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## ▷ From Slave to Popular Culture: The Formation of Afro-Brazilian Art Forms in Nineteenth-Century Bahia and Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian popular culture is playing a growing role in the development of contemporary expressions of mass culture. Samba, axé-music and other styles of Brazilian Popular Music (MPB), as well as the martial art capoeira, are not only widely consumed on a global scale, but young people all over the world also dance, play and perform them. These art forms are usually referred to as ‘Brazilian’, and often associated with the colours of the Brazilian flag (green, yellow and blue). This reflects the growing pride of Brazilians in their own culture but also convenient ways of promoting nationalist agendas or packaging cultural commodities.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes samba and capoeira are labelled ‘Afro-Brazilian’ to emphasize their African ‘roots’ or their origins within the context of Brazilian slave society. Over the last few years the arguments over the appropriation of these forms have intensified. Black consciousness movements in Brazil have criticized the fact that Brazilian nationalism underplays the cultural contribution of African slaves. They claim that samba and capoeira are, above all, cultural expressions of Africans in the Diaspora, and therefore represent African ‘extensions’ rather than genuinely Brazilian ‘inventions’. Some scholars assert that what are seen in many Latin American countries as typical national dances – rumba, tango, merengue or samba – should rather be understood as the continuation of Central African forms (Dawson/Moreno Vega 1991).

This debate raises the broader issue of cultural continuity and change in the context of slave and post-emancipation societies. To call capoeira or samba Brazilian is to emphasize change, whilst to describe them as African is to highlight continuity. In their zeal to show the irrelevance of African traditions, Eurocentric or ‘America-centric’ scholars have often ignored important commonalities amongst African slaves, which allowed for significant continuities in music, dance and religion. Afrocentric writers on the other hand, eager to prove the extent of continuities between African and Afro-American cultures, have disregarded the ruptures, and overlooked the mechanisms captives used to compensate for the loss of traditions. Too much insistence on smooth cultural

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the local and the global in contemporary Afro-Bahian culture, see Sansone (1996) and Sansone/Santos (1997).

continuities can lead to an underestimation of the brutality of slavery and a rehabilitation of the institution. As legitimate as each perspective might be in its aspirations to provide identity for its audiences, by de-emphasizing one side of the equation both of them risk downplaying the complexity of the historical process.

Scholars have used a range of terms – acculturation, hybridization, transculturation, creolization – to analyze cultural change in slave societies. In my view creolization is still the best suited concept since it does not – unlike hybridity – suggest a biological heritage or a ‘miscegenation’; it rather implies that change is acquired during a socialization process. It is also more specific than acculturation and does not imply a passive adaptation. Creole is probably derived from the Portuguese *criar* (to nurse) and is said to have originated during the period when the Portuguese dominated trade on the West African coast.<sup>2</sup> The debate over the formation of slave culture and creolization has a long history which is linked to identity politics. Already during the 1940s the US anthropologists E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits exchanged arguments regarding the importance of African heritage in the Americas. According to Frazier, slaves had been stripped of their culture to the point that their African past had been reduced to ‘forgotten memories’. Thus, in the view of Frazier and his followers, slave culture would mainly be the result of a situation of oppression and the slaves’ adaptation to it. Herskovits, on the other hand, insisted on the common cultural traits shared by slaves from different parts of Africa.<sup>3</sup> In the early 1970s, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price proposed a model that sought to reconcile both perspectives. They did not deny the importance of African input, but insisted that “neither social context nor cultural traditions alone can explain an African-American institutional form and that the development of institutions must be viewed in their full historical setting”. They concluded that “formal continuities from Africa are more the exception than the rule in any African-American culture” and that “borrowing may not best express the reality at all – ‘creating’ or ‘remodeling’ may be more precise” (Mintz/Price 1992: 64, 83).

Critics of the ‘creolization model’ have pointed out that Mintz and Price’s analysis underplays the importance of African continuities and therefore “has too many exceptions to carry much weight” (Lovejoy 2000: 24). A number of recent studies have emphasized the continuity of African ethnicities well beyond the first generation in the Americas. Ira Berlin (1996) has shown that there was no linear evolution from ‘African’ into ‘Creole’. Furthermore, Africans were exposed to and interacted with European culture long before being forced into the middle passage (Heywood 2002). If creolization processes occurred already in Africa the dichotomy between African and creole in the Americas becomes less absolute. Moreover, scholars increasingly point out that the ‘Black Atlantic’ constituted a space where communications took place not only in the sense of the ‘triangular trade’ (from Europe to Africa, from Africa to Brazil). Brazilian masters and their slaves, for instance, were present on the West African coast and in Angola from at least the early eighteenth century.

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<sup>2</sup> More recently M. Warner-Lewis has suggested that creole derived from the Kikongo term *kuulolo* (Lovejoy 2000: 13-14).

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough the family structure (as part of culture in the widest sense) in Bahia constituted their chief bone of contention. See Frazier (1942) and Herskovits (1943).

My aim in this article is to examine the formation of slave and popular culture in two core regions, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, in the light of recent research. Afro-Brazilian religions (such as *candomblé* and *macumba*), diversions (*batuque*) and combat games (capoeira) developed through intense cultural circulation between various socio-ethnic groups whilst at the same time playing a core role in the constitution of neo-African identities. These identities were even reinforced by colonial institutions such as membership of Catholic brotherhoods.

From a transatlantic perspective it is possible to conceive of these expressions as neither 'Brazilian' nor 'African' but rather as creole developments. The rigid dichotomy of African versus Brazilian is to a large extent due to anachronistic projections onto the past, a result of twentieth-century nationalisms trying to re-appropriate history for their own agendas. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Brazil and Africa were not much more than geographical concepts, not stable identities historical actors identified with. In Brazil, neo-African nations such as Mina or Angola, West or Central African deities, Catholic saints and regional and local identities all assumed much greater importance in the lives of slaves and freed people and their descendants.

Authorities and slave owners in Brazil not only imposed their institutions and labour organization, but also tried to make captives adopt their world views and every day practices. Often slaves had no other choice than to submit, at least apparently, to their masters' demands, but whenever possible they rejected and fought what threatened to destroy their lives and identities. However, slaves also voluntarily adopted what seemed useful to them in their new situation. They merged and re-appropriated aspects that seemed similar to their own cultures. This complex interaction with the colonizer's culture took place in all aspects of slave life, from housing to food, from religious practices to profane celebrations.

Although scholars still debate over the commonalities that existed between the different pre-colonial African societies, there is no doubt that owners tried and often managed to capitalise on the ethnic differences between their slaves as a strategy of domination. Slave traders classified captives according to various and contradictory criteria: their port of embarkation in Africa, the macro-region they came from, the state of which they had been subjects prior to their transatlantic crossing, the language they spoke or the particular ethnic group they belonged to. Classification was far from consistent, however, due to the trader's ignorance of the slaves' specific backgrounds, and the intricacy of African ethnic identities and political structures. For that reason indications of slave origins in historical documents are frequently vague and often unreliable. Yet slaves often adopted these designations themselves, and African-derived terms such as Mina or Angola developed into new, creole identities in the Americas.

## 1. Slave Religion in Brazil

Despite the overall imposition of Roman Catholicism, and the ferocious persecution of any 'idolatry' by the Church and the authorities, a number of heterodox or 'syncretic' religious practices developed in Brazil from the early colonial period onwards. The deported African slaves not only brought their own, distinctive beliefs with them, but a sizeable minority had already adopted Islam or Christianity in Africa. The king of Kongo

converted to Christianity as early as 1491, and subsequently many of his subjects became Christians. In the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Benguela, Catholicism was also imposed on Africans, and adopted even by long-time opponents of European expansionism such as the famous queen Njinga. Yet the spread of the Christian faith into the region was accompanied by substantial adaptations and re-arrangements. The Catholic hierarchy in Kongo/Angola often despaired at the Africanization of religious practices. In other words, syncretism between Catholicism and native religions had already occurred in Africa, even before Angolans were shipped over to the Americas (Heywood 2002). The same applies to Islam, adopted by populations south of the Sahara. All this encouraged a process of re-interpretation of Christianity by slaves and freed people, which resulted in a popular form of Catholicism quite distant from Roman orthodoxy. It is also important to underline that syncretism in Brazil did not occur only with an abstract Roman Catholicism, but with a much wider range of beliefs and practices related to European medieval traditions of mysticism and elements of Iberian paganism, and some native American traditions that eventually survived the ethnocide, such as *catimbó* and *pajelança*.

The strongest case for the existence of African ‘retentions’ or ‘extensions’ is undoubtedly the Afro-Bahian religions. Since Nina Rodrigues (1977, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1932), scholars have pointed out the extent to which they transmitted African values, aesthetics and spirituality. Despite the constraints of slavery and repression by the authorities, African captives transplanted the worship of their gods, which involved elaborate rituals, to Brazil. Roger Bastide (1958, 1978) and his successors have highlighted the fact that the Bahian *candomblé* represents a complex religious system with four complementary dimensions: the worship of the gods, the cult of ancestors, divination and healing. Even today traditional cult houses pray to *orixás*, *voduns* or *inquices* in ritual languages that are derived from Yoruba, Fon or Kimbundo, even if many followers no longer understand the meaning of the words (Prandi 1998).

The recognition of all those important continuities does not mean, however, that no or few changes occurred. On the contrary, practitioners introduced a number of significant alterations, even in the houses reputed to be the most traditional. One major transformation consisted in uniting the cult of different gods – worshipped separately in Africa – thus creating a ‘little Africa’ in the single space of the *terreiro*. Scholars have emphasised that syncretism – a specific form of creolization in the religious domain – occurred as much among the African religions as between them and the religious traditions of the colonizers (Bastide 1967: 157 and 1978: 277; Harding 2000: 39). The similarities between African religious traditions within each cultural sub-area obviously eased their fusion in the Diaspora. Yet inter-African syncretism even amalgamated elements from culturally more diverse backgrounds. The formation of neo-African ‘nations’ in *candomblé* never meant strict segmentation and absolute separation between the Nagô, Jeje and Angola traditions. It is well known that the Angola cults, often characterized or even stigmatised as more syncretic or flexible, embraced many features of the Nagô tradition, and even the whole Yoruba pantheon. Hence in Brazil, the Central African worshippers of *inquices* adopted the ritual structure of the West African cult of the *orixás*, and thus created the syncretic *candomblé de Angola*. It is less known, however, that the organisation and ceremonies of the most traditional houses in Bahia, which claim to belong to the Nagô-Ketu or the Ketu nation, are in fact much closer to the religious

model of the Fons from Benin (Braga 1995: 56). Anthropologists have furthermore pointed out that the 'African' character of many aspects of *candomblé* are social constructions that arise out of specific Brazilian contexts, and which can therefore vary according to the location (Dantas 1988). Despite all these mutual borrowings, adaptations and re-inventions, one point has to remain clear: within the realm of African-derived religion, slaves and their descendants did not primarily build pan-African, black or Brazilian identities, but rather associated with particular neo-African nations or Catholic saints that seemed more suited to expressing their aspirations.

Not all slaves worshipped exclusively African gods. The ambiguous relationship with the masters' faith and church constituted the other fundamental aspect of slave religion. Depending on their master's attitude they might have to attend mass and observe Catholic rituals. How many of them genuinely adopted Christian values and how many just pretended to do so is a matter of debate, but both attitudes undoubtedly coexisted. Slaves willing to deceive their masters or priests readily discovered that the easiest way to do this was by superimposing the cult of Catholic saints on that of their African deities, resulting in the well known association, in Bahia, of Jesus with the Nagô *orixá* Oxalá, Saint Barbara with Yansã, and Saint George with Oxossi. Thus, slaves used festivals dedicated to a Catholic saint to discreetly worship a corresponding African God. Some scholars argue that over time people were unable to disentangle the two, and that syncretism was therefore real, not faked. Others have adopted a more 'Afrocentric' view, pleading that deception was maintained over time and up to the present. They feel confirmed by the fact that many contemporary *candomblé* leaders now advocate a strict separation between *candomblé* and Catholicism. That is however a recent development and does not constitute any evidence that syncretism did not occur in the past.

On the contrary, what is striking about *candomblé* adepts up until at least the 1970s is not only their ease in proclaiming their Christian faith, but also their active role within Catholic institutions. Research has shown that key figures of the *candomblé* world in Bahia, such as mãe Aninha and Martiniano do Bomfim, were also influential members of Catholic brotherhoods (Butler 1998: 156-159; Wimberley 1998: 84-85). Rather than assuming permanent deception on the part of thousands of *candomblé* practitioners over generations, I find the idea that both religions did coexist more convincing. It has also been argued that polytheist African religions can easily integrate new gods without necessarily altering their whole systems. By contrast, a monotheist religion loses its internal coherence by adopting new gods. Therefore *candomblé* adepts could worship the 'new' saints without feeling that they were betraying the gods of their ancestors. In this case the process of merging different religious traditions consisted rather of juxtapositions and convergences than of real fusion. The term syncretism therefore needs to be broken down in order to further refine the analysis of such complex phenomena (Ferretti 1995).

In Rio de Janeiro, in contrast, slaves from Kongo/Angola always constituted a majority among the deported Africans, and their religious traditions prevailed here more than in Bahia. Since Ramos and Bastide scholars have emphasized the greater permeability of 'Bantu' cults, more inclined to assimilate aspects of the dominant Christian faith. The cult known since the late nineteenth century as *macumba* is always described as 'mixed' and 'adulterated' (Brown 1994: 25). Mary Karasch (1987: 272) has argued that the adoption of Catholic saints, membership of religious brotherhoods and participation in processions did not necessarily mean slaves had converted to Roman Catholicism in the nar-

row sense or adopted a syncretic religion. She interprets the greater flexibility of Central African traditions rather as a sign of strength. By qualifying flexibility and capacity for change as positive Central African characteristics, this line of thought thus abolishes the negative assessment of 'Bantu' cultures that has prevailed for so long in Brazil. Yet sources do not give us a precise answer as to the degree and nature of that flexibility. Since not much is known about colonial or early nineteenth-century Central African religious practices in Rio, conclusions in that respect have to remain provisional. The case of Rosa Egipcíaca shows that African women could even become an object of popular Catholic devotion (Mott 1993).

If it is thus possible to identify areas of slave and Afro-Brazilian religion characterized by a strong – even though never exclusive – African heritage, it is also important to acknowledge by the same token that this was not always possible or desired and involved only a segment of slaves and free Afro-Brazilians. The most popular forms were and are highly syncretic, merging a wide range of traditions. Even the most traditional cult houses survived only through re-inventions and concessions to the dominant faith. One might argue that in doing so they possibly adopted a quite 'African' posture, which considered that it was better to add different spiritual forces rather than to oppose them.

## 2. Slave combat games

Not much is known about pre-colonial combat games in Africa, but African martial traditions in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro constituted another important aspect of slave culture that preoccupied authorities and often led to brutal repression. In many coastal provinces of the Brazilian Empire slaves practiced combat games that involved head butts, kicks, and blows. They also made use of weapons such as sticks or knives to defeat an opponent. Practitioners were known as *capoeiras*, and capoeira became the generic name for all activities involving these techniques. In Bahia few sources mention the practice during the nineteenth century (Abreu 1999a). The British merchant and vice-consul James Wetherell provided us with one of the first descriptions in his diary, in an entry headed 'Blacks', from 1857:

Negroes fighting with their open hands is a frequent scene in the lower city. They seldom come to blows, or at least sufficient to cause any serious damage. A kick on the shins is about the most painful knock they give each other. They are full of action, capering and throwing their arms and legs about like monkeys during their quarrels. It is a ludicrous sight (1860: 119-120).

Leaving aside his eurocentric prejudices, Wetherell's account is interesting because it conveys the ambiguity of the practice (to which he gave no name). He first classified it as a 'fight', and then suggested it was not really serious.

The existence of several modalities with varying degrees of 'seriousness' – from friendly games to rough street brawls – is also attested in the streets of Rio de Janeiro (Soares 2001, Chvaicer 2002). No regular police force existed in the city, in which over 40 per cent of the inhabitants were slaves, and another substantial part were free 'coloured' and Africans. The transfer of the Portuguese Court to the capital of the vice-

royalty in 1808 highlighted the problem of public order and security. The Police Intendant and the Royal Police Guard, created in that year, directed their energy towards the repression of what was considered 'unacceptable' behaviour: vagrancy, disorderly conduct, public drunkenness and capoeira. As more and more slaves disembarked on the city's shores (one million in the first half of the nineteenth century), the maintenance of public order became an obsession for the authorities. Preventing slaves and even free people from carrying weapons was a constant preoccupation. In 1817, the Intendant announced that slaves found with knives were to suffer harsh penalties (300 lashes of the whip and three months of forced labour). He also targeted the *capoeiras*, and simultaneously gave one of the first definitions of their practice according to the authorities:

The same penalty will apply to all those who roam around the city, whistling and with sticks, committing disorder most of the times with no aim, and which are well known by the name of *capoeiras*, even if they do not provoke any injuries or death or any other crime [...]<sup>4</sup>

As the Intendant suggested, the practice of capoeira did not inevitably result in injuries or challenge to the authorities. Unfortunately police records only reveal the number of arrests and the socio-economic background of the detained and punished, but never describe the practice in detail. Some *capoeiras* were carrying musical instruments when detained, suggesting that capoeira was also a diversion. This is confirmed by the two earliest iconographic representations of slaves' combat games, the engravings by Augustus Earle (1822) and Johann Moritz Rugendas (1835). Earle shows two black males in a backyard, practising kicks and open hand techniques. The way the slave women are watching suggests that they were enjoying it as a friendly game – at least until the arrival of the police officer, who is about to jump over the fence to interrupt the game. Rugendas' well known engraving depicts capoeira as an integral part of the city's street life, a game accompanied by a small drum and the enthusiastic support of bystanders. Ferdinand Denis, a French traveller who resided in Brazil on different occasions during the years 1816-31, also indicated that capoeira was 'mock combat' (Denis 1839: 147; Abreu 1999b: 91).

The combat game could easily become a lethal weapon when used against a real opponent. Slaves resorted to its techniques to settle disputes among themselves, to assault free people or resist police. Contrary to a common opinion among twentieth-century adepts, slave owners and authorities were always aware of the danger capoeira represented and thus usually advocated its repression. Throughout the nineteenth century, capoeira constituted one of the main reasons for slave arrests and punishments in Rio de Janeiro (Holloway 1989). Despite the brutality of police and militia, the practice proved difficult to eradicate for a number of reasons. Capoeira games could take place almost anywhere and its practice could be interrupted as soon as police approached. Adepts used to gather together in groups which made arrests more difficult unless a major police force was allocated to the task. By the 1840s a number of structured capoeira gangs (*maltas*) emerged, usually based around a parish church. They were embedded in the local slave and free African community and used younger boys as helpers and infor-

<sup>4</sup> *Edital* from 6.12.1817, quoted in Soares (2001: 557).



Augustus Earle (1793-1838): *Negroes fighting, Brazil*. [c. 1822]. Watercolour; 16.5 × 25.1 cm.  
Rex Nan Kivell Collection, By kind permission of the National Library of Australia.

nants. Police officers and soldiers of the National Guard often indulged themselves in the practice. If repression did not succeed in eradicating capoeira, it certainly contributed to shaping the ways in which the art evolved. Some scholars argue that it lost its character of a game (Chvaicer 2002). The dynamics of repression certainly contributed to a more systematic use of weapons, and thus enhanced the violence of the practice.

### 3. Batuques

If African religions and martial traditions provided frequent occasion for harsh conflicts, where the ruthless repression unleashed by the authorities was met by the most stubborn resistance from the captives, other manifestations of slave culture eventually met with less systematic opposition. The case of the *batuques* illustrates how, despite periodical clampdowns and prohibitions, African culture extended quickly beyond its original constituency from at least the eighteenth century onwards.

*Batuque* was a generic term already used by the Portuguese in Angola to designate any singing and dancing by natives. In Brazil the expression kept this encompassing definition. Any dance by slaves or freedmen taking place in a circle, accompanied by singing and handclapping and – but not always – drums or other instruments is called



*batuques* in late colonial and nineteenth century sources. The improvisation of the lyrics constituted another core characteristic of the *batuque*. The dances performed at *batuques* in Kongo/Angola varied according to region and ethnicity and combined belly-bouncing dances (*danças de umbigadas*), dances in pairs or dances in a circle (*dança de roda*). Central Africans used a wide range of instruments for their *batuques*; including drums, *quiçanjes*, and *marimbas* (hand pianos) (Carneiro 1982: 28-31).

Yet the ‘dissolute movements’ and the ‘unbridled pantomimes’ of black bodies, and in particular their ‘artificial rotations and contortions of the hip’ inevitably impressed European observers (Spix/Martius 1981, I: 180). The widespread and generic use of the term *batuque* suggests that authorities were either unable or unwilling to distinguish between what were possibly very different manifestations. Accounts usually fail to comment on the meaning of the *batuque* for the slaves. Did it serve only recreational purposes, as most sources seem to suggest by insisting on its licentious character, or did it also have religious meanings? Since the slaves knew all too well that ‘idolatry’ was more likely to be repressed than profane recreations, they were not keen on explaining its meaning to masters and white observers. Rigid distinctions between sacred and profane are not helpful anyway, since religion permeated daily life in early modern African and European societies.

Colonial authorities seem to have tolerated *batuques* for long periods of time, and so did plantation owners – who, after all, were relatively free to determine how their slaves were allowed to spend their time off. The Church permitted black distractions as long as they remained ‘honest, and decent’ (Soares 2000: 156). African dances were even performed to honour the Portuguese monarch João VI while he resided in Rio de Janeiro (Karasch 1987: 242). This apparently tolerant attitude was in line with the public display of power and reflected the proliferation of colonial identities encouraged by the colonial baroque.

During the nineteenth century elites in Brazil became profoundly divided over the issue of African diversions, as can be seen from the frequent changes in policy from the end of the colonial period. In Salvador, the Conde da Ponte, governor of Bahia between 1805 and 1809, tried to suppress the ‘absolute freedom’ slaves enjoyed with respect to dances, clothes and religion. One of his successors, however, the famous Conde dos Arcos, explicitly took the opposite stance. He instructed a judge in Cachoeira that the safest way to avoid disorder consisted in allowing slaves to dance on Sundays and holidays (Reis 2002: 104-114). After the Muslim slave revolt of 1835, authorities adopted a tougher stance again, and the city council repeatedly issued laws to repress *batuques* in the public space (Santos 1997: 20-21). During the 1850s discussion over the right policy continued. Some liberal politicians advocated that the state should not intervene in the private sphere, and should therefore tolerate *batuques* if they constituted no threat to public order (Reis 2002: 134-143). In Rio, after years of tolerance, the authorities also opted for harsher repression during the period of political troubles that followed independence and especially after the resignation of the Emperor in 1831, arresting dancers and breaking up the nightly gatherings of captives. The success of these actions was however limited: according to Mary Karasch (1987: 243), “police correspondence is eloquent on their inability to prevent slaves from dancing”. The Romanization of the Brazilian Church and the introduction of positivism resulted in new waves of repression of Afro-Brazilian culture.

#### 4. Brotherhoods and Congo Kings

If slaves recreated their own religions and pastimes, they also actively participated, albeit in a limited way, in broader social life. The best examples of this involvement are the lay confraternities, the only formal institution slaves could legally belong to. The church encouraged the constitution of brotherhoods, considering them a means of spreading the gospel among the free population in general, and amongst the mass of 'fetishist' or only superficially Christianised slaves and freed people in particular. These lay associations brought together persons according to colour, ethnic and status criteria. Elite brotherhoods only accepted whites or the wealthy light-skinned considered as such, whilst the poorer confraternities usually accepted slave and free indiscriminately. In Rio de Janeiro, Our Lady of the Rosary was the most popular patron saint of black and mulatto brotherhoods, followed by St. Anthony and black saints such as St. Benedict, St. Ephi-genia, St. Balthