mercy,” and Ronaldo burst out laughing. In their view, the culture centers were a promising idea, but more trouble than they were worth.

One of the most frequent criticisms is that the administrative support is dependent on outsiders to the group, who have varying degrees of involvement and commitment to the maracatu community. Some new resources are made available to the group that, due to the massive social divisions between classes, are often not utilized productively by the membership. Cambinda Brasileira received a computer and a digital camera for the express purposes of documenting their events and for maintaining a website, yet nobody on the directorate knew how to work them. During the time of my work, some of the children of the directors were learning to use the camera largely through trial and error. The website had still not been created at the time of this writing, although their Ponto de Cultura became official in 2009. The only new acquisition I saw them regularly make use of was a small sound system (an eight-channel mixing console and a pair of powered speakers) that was brought out for events at Engenho Cumbe.

In spite of provisional funds for training and orientation, the opportunity for the teaching of new technological skills does not seem to be taking place. When the intermediaries and project directors – who all come from middle and upper-class backgrounds – are questioned about this shortcoming, they have typically responded to me that the question of *capacitação* (which can mean “empowerment” as well as training) is a systemic societal problem that they should not be expected to tackle. As one cultural programmer expressed it, Brazil needs to deal with educating its citizens and teaching them basic literacy before he can be worried about teaching rural maracatuzeiros how to use computers and cameras.

This deferral of responsibility to an abstracted notion of the state also serves the agenda of the intermediaries, since twenty percent of any project’s budget is earmarked to pay a stipend for

those who run it. If the pool of qualified persons stays restricted, there is potential for considerable profits, as there is no limit on the number of different cultural projects that an individual administrator can be involved in simultaneously. In Brazil - where there has long been what journalists and intellectuals refer to without irony as an “artistic class” - there has now developed a whole new class of “cultural producers” who make a living off of state-subsidized art projects. The notion of middle-management figures profiting off the artistic talent and labor of others while producing nothing themselves is obviously not a new one: the US music and film industries were built on the idea. But while those were blatantly and unabashedly capitalist in their orientation, the network of “cultural producers” in Brazil is embroidered with the fabric of “diversity” and “sustainability.” If such relatively simple matters as training people to use digital cameras and computers is beyond the reach of those running the cultural programs, then what becomes of the notion that these cultural centers should be autonomous, organized from the grassroots, and agents of empowerment according to the tenets set out by the Ministry of Culture?

Maracatuzeiros are well aware that they are being exploited, but have become dependent on the income from participation in these projects, however meager or irregular. Thony, whose skills as an artisan allowed him to refrain from driving a taxi for at least part of the year while he worked from home designing and constructing *golas* and *estandartes* for maracatuzeiro clients, had previously been contracted to teach a series of workshops in costume design by a certain notorious “cultural producer.” I will refer to this producer by the fictitious name of Paraguay Productions. Thony related to me that when the series was over, his payment was for less than the agreed-upon price and the paperwork reflected far less hours than he had actually spent on the project. He also discovered that the producer was not paying INSS tax as required by law (the equivalent of social security). Thony said he had wanted to take him to small claims court over

the missing payments and the evasion of INSS, but in the end decided it wasn't worth the trouble. I tried to visualize my Nazareno friend, who is very dark and self-identifies as black, sitting in a courtroom across from the white "cultural producer" from Recife, and agreed that he was probably better off having left it alone.

One aspiring mestre and host of a local radio show commented on Paraguay Productions to me in this way: "Sure, he's a thief, but he's a good thief to know. He knows how to put together a project proposal. Do you know how to make a project ("fazer um projeto")? Me neither. So I'll hitch my wagon to his train." From that point of view there would seem to be plenty of wealth to spread around, as this particular cultural entrepreneur has run his own production company for over a decade. He began with a different name in the 1990s, focusing on events and productions featuring urban Maracatu Nação for national and international audiences at the time that it had become thrust into the limelight. Now, as one of the main event contractors in the Mata Norte, his new company employs full-time staff, including several members of his family. Paraguay Productions has a cozy relationship with media contacts at the *Jornal do Comercio*, with the family of former governor Jarbas Vasconcelos (of the PMDB), and even an academic who publishes books of a coffee-table variety about genres of *cultura popular* including maracatu, published by their own press with a half dozen government and industry sponsors.

These books – like the CDs, videos, events, and festivals produced by this company and others like it – are released with the graphic design "feature" of a visually-jarring quantity of logos belonging to their sponsors. These are not logos belonging to brands of beer or retail chains, like the popular sertaneja duos or trio elétrico bands use in their productions, but rather logos for government offices. At a minimum, "cultural productions" will prominently display iconography from the state oil company Petrobrás, the Brazilian development bank (BNDES), the Ministry of

Culture, and the state arts council FUNDARPE. Although a privately-held business, Paraguay Productions is deeply embedded in at least three Pontos de Cultura in the region, one of which is built around the maracatu founded by a famous mestre in the region. Another of their recent projects include a multi-sited festival in the region that appropriates the language of social movements, framing itself as representing a surge of grassroots expression and regional pride and issuing manifestos at its annual events and its website.

As a new generation of maracatuzeiros (one that has grown up with digital gadgets and the internet) grows old enough to begin assuming leadership positions within their own groups, this situation seems to be slowly changing. While the maracatus may not be in any position to seize the means of (cultural) production anytime soon, one can hope that the days of such blatant exploitation are limited. One of the rationales of “sustainability” in the new cultural programming is that such initiatives would free up groups such as maracatus from simply surviving from carnival to carnival and make them less dependent on the logic of the market. As I believe the above observations indicate, the marriage of private enterprise with public sector spending in rural Pernambuco has not exactly resulted in autonomy as most would define it. And while perhaps not as dependent on the fluctuations of the market as they would be if *cultura popular* was completely opened up to capitalist exploitation, the maracatu groups are still subject to the fluctuations of political dynasties. During the months leading up to the election of 2010, cultural events essentially dried up as the faucet of public spending was halted or redirected during campaign season. This also happened to be the period when relationships became strained within Estrela Brilhante, although they fared better than most in keeping a relatively busy agenda during the year in spite of the awkward public funding situation.

As already described, Estrela Brilhante's troubles as an organization largely originated from internal tensions involving a multitude of nuances including personal histories, kinship ties, and economic conditions. The degree to which their engagement with productions and performance opportunities outside the carnival cycle may have contributed to those tensions would be difficult to surmise. Some of the public presentations described in this dissertation that were arranged through intermediaries took place on weekdays during daytime hours, when many in the core directorate were unavailable. In spite of the frequent praise and acknowledgements of Barachinha's work on behalf of the group, perhaps there were some resentments building about the degree to which his personal prestige and honor was growing with "outside" audiences, while others continued working long hours at jobs that kept them out of the spotlight. What is certain is that after Barachinha's departure, there was not anyone within the group itself who was adept at dealing with the intermediaries of "cultural producers" and actively seeking out performance opportunities.

The 2011-2012 cycle: uncertainty and division

Barachinha departs

Only a few weeks after the 2011 carnival came to a close, Barachinha announced that he would be leaving Estrela Brilhante after nine years as their mestre. Although anticipated, the news still came as a jolt to the maracatu community. He announced it at a private meeting of a few of the principal members, going to great pains to express his respect for everyone in the maracatu and pledge that he would continue to support them. He left the question of whether he would take up singing with another group open-ended, indicating that perhaps he wanted to take a break from

performing, but leaving things ambiguous. He expressed that he hoped everyone there would stay with the group and continue to make Estrela Brilhante one of the most respected maracatus in the region.

Barachinha was anticipating a crucial issue that was likely on the mind of most of the directorate. How many members would leave the group when they learned he was no longer singing with them? Would others follow him to a new maracatu? In the many conversations I had during that time, many people seemed conflicted in their loyalties. Some of the younger members who had played with Estrela for most or all of their own experience in maracatu confessed that they had no desire to switch to a new group, but that the thought of continuing without Mestre Barachinha was unappealing enough that they considered giving it up entirely. By the end of my third carnival in Nazaré, I would learn that such sentiments of wanting to hang up one's *gola* for good or for an indeterminate hiatus was a common feeling after carnival, regardless of personnel changes. I also learned that in the majority of cases, when the next carnival came around, those same individuals would be back at it preparing their costumes and slowly getting enthusiastic again.

But this time was different. Estrela Brilhante had gained many members largely on the fame of Barachinha as a poet and a figure in the community who inspired others. Several of the well-established maracatus in the region courted him to be their mestre, and there was much speculation over his next move. Within a few months, he had joined a lesser-known maracatu in another town, Maracatu Leão Mimoso of Upatininga. During the winter of 2011 they began planning for the coming carnival cycle. A sambada was scheduled with Mestre Zé Flor of Maracatu Águia, with whom a rivalry had developed after contentious, racially-pejorative “joking” was directed at Barachinha during their last sambada in 2009.

Barachinha followed through on his promise to continue supporting Estrela Brilhante. He worked with diretor Biu Rosi on planning their costumes and made trips with him to Recife for materials and supplies. He also helped in constructing a building for Estrela's headquarters in the backyard of his father's house. In spite of its renown, Estrela had been operating out of a converted garage, with costumes and supplies piled in chaotic, neck-high mounds while other maracatus had designated spaces that were luxurious by comparison. The new headquarters was to be a simple two-room space with a concrete floor and exposed brick walls, providing considerably more room for the construction of costumes and a place to store them. The impression was that Estrela was confronting some of its organizational issues and seeking to tighten up its operation.

Leão Mimoso held its first ensaio rehearsal with Barachinha in August. It turned out to be a momentous, celebratory occasion, with one of the longest, most elaborate *manobras* I have ever witnessed. There were also more invited mestres called up to the microphone than most rehearsals I have attended. Many of Barachinha's peers and colleagues went out of their way to put in an appearance. However, the ensaio was also in the period when "silence laws" began to be haphazardly enforced in the smaller towns and municípios, and so it was known ahead of time that the rehearsal would be forced to end at 2 a.m. As such, the rotation of visiting mestres seemed extremely organized for an open rehearsal, with each mestre singing no more than twenty or thirty minutes. There was a show of support by some of Estrela Brilhante's directorate making the trek to Upatininga to be present, but there were others who were conspicuous by their absence.

At the end of September, in the weeks leading up to Barachinha's sambada with Zé Flor, the patriarch of the Maracatu Estrela Brilhante, José Porfiro de França, passed away. I found out as Barachinha arrived at my door to personally deliver the news. He handed me a small card with his father's photo, date of birth and death, and the announcement of his funeral. In somewhat

typical fashion, Barachinha dealt with this major loss by mobilizing himself into action: having an announcement printed up and walking the streets of Nazaré, hand delivering it to everyone who knew his family. The funeral had a stateliness to it that seemed like that usually reserved for political figures or priests. Several hours beforehand, people began arriving at his father's home to see him lying in state. By the time the procession was ready to begin, there were hundreds of people in the street. As with funerals in many parts in the world, the ambiance was a mixture of grief and conviviality, as people conversed both about the departed and about other subjects and happenings in the community. Gossip about maracatu and plans for future events were discussed. Remembrances of José Porfiro and all he had done for Estrela Brilhante during its first decade were expressed alongside the sincere sentiment that at least now his suffering was at an end. The funeral procession proceeded on foot, the casket carried down the middle of the streets, three kilometers to the cemetery. José's widow, Maria, who was elderly and somewhat unwell, did not accompany the procession. It picked up additional mourners as it passed, and by the time it reached the chapel there seemed to be at least a thousand people in the streets trailing behind the pallbearers.

Many did not enter the small courtyard near the section of the crowded cemetery where he was to be buried, but stayed on the street outside as it took place. There was not much ceremony beyond some prayers said before laying the first handfuls of earth over his casket. Even as the burial was occurring, there was conversation about maracatu among the attendees further down the hill. People asked each other: would Barachinha carry on with the sambada that was marked in only a few weeks' time? The rumors were that his new maracatu, Leão Mimoso, had offered to pull out of the event in respect for his loss, but Barachinha would hear none of it. The rumors proved true, as Barachinha stated that his father would have wanted it to continue as planned. Yet

another question was in the thoughts of many of us: was Barachinha actually in the right state of mind for a sambada? These events are physically and mentally demanding, and many mestres spend weeks preparing themselves. Much like carnival, there is a feeling of exposure and vulnerability to the eyes and ears of the world, an existential liminality for which caboclos de lança and mestres alike often seek protection from a mãe or pai de santo, or a house of catimbó or jurema. Barachinha was not known to frequent such places, at least not at this time in his life, but surely sought protection in his own way. Perhaps he would pray to the spirit of the Franciscan friar revered in folk Catholicism by many rural Pernambucans, Frei Damião, whose framed portrait hung in his father's front room, or make an oration to the spirits of the caboclos and ancestors who presided over a maracatu.

Although it would be romantic to say that Barachinha sang better than he ever had, it would be untrue – it was probably an average performance for him. He stayed focused and did not falter, even when his opponent Zé Flor pulled the unexpected move of singing commentary about his recently deceased father, accusing Barachinha of having caused his illness to worsen through wrong living and by deserting his maracatu for another. It was in such poor taste and so poorly received that it was difficult to take seriously, but surely it also stung. Not long after, Zé Flor took up the racist imagery he had engaged in during his 2009, in spite of how deftly Barachinha had turned the tables on him during that sambada. He did the same in 2011, making Zé Flor look the ignorant fool for expressing outmoded clichés in a modern Brazil. As the sun rose, Zé Flor was the first person to switch to the four-line *marcha* mode of rhyming, the signal that they have essentially ceded victory to their opponent.

Estrela Brilhante enters a new era

As the next carnival approached, a tremendous amount of uncertainty still surrounded Estrela Brilhante. Several members had in fact followed Barachinha to Leão Mimoso. My friends in Estrela wanted reassurance that I would be spending carnival with them. Aside from Barachinha and Cabeça, I did not really know anyone in the town of Upatininga, and Nazaré was my field site. In addition, Estrela had contracted a very good mestre in Veronildo, who like Barachinha was also a cousin of Mestre João Paulo. He had most recently been singing with the group Leão Formoso, one of the oldest in the city. His contra-mestre was to be Narciso, who had been singing with João Paulo for several years. I would be surrounded by familiar faces during the 2012 carnival if I stayed with them.

A gap in leadership after Barachinha's departure was nevertheless apparent. In the past, Barachinha was always near the headquarters to attend to matters, the doors were frequently open to the street and accepting of visitors, and artisanal production carried on throughout the week. Now, most of the directorate – including the new president, Biu Porfiro (brother of Barachinha) – worked jobs that took them outside the city for extended periods. Several of them were truck drivers and were only seen around the *sede* on the weekends. The construction of the new *sede* in the backyard of the house meant that that the normal business of the maracatu had to be put on hold for a period, although the project was finished remarkably fast given that it was being done solely during weekend spare time.

Alliances and friendship with other maracatus suffered during the 2011-12 cycle. The new leadership failed to send “delegates” to support the events of the groups who had always reciprocated, and there was a weakening of the ties of solidarity between these groups. Those other maracatus still sent their regular emissaries to Estrela's first open rehearsal with Veronildo,

but a few of them seemed somewhat aloof from the festivities. Barachinha was also there, and had once again made it a point to promote the ensaio of his former maracatu in which he had invested so much of himself. As in all such rehearsals, any mestre in attendance was called upon to sing for a while. Barachinha took this opportunity to sing verses complimenting Veronildo and his former comrades, but limited his time at the microphone, conscious of not wanting to detract attention from his successor.

This carnival would be my last as a resident of Nazaré da Mata, and it seemed like a good time to wrap things up. As I became more aware of the transition ahead, I began spending more time with the close friends I had made there and less time pursuing every move of one particular group. Although I had pledged myself to spending carnival with Estrela rather than following Barachinha, there was no longer the same affective connection. Several members had in fact left for other maracatus, but many who had contemplated leaving ended up staying. The most loyal and stalwart members may well have been the youngest: Barachinha's son Carlinhos and all of his friends had told me early in the year that they would be staying with Estrela in spite of the changes. And there they were, working in the *sede* behind Carlinhos' grandparents' house, or just hanging around, watching, occasionally cracking jokes. Estrela Brilhante was their family and their neighborhood maracatu.

When carnival was directly upon us, there was doubt about whether or not Estrela would be skipping the *chegada* again. The same performance in Recife's Brasília Teimosa that had been thrust upon the group by the Association in 2011 was once again being "offered" to them. Biu Porfiro (now president of the maracatu) felt strongly that Estrela needed to hold their ceremonial *chegada* in the neighborhood, but there was resistance from other members of the directorate who felt the performance money was necessary. Ronaldo suggested to Biu that they could try to begin

the chegada earlier than usual, allowing enough time to still make the Recife performance. Biu seemed hesitant, and others balked at the idea, knowing as they did how time-consuming it was to round everyone upon the two buses, with an additional truck to haul some of the equipment. But as late as the Friday of that weekend, Biu was still saying that he wanted to pass on the Recife performance in favor of their chegada.

In Nazaré, carnival does not traditionally begin until Sunday morning, although there are *blocos* in the streets and bands playing on Saturday of Zé Pereira (the eve of carnival). Frustrated by tension and indecision regarding the chegada, I went to Recife on that Friday night, where carnival would already be kicking off. I returned Saturday evening, still hopeful that a chegada might happen. On Sunday morning, it was certain: there would be no chegada for Estrela Brilhante that year. I called Mestre João Paulo of Maracatu Leão Misterioso and asked if I could come to their chegada and spend the day with them. I packed up my microphones and camera and hiked from my house to their headquarters next to the bar of Seu Luiz. I stopped by Estrela Brilhante's *sede* to inform them of my change of plans, explaining that I needed to see this ceremony once more before ending my research in Nazaré. The directors seemed caught off guard, having assumed that I would be going along for their afternoon guard performance in Recife. Other members, however, seemed irritated as well that they were skipping this ritual and encouraged me that they would do the same if they could.

Leão Misterioso's headquarters were almost a stereotypical picture of carnival chaos. At times nobody seemed to be in charge, although the directors did their best to get things organized. João Paulo himself did not arrive until quite late, and the sound system arrived last of all, causing even further delay. It was nearly 3 o'clock in the afternoon before the chegada truly began, with each *caboclo de lança* being called down from the other end of the street to perform their dance.

Due to the late start, the sun had already set by the time chegada came to an end, the final manobra being performed in near darkness.

The following morning I joined Estrela Brilhante just as they were in the queue to present at Nazaré's stage, only a short walk from where I lived. I realized that I had drawn upon my privilege as an insider/outsider to move between the boundaries of groups in a way that maracatu participants cannot do in the middle of a carnival. And they realized for the first time, I think, that I really would be going back to my country at last.

Somewhat surprisingly, after the lunch break Estrela returned to Nazaré and circulated through the neighborhood for a short time. Back on the road, the new director Beronice would manage to maintain order and peace on the women's bus that year, although she sometimes struggled to wrangle everyone together during the transitions between breaks and performances. That year's performances reflected a group rebuilding itself from a solid core. Veronildo filled the space left by Barachinha quite well, staying true to his own style and eliciting compliments from the doubtful, but he kept mostly to himself when not on stage.

The Recife competition went well enough to maintain Estrela's ranking in the "first group," but not good enough to get them first prize and back on their way to the "special group" categorization. When carnival was over, Biu Rosi resigned from the directorate, citing his recent heart problems as the main reason but telling me later that he didn't like the way things had been run that year. When it came time for discussing plans for the next year's cycle, after I had already returned to the United States, there were further changes. First Veronildo and then Narciso had contentious arguments with the directorate and quit. Ronaldo, who told me he had only stayed in Estrela because Barachinha had personally asked him to do so for at least one carnival after his departure, handed in his resignation. My percussionist friend Lilo began a full-time job in Recife

and spent a carnival away from maracatu; his grandfather Heleno spent a year in the band for João Paulo's Leão Misterioso. The group found a new poet in the young and untested Mestre Bi, who has proven to be a prodigious talent with an outgoing and humble manner. In carnival of 2013 they won first place in their category again, putting them back in the elite "special category" in the Recife's hierarchy of culture.

After three carnivals with the group, I felt that I understood a little more of the dedication and passion required to continue this serious *brincadeira* year after year, as well as the challenges that could sometimes bring a maracatu to the brink of collapse. The trajectory followed by Estrela Brilhante during that time demonstrated how maracatus could make use of institutional support for their own purposes as well as the shortcomings and failures of being closely embedded in the system of Pernambuco's cultural programming. Certainly maracatu had traveled a long distance from the days of the engenhos when groups would walk the back roads from settlement to settlement. This professionalization is a fact about which maracatuzeiros are sometimes proud and sometimes regretful. For all the exhilaration of the performances, for all the spectacle of appearing in lighted plazas and singing from stages, carnival often seemed to me as something oriented outward towards others, and away from the communities that sustained the maracatus throughout the year in ways more profound than economic incentives. The pressures toward growth, expansion, and folkloric spectacle for tourists are putting maracatus in a predicament where they are complicit in the loss of their own traditions by accommodating the public/private institutions that claim to preserve it.

Although carnival is undoubtedly a source of inspiration and joy for most participants in maracatu, the contemporary experience also reflects a profound routinization and even banalization. This was expressed to me in a very matter-of-fact and offhand way by Heleno over

lunch at his house one day. He was telling me about how, in “the time of the *engenhos*,” if a person wanted to play at carnival then they were required to make their own costumes. Now people who have never been part of a given group will approach a maracatu and announce they would like to *brincar* that year with only weeks to spare, and in accommodation of the demand for ever larger and more eye-catching presentations, a business-savvy group will always have extra an extra costume (or *arrumação*). A caboclo without his own *arrumação* is paid less than one who makes his own, so a maracatu can take advantage of the opportunity to increase its numbers by investing in extra costumes.

“And another thing,” he said, “In those days you made your *gola* totally hidden away from everyone. You might tell this or that person that it was coming along well, but you never gave your secrets away to anybody. Nobody would see it until Sunday of carnival. But now, with all these presentations the whole year long – every day is carnival.”

Conclusion:

Cultural Coronelismo and the Quiet Resistance of Song

Many of the arguments and material presented in these chapters are encapsulated in the following two scenarios, situations that involve the manipulation and reification of *cultura popular*, the repression of maracatu's core practices in accordance with a civilizing discourse, and the difficulties faced in mobilizing against that repression. In both scenarios, the conquests of maracatu – as a way to remember histories, a form of expression, and an identity – are in tension with the limits to its practitioners' agency in the broader context of regional networks of politics and patronage. But for all the similarities, the elite's treatment of *cultura popular* in both scenes is as different as night and day.

Daytime: The ground troops of culture

One June morning in 2010 I received a phone call from Barachinha informing me that Estrela was traveling to Recife to perform. He invited me to come along, telling me to meet them in an hour in the main plaza here a bus would be waiting. "What is the event?" I asked him.

"I don't know exactly. Some sort of FUNDARPE thing. The Association called and said they needed a couple of groups to go and asked if we were available." He told me that at least two other maracatus were bringing people from Tracunhaém and Aliança. Soon I was on the bus with my recording equipment and talking to Thony, who had left Estrela over a year before but was close friends with Barachinha and always willing to help out. Besides, everyone would get paid.

I asked him if he knew what the event was all about and he answered no, he had only received a call from Barachinha saying they needed twenty caboclos. Contracted presentations often work this way, separate from the alliances, loyalties, or rivalries that exist during carnaval or sambadas. A director of the maracatu is contacted by an interested party – most frequently the Association, although there are now several “cultural producers” and entrepreneurs fulfilling this role - who act as brokers, at which time certain specifics are agreed upon: how many bodies they need for the performance, what time they should arrive, and the payment. The maracatu directors then begin the process of contacting their membership to see who is available.

I asked Thony, who likes to stay caught up on the news, if he had heard anything about the recent scandals involving FUNDARPE that had been all over the newspapers in recent weeks. He had not. I decided that now was not the time to go into it and we would talk about it sometime later, at his house. The controversies revolved around billing irregularities and accusations of systemic corruption at the state arts funding agency, with details familiar to any student of Brazilian history and its clientelistic politics. There were alleged instances of production companies contracted by FUNDARPE that were in truth “ghost corporations,” *empresas fantasmas* that existed only on paper, often using a surreptitiously rented address from a small shop or lottery ticket seller where someone might stop by once a month and collect their fictitious mail. Millions of *reais* has been paid to a handful of event production companies operated by the same people.¹ Four different groups who never actually performed at particular festivals appeared to have been issued sizeable payments. The scandals erupted during an election year, at a time when there was already a groundswell of public criticism and frustration from the professional “artistic class” about their dealings with the agency, in particular payments delayed as long as a

¹ An alleged \$62,600,000 was paid out between 2007-2010 to sixteen different production companies operated by the same two groups of individuals.

year after a performance. The first headlines began to appear in the second week of May, and continued on an almost daily basis in both the major newspapers into July.²

The leadership of FUNDARPE initially claimed they were the victims of a witch-hunt initiated by the political opposition and denounced the claims as groundless. The corruption accusations against FUNDARPE were of course politically motivated, as the politicians responsible for calling for an official investigation were opponents of the governing coalition, yet this does not invalidate the merit or seriousness of their accusations. The agency's response – particularly the statements given in radio interviews of then-director Luciana Azevedo, who was eventually forced to resign in disgrace – amounted to variations of *ad hominem* attacks on the opposition without addressing the gravity of the accusations.³ As evidence mounted, they eventually acknowledged irregularities but explained them away as simply an accounting problem, claiming they had inherited the irregularities from the previous government, and promised to exercise greater oversight over its contractors. The organization had in fact been investigated multiple times since 1999, but ultimately without any consequences. Promises were not enough for the opposition, who threatened judicial action and called for reform at the state legislative assembly. In addition to the aforementioned resignation of its president, new regulatory laws were passed to provide more oversight in the contracting of artists and production companies.

Within this drama, working artists were being compelled to pick a side. While established musical artists were willing to make outspoken statements on social media, offering their own criticisms and observations that appeared to corroborate the evidence of corruption, they had the luxury of being able to do so from the safe buffer zone of careers with a degree of autonomy. Less-

² This daily coverage was in the *Diário de Pernambuco* and the *Jornal do Commercio* of Recife. The story was also covered in the *Folha de Pernambuco*.

³ June 10, 2010, *Jornal do Commercio*, Recife. “Desabafo deixa Palácio incomodado.”

established or financially-secure artists, especially those relegated to the “artisan” slots in *cultura popular*, could not afford to jeopardize their relationships with such an important source of funding. Although I encountered several people in Nazaré who knew about the scandals, none seemed surprised by them, nor especially concerned about their veracity or their implications.

On the bus, we learned that the maracatus would be converging on the newly-renovated São Luiz Cinema, downtown Recife’s only independent cinema that had fallen into decadence and spent several years with its doors shuttered. A grand reopening was scheduled for the following month, and I speculated that perhaps the maracatu groups had been contracted to provide some folkloric color to a commemoration for an important event. My guess was partially correct.

Folkloric color was in fact the purpose, but the location of the São Luiz Cinema was mostly coincidental. The bus parked down Rua da Aurora, far past the Princess Isabel Bridge where the street is broader and the traffic less intense. The group dismounted and collected their costumes and instruments, and we made our way up the street towards the more congested area where the cinema is located. On our way we passed another parked bus with maracatuzeiros from other towns, and people greeted and joked with each other. Out of another caravan of buses spilled people dressed in the leather coats and triangular hats worn by the *cangaceiro* bandits of the backlands during the first third of the twentieth century. As we approached our destination, I could see that maracatu was only one of many genres of cultural expression that had been called to this event, from all over the state of Pernambuco. Apparently the occasion was ostensibly to announce the official creation (*editais*) of hundreds of new Pontos de Cultura across the state.

The groups congregated around the sidewalk in front of the theater and in the spacious lobby, with reporters and photographers from local newspapers and TV channels being shepherded around by smartly-dressed women and men who seemed to be the event organizers. I also noticed



Figure 25: Coercion and culture – A staged photo-op by FUNDARPE of a caboclo de lança showing his “support.” June 5, 2010, Jornal do Commercio, Recife

other urbanites circulating among the folklore groups with clipboards, asking people to sign their name to some sort of document. I picked up a flier from one of them, and it turned out to be a “manifesto” from FUNDARPE. The following day, I would open one of Recife’s newspapers to the arts section and see a photo of a young man adorned in the sequined *gola* of a *caboclo de lança* and glittering headdress framing his face like a lion’s mane, intent upon a petition that he was signing. The photo referenced the full story inside, describing the day as an “Action in defense of Luciana Azevedo and Fundarpe.”⁴ I do not know the man in the photo, but I find it likely that – like most of my friends in Nazaré - he had not been overly preoccupied with the scandals involving FUNDARPE until that day. Perhaps he had not even heard anything about them until having the

⁴ And see also Jornal do Commercio, Recife, June 5, 2010. “Ato em defesa de Luciana Azevedo no caso Fundarpe.”

situation “explained” to him by a FUNDARPE representative thrusting a clipboard into his hands. In time, we were herded into seats in the theater, forced to listen to a succession of tedious speeches made by FUNDARPE functionaries and administrators about how important it was that everyone had shown up to “defend culture.”

This unapologetic, barefaced manipulation is reminiscent of rural *coroneis* transporting peasants to the polling stations, buying their votes in exchange for a pair of shoes or an afternoon’s worth of liquor. A staged photographic moment, represented as grassroots support for a state agency, demonstrates in a profound way how the cumulative effects of many years of patronage leave maracatuzeiros not just unwilling but literally unable to openly question or criticize the policies and practices of their “benefactors.” They are burdened with an inability to air their grievances not only in a public space, but even among friends in a mixed social setting. I have observed that the willingness to make observations about irregularities or question the motives or profits of “cultural producers” is directly proportional to how much a given individual is invested in the system of patronage. The more tied into the material and social benefits of that network, the more cautious and uncomfortable they are to risk saying anything remotely unflattering that might find its way back to the ears of their patrons. This is compounded by the sentiments of competition, envy, and suspicion fostered by cultural programs that dispense resources in a personalistic way – cultivating motivations of personal gain rather than the collective ethos espoused by official cultural programming discourse. The fear that unflattering or critical words might have punitive consequences presumes that there are individuals in the community with “loose lips,” which in turn implies that a given individual might have enemies seeking to redirect his patronage onto themselves by currying favor with their “master.” These dynamics combine the most nefarious elements of a traditional clientalistic politics with a surveillance state trading on secrets, in place

since the regime of Getulio Vargas when a great many of the institutions of modern Brazil were created, including the predecessor of the Ministry of Culture - the Ministry of Education and Culture, founded in 1953.⁵

When I attempted to discuss the scandals with Barachinha privately, he was taciturn and shrugged off the allegations, essentially repeating the “party line” about a political scandal hatched by the opposition party. Yet Barachinha was at that time unwilling to discuss – at least with a foreign friend who had a tendency to write such things down - that FUNDARPE was exercising their institutional power in an exploitative fashion at a time of crisis. When faced with scandalous allegations, FUNDARPE began to call in favors that emanated in capillary fashion from the leadership and through clearly hierarchical relationships. Powerful figures in the arts programming and event production sectors were called upon by their bosses to mobilize their “clients” in support of FUNDARPE’s agenda in promoting the image of an embattled humanitarian agency. Those figures called upon their “chiefs” in the local communities of cultura popular, such as Manoel Salustiano, relying on his domination of the Maracatu Association and capability to mobilize as many of his “troops” as he could muster to come out and show their support for the cause. Those at the end of the chain like Barachinha and the directors of other maracatus would refuse such a request at their own peril, with the potential forfeit of future contracts always present as a threat. And so the ground troops of culture board the bus and descend on the capital, marching in an army with other “folkloric” groups and interrupting midday traffic with an out-of-season

⁵ This ministry had in turn been created out of an earlier Estado Novo one, the Ministry of Education and Health in 1937.

carnival parade that ended at the Legislative Assembly, where the “manifesto” circulated earlier in the day was read out loud in a volume pitched to the television cameras.

Nighttime: Silencing the ensaios and sambadas, 2011-2014

During the carnival cycle of 2011, the core maracatu practices of *ensaios* and *sambadas* began to be jeopardized in a dramatic way by the scattershot enforcement of new laws purporting to promote “public security,” which purportedly required local authorities to close down these events at 2 a.m. in the small towns and cities where maracatuzeiros have been holding them for decades without incident. The first *ensaio* effected by these laws was in the town of Glória do Goitá,⁶ held by Maracatu Gavião da Mata. The second was for Maracatu Estrela Dourada of Buenos Aires. In the first instance the directorate was aware of the new law and informed all their members. Compliance was enforced by the maracatu itself. However like all *ensaios* I attended, the evening still did not begin until well after nine o’clock, leaving very little time before it was called to a close. In the second *ensaio* director José Modesto claimed that his paperwork was all in order and that he had not be informed of any changes in the town’s regulations, which had only recently changed. The night came to an awkward and tense pause as José took the microphone from the mestre to announce that the directors were being forced to end early, and fulminating against the contradictory treatment when their maracatu was respected enough to have even received a vacant plot of land from the mayor for their headquarters. This was followed by singer

⁶ Town of approximatley 30,000 people, southwest of Nazaré da Mata, and birthplace of the early twentieth-century dragqueen Madame Satã.

Maciel Salu⁷, also taking the microphone and vigorously denouncing the police action as unjust and discriminatory. After some negotiations with officers, who at least kept themselves unobtrusively on the periphery of the event, a compromise was reached that the ensaio could continue until 4 a.m. This was ostensibly because the law was new and still unknown to many people, but one suspects that the exhortations of Maciel, a nationally-recognized recording artist and regional celebrity, may have influenced the police decision to back off.

The rationale given for this new repression of maracatu was public safety and an arbitrary silence law. In the three years I spent attending maracatu events in the Mata Norte region, the number of violent altercations was remarkably miniscule, especially for open, public events. On only one occasion was there any violence directly involving two maracatus groups in conflict with one another.⁸ Maracatuzeiros typically take preventative measures to prevent a conflict from escalating into a fight, with directors or other persons known to the community stepping in to separate individuals before things go wrong. The maracatu community is remarkably effective at policing itself, and treats visitors and outsiders with the same courtesy extended to houseguests, often taking special care that they are not hassled by any especially inebriated members of the community. By forcing events to end prematurely, many people were left to their own luck as they made their way down poorly-lit streets in the middle of the night, easy prey for robberies.

What might appear to outsiders as “spontaneous,” ludic expressions of a quaint regional culture are actually products of a tremendous amount of planning, organization, and artistic sophistication within the maracatu communities, the result of many generations’ worth of

⁷ Although Maciel is a member of the influential family of *cultura popular* patriarch Mestre Manoel Salustiano, he rarely relies upon this to enrich his prestige and has built a strong identity based around a career as figure in Recife’s vibrant independent music scene.

⁸ This was the fight between Estrela Brilhante and Cambidinha Brasileira described in chapter five, which (as explained there) happened to be the one Estrela Brilhante event at which I was absent during the period of fieldwork.

collective experience and historical struggle. The directorates of the groups are adept at juggling the bureaucratic requirements for holding their events, in addition to paying their musicians, doing their own publicity, and securing the support of local entrepreneurs like bar owners or small businesses who might contribute with donations. However, a sizeable percentage of the leadership (age forty and older) remain semi- or non-literate, and the navigation of bureaucracy and paperwork always presents headaches. The imposition of these new, poorly-defined regulations seemed both unnecessary and contradictory in light of the increased prestige of the art form and the attention and income it has brought to these small towns and cities.

When these problems began, nearly everyone seemed to think they would never reach Nazaré da Mata, the Land of Maracatu. And indeed the city seems to have been the last municipality to fall. It was over a year since those first closures, during the months leading up to 2012 carnival, that police began enforcing a 2 a.m. curfew there as well. At Estrela Brilhante's rehearsal that year, nobody seemed quite certain whether they would have to end early or not. Some seemed to think that their patron, Siba, would be able to help them talk their way out of it, in the traditional way of *jeito* or favors in Brazil. On that evening there was a torrential downfall typical of the summer season that considerably thinned out the crowd. When the police did arrive to close the rehearsal, the directorate decided it was not worth challenging the order. Most of us went home, tired and wet. Later I learned that at least one São Paulo tourist had ended up sleeping on the floor of the Estrela's headquarters after the event was shut down because bus service back to Recife does not begin until seven.

When this scenario repeated itself in 2014, it marked a turning point of sorts. Siba once again had to act as a mediator with the police, and in the end posting an open letter describing the situation in what would become a combination of online activism and community organization

work with Barachinha and other maracatuzeiros. He described the quandary of having to argue with police by showing them that their documentation was perfectly in order, only to be told that the police were acting on orders from higher up. Estrela Brilhante's rehearsal was allowed to continue after this night-long negotiation. Similar to the Estrela Dourada rehearsal two years earlier, it was most likely influenced by Siba's status as a public figure, a person of light skin, and a member of Brazil's "artistic class" in an extremely class-conscious society. He noted in his social media post that most of the other less famous maracatus in the area have not been so lucky with the closures of rehearsals. None of the older veterans of these maracatu groups, whose memories reach back to the 1960s, recall any similar prohibitions ever being imposed. Significantly, in contrast to these neighborhood events driven by the maracatuzeiros themselves, maracatu productions sponsored by the local mayors or by "cultural projects" with state or federal backing seem curiously immune to these silence laws.

Maracatuzeiros often play upon the imagery of the fierce warrior represented in the mysterious caboclo de lança figure, their most prominent and visually-striking symbol during carnival. With their massive headdresses, lances measuring two meters and adorned with hundreds of strips of cloth, and cloaks adorned with thousands of sequins in ornate patterns and designs - all of it made with their own hands over the course of many months in the long lead up to carnival - they remain the most visually-striking icon of the art form. Legends about rival groups battling each other on the dirt roads traversing the sugar plantations form part of maracatu's internal mythos, surviving separately from any issues about their empirical truth or exaggeration. But for all the ferocity on display in the colorful imagery and frantic music of maracatu, in practice their gatherings today are sociable ones where entire families are often seen together. In the troubling

and condescending language found in most of the scant literature on rural maracatu, the tradition has been “domesticated.”

These scenarios of repression played out with increased frequency since the first of these new “security” laws began proliferating in 2011, an unintended consequence of the Pacto Pela Vida (Pact For Life) enacted by Campos to combat violence, a program that has garnered his administration the “good governance award” from the Inter-American Development Bank. The dramatic example which precipitated a formal complaint and public hearing in Recife in February of 2014 occurred in Nazaré da Mata during a rehearsal commemorating 96 years of the group Maracatu Cambinda Brasileira. One of the last maracatus to still hold events at its original location on an old sugar plantation, the celebration was several miles from the city center but still in the municipal limits. With an outsized police presence descending on the festivities, they were forced to end early in spite of having all of their paperwork in order. In plain view of the many journalists, photographers, and tourists in attendance at this location that - it should be noted - also hosts a Ponto de Cultura, the police still shut down the festivities.

At the public hearing held February 14 in Recife, maracatuzeiros and their allies in Recife’s artistic community presented their grievances to officials from the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Military Police, who predictably denied any discrimination or persecution.⁹ The officials argued that their interests were solely about public safety, order, and sanitation.¹⁰ They dissimulated and deflected accountability in accordance with their own tradition – that of bureaucracy. During the course of the hearing, it became evident that Cambinda Brasileira had

⁹ My account of these meeting, which took place after the conclusion of my fieldwork, is based on an audio recording of the entire proceeding provided to me to those who organized it.

¹⁰ Given the number of times it was mentioned during the meeting, this seeming obsession over salting the earth with Port-A-Johns seems slightly ironic in a place where public events are not exactly famous for their cleanliness in the first place.

been asked to sign an authorization document that differed drastically from the usual format to which they were accustomed. The new form, signed without the maracatu being aware of its full contents and ramifications, stipulated that they were asking authorization for an event in excess of 3,000 people – a number filled in by the attending police officer - and would need to terminate at 2 a.m. In actuality the event had an estimated 500 attendees.

The coordinator of a project to gain protected status for maracatu as immaterial patrimony with the Institute of Historical and Artistic National Patrimony (or IPHAN) talked about the need for dialogue and the potential consequences of the misapplication of security laws for *cultura popular* in the state.¹¹ Siba emphasized that “maracatu should not be treated as a police matter. Maracatu is a tool of civilization; it is a positive force in society.” The lawyer who was preparing an official grievance (*denúncia*) with the Ministério Público waited until all the public officials had presented their points of view, and then spoke forcefully that there was no legal basis for classifying these gatherings in the same category as large events. She argued that what was happening was clearly discriminatory, racist, and illegal: nobody sees the police shutting down large gatherings held by the wealthy, and the police actions are consistent with the legacy of unequal treatment left in place by an aristocratic slave-holding regime. No deaths have been attributed to any maracatu event, yet the authorities’ constant reference to the “Pact For Life” program serves as justification for their arbitrary and erroneous application of the law.¹²

It seemed that Pernambuco, and perhaps Brazil more generally, is in the curious position of rhetorically promoting the diversity and social inclusion of its artistic heritage while continuing to persecute and exclude many of the people who create it. One half of the Janus-faced state believes in celebrating the art while the other is busy repressing the artist. In the months following

¹¹ Maria Alice Amorim, also the author of several works referenced in this dissertation

¹² Summary of statement by Liana Cirne Lins, February 14, 2014.

that February meeting the city of Nazaré da Mata, which has the highest concentration of rural maracatu groups, passed an ordinance permitting their events to continue uninterrupted. However, the complaints about police shutdowns had been reported from thirty-two different municipalities in Pernambuco.

At one of the several meetings with government officials, the maracatu contingent asked Barachinha to speak. He went to the microphone somewhat reluctantly and told the following anecdote which received a vigorous ovation:

My son is sixteen years old and plays as a *caboclo de lança*. He began as a caboclo when he was only two. One carnival, as he was going door to door asking for tips (*o dinheiro do caboclo*), a woman asked him, “What are you going to buy with this money, caboclo?” And he responded, “A toy police car,” with no way of knowing that someday it would be the police shutting down the *ensaios* and *sambadas*.

In October of 2014, the Public Prosecutor’s Office passed a resolution allowing the maracatus to continue their traditional night-long Saturday activities without interference. It is unlikely that this would have occurred without the interventions of individuals based in Recife’s “artistic class” who mobilized maracatuzeiros from Nazaré, Tracunhaém, Buenos Aires and other towns to attend meetings with the government and police representatives. This is in itself an unsurprising observation. What is more remarkable is the degree to which the institutions purporting to support, protect, and defend tradition and *cultura popular* – FUNDARPE and the Maracatu Association of Pernambuco – were absent from the process. Both had representatives at the initial public hearing, but when it became a legal matter involving a formal complaint against the Public Prosecutor, both organizations retreated and remained silent. This is reflective of the extent to which they are indebted by political favors and patronage that curtails any likelihood they will speak out or take action against policies that negatively affect people further down in the cultural hierarchy. These institutions have rather brazenly turned their backs on some of the very

groups they ostensibly purport to represent, and upon whom they rely when they need to make a show of public support.

This assertion could feed into the frequent posture of hands-tied helplessness struck by representatives of these agencies: the response “it’s complicated” was the most frequent – and often the only – that I received when bringing up the subject of the silence laws in 2011 to figures in the Association. The Association’s leadership continued familiar rhetoric in their monthly meetings about needing to “defend the tradition of the *sambada de terreiro*” for a time, but the organization took no action. This is at least partially because the repressive policies restricting maracatu as a participatory, local tradition indirectly benefits their own interests and helps to explain their inertia. A decrease in neighborhood *ensaios* and *sambadas* leads to more frequent, larger, more capital-intensive mega-events sponsored by FUNDARPE and the Association, as the maracatus have less freedom to continue their traditions and are concentrated in the sanctioned spaces controlled by “cultural producers.”

A few of the maracatuzeiros and artists who mobilized and vocally criticized the new policies were chastised by Manoelzinho, president of the Association ever since his father Mestre Salu passed away, for publicly giving the impression that nothing was being done about the situation. It is difficult to see how these critics could be wrong: the Association had known about the repressive measures against the maracatus since 2011, and yet had no plan for addressing the issue and seemingly no desire to do so. Owners of maracatus repeatedly brought up the situation as a very serious grievance at the monthly meetings and were rebuffed. Several of the maracatuzeiros and artists that had been mobilizing and vocally criticizing the repressive policies since the February meeting felt themselves to be at the receiving end of a blacklist in the aftermath, excluded from the usual sponsored events and performance opportunities. There is, of course, no

reliable way of substantiating that this type of indirect retaliation is happening, which is part of what makes it such an effective tactic for repressing dissent.

With the legal victory gained after the mobilization against the Public Prosecutor's office, the maracatus have won a respite from this process of being herded into controlled spaces for sponsored spectacularization, a process that could ultimately result in maracatu being reduced to folklore produced for tourists. The degree to which the maracatus themselves continue to depend on the patronage of state actors and the projects launched under the public-private aegis of cultural programming, however, leaves the groups vulnerable to similar episodes in the future. They were not long in coming: in the weeks leading up to the carnival of 2015 the public prosecutor of Nazaré began issuing mandates for the coming year, stating that although the maracatus were now free to continue their events until dawn, they will be required to make provisions for chemical toilets, security, and an on-site ambulance.¹³ Meanwhile those who fought against the curfew restrictions celebrated their victory in Estrela Brilhante's pre-carnival *ensaio* that January. The event was publicized over social media, largely through the vast networks of the recording artists Siba and Maciel Salu, and drew a crowd estimated to be in excess of three thousand people. This presented its own problems and ruptures with the endogenous ways of participating and celebrating maracatu. Aside from the sheer number of people, there were problems with the cultural tourists from Recife and Olinda who did not know how to *brincar* (play) maracatu, and did not respect the physical space as it is normally used.

Recent appeals to international standards of "immaterial patrimony" can potentially introduce more resources for the maracatus to disentangle themselves somewhat from the local and regional patronage system that has contributed to this conundrum. In 2013 a proposal had

¹³ It is unclear at the time of writing who is supposed to cover these new expenses.

been submitted to IPHAN to include maracatu and related forms of artistic expression in Pernambuco (such as *caboclinhos*, *cavalo marinho*, and *maracatu nação*) on the registry of immaterial patrimony that would guarantee it some constitutional protections in accordance with the UNESCO charter. A year later in December 2014, it was announced at a meeting of the Ministry of Culture in Brasília that the proposal was accepted.¹⁴ The data collection of a “cultural inventory,” necessary for submitting the proposal, began after I had already left the field. The language used in the final resolution, however, only refers to maracatu in its relationship to carnival and Recife, a continuation of a longstanding bias that favors the capital and where “folkloric” or *cultura popular* art forms occupies a second-tier slot, with its main value being as a carnival attraction. The growing literature on the new cultural patrimony laws ranges from the critical to the optimistic. In my view, maracatu is indisputably the property and patrimony of the rural and urban workers of the towns of the Mata Norte, something that circulates among families and maintains a distinct identity even while it is – and always has been – in dynamic relationships of interaction, exchange, and tension with other social groups. These new developments regarding its protection as patrimony should be approached with a cautious optimism that does not abnegate the necessity to apply the same scrutiny, nuance, and unpacking that anthropologists and historians apply to other aspects of state intervention.

These two examples - the manipulated and staged “demonstration” in support of FUNDARPE, and of the persecution of maracatu’s core practices - do not simply illustrate that the Brazilian state is not monolithic, but that it is also sometimes schizophrenic. Different cadres of political actors are constantly repositioning themselves and seeking to demonstrate their power,

¹⁴ December 3, 2014, Ministry of Culture website. Accessed 12/04/14. http://www.cultura.gov.br/o-dia-a-dia-da-cultura%3Fp_p_id%3D101_INSTANCE_waaE236Oves2%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-1%26p_p_col_count%3D1

authority, and influence over both the public and their political rivals. The agencies responsible for public arts funding surround themselves with grateful recipients of patronage to create a spectacle of public support, while the ministry of public security represses those same recipients, perhaps to remind them who is really in control. “Culture” becomes a political football, with the score constantly changing and in danger of rapid reversals.

In addition we must carefully consider the discourse of domestication that only appears in representations produced by “experts” affiliated with universities or cultural policy contexts. It is not a phrase that I am accustomed to hear uttered by maracatuzeiros, although they might mean something similar when they talk about how maracatu has now been modernized – brought into the context of an urban civil society, leaving behind the less flattering aspects of its origins, and open to the participation of outsiders like cultural tourists from the middle class. The biological and naturalistic tropes that are embedded in “domestication” cannot be easily decoupled from the racial theories that informed the earliest forms of nationalism in Brazil. The curbing of violence among groups who are depicted as having been in constant conflict and rivalry, similar to a state of “perpetual war,” is repeated endlessly as oral history, ethnographic description, and now public policy, and its rationale justifies the continuing presence of the state in the activities of maracatu.¹⁵ The taming of the “wild” maracatu by bringing it into the state’s benevolent paternalism is a continuation of a “civilizing mission,” reaffirmed in the image of carnival caboclos signing a petition against their own interests, and accepting the restrictions imposed on their practices with resignation. When resistance occurs, it must be formulated in hegemonic terms in order to be recognized as legitimate – appeals to constitutional notions of racial equity and fairness, references

¹⁵ Kirsch, Stuart. 2010. "Ethnographic Representation and the Politics of Violence in West Papua." *Critique of Anthropology* 30(1): 3-22.

to their rights as cultural “tradition bearers,”¹⁶ or reappropriating a discourse of domesticity such as in Barachinha’s speech to the Public Prosecutor. Barachinha’s reworking of a moral discourse about lawfulness highlights how the language of tradition can be drawn upon to maintain and protect the rights of an oppositional identity, making simultaneous appeals to a respect for authority and a defense of the traditional rights of the disenfranchised. Maracatuzeiros have a *right* to descend on a street corner in their neighborhood like an invading army a few times a year - to reappropriate these urban spaces carved out of the old sugar plantations which received the thousands of workers forced off of them over the last century - because it is part of their cultural identity, of what defines them as a distinct group with its own history of struggle.

The framing of maracatu as a tradition belonging to a way of life that has disappeared, but which is faithfully maintained by the descendants of slaves within the limits of “civilization” while beleaguered on all sides by the seductions of modernity, accomplishes several analytical moves. This narrative reinforces a romantic and self-flattering revision of history for those elites who most benefited from the oppressive conditions that characterized and continue to plague the region: the notion that in spite of the precarious living conditions of the people who make it, a marvelous, ornate, and “authentic” thing of beauty was created. The immutability of the human spirit is a story that never fails to inspire us. But it fails to account for how maracatu as we know it developed in tandem and in response to the elimination of that rural way of life, and how its practitioners view the “time of the *engenhos*” as one of scarcity and deprivation. The story implies continuity that vanishes when confronted with the prismatic light of regional histories – the illusion that there was one once a discrete category of “rural worker” in the countryside and another of “city dweller”

¹⁶ Price, Richard and Sally. 1994. *On the mall: presenting Maroon tradition-bearers at the 1992 FAF*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

in the towns. It does not explain how the particularities of an expressive genre created by the inhabitants of those marginal, borderland spaces between “rural” and “urban”, caught between the traditional and the modern, became generalities that are now the collective “patrimony” of everyone in the state of Pernambuco. It does not account for the movement of people and ideas, the broader changes in the region or in Brazil, nor the shifts in social attitudes that facilitated the clearing of a place at the table by the gatekeepers of cultural legitimacy. Maracatu was not always a pretty thing: as the song from Antonio Roberto tells us, it was once ugly and coarse, and now it is beautiful and fine. Modernity has made it so.¹⁷

The analytical construct of “*cultura popular*” and the category of “tradition” in Brazil have been in a curious dance with the idea of modernity since the end of the nineteenth century, changing partners and costumes as often as the musicians on the bandstand. A cross-section of their repertoire, by no means exhaustive, has been attempted in this dissertation in an effort to trace how those shifting categories had a significant impact on the development of one particular form of cultural expression tied to a specific region and group of people. The misreading of that expression by elites and the propagation of orthodoxies that were then repeated, internalized, reclaimed, and reconfigured forms a pattern that also becomes a kind of dance: commentators and practitioners, analysts and participants, accommodation and resistance moving in the interlocking circles of clockwise and counterclockwise movements of a maracatu *manobra*.

¹⁷ Refer to the lyrics of the song “Maracatu no passado” on pages 1-2.



Figure 26: Dawn breaks over an ensaio in Nazaré, 2009

Glossary of frequently-used terms

Caboclo: in contrast to its specific definition as a person of mixed Portuguese and Indian ancestry, or a generalized one meaning any “country” person of the interior, in the context of maracatu this word refers to the *caboclo de lança*, a neo-indigenous warrior figure that is the most common personage and visible symbol of maracatu in its manifestation during carnival, in which dozens of them encircle the group. A related variant, the *caboclo de pena* or *arreimar*, performs in the middle and is few in number.

Cantoria: most common name in the Mata Norte for the musical genre of *cantoria de viola* or *repente* found more widely throughout the northeast and cities with a large northeastern migrant population such as São Paulo. It is performed by two singers, typically working as regular partners, who play ten-stringed guitars in open tuning. The genre is based around poetic improvisation with rigorous rules and formulas, historically related to northeastern pamphlet literature or *cordel* poetry, and has had a profound influence on contemporary maracatu.

Catimbó: a system of ritual and magic in northeast Brazil that combines elements of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religions, spiritism, folk Catholicism, and neo-indigenous shamanism.

Ensaio: a night-long open rehearsal held at or near a maracatu’s headquarters in which anyone is welcome to participate and where visiting *mestres* from other groups are called to the microphone to sing. An *ensaio* event is structured similarly to a *sambada* but is more informal.

Manobra: the choreographed maneuver that a maracatu makes when entering and leaving an area during a performance such as an *ensaio* or *sambada*, as well as during carnival presentations.

Maracatu: when used without an adjective in this dissertation, *maracatu* refers to the style of sung poetry, music, and carnival club found in the semi-rural towns and cities of the Mata Norte of Pernambuco, between Recife and the Paraíba border. Throughout the twentieth century it received the denominations of *baque solto* (loose or fast beat maracatu), *maracatu do trombone* or *orchestra* (trombone or orchestra maracatu), and *maracatu rural*, in order to distinguish it from another, separate genre of music also known as maracatu, based mostly in Recife and known as *maracatu nação* or *baque virado*, which resembles the afoxés of Bahia.

Maracatuzeiro: one who regularly participates in maracatu and identifies with it as a lifestyle.

Mestre: the singer-poet of a maracatu.

Músicos: the horn section in a maracatu band, comprised principally of several trumpets and trombones, but occasionally including reed instruments such as a saxophone.

Sambada: A sung duel between *mestres* of two different maracatus, typically occurring at or near the headquarters of one of them. A *sambada* begins around nine in the evening and does not end until sunrise, and the poetry passes through all the modes of maracatu verse such as *marcha*, *samba em dez linhas*, *samba em seis linhas*, *galope*, and *samba curto*.

Terno: The percussion section of a maracatu band, comprised of snare drums (*caixa* and *tarol*), a tom drum (*bombo*), metal shaker (*mineiro*), a double bell (*gonguê*), and a friction drum (*poíca*, less commonly called a *cuíca*)

Xangô: a northeastern Afro-Brazilian religion, related to the candomblé religion found in Bahia. Although the term is often used generically by *maracatuzeiros* to refer to any practice of Afro-indigenous ritual, the xangô religion (like candomblé) is based around temples or *terreiros* with a priest or priestess (*pai* or *mãe de santo*) and a sacerdotal hierarchy.

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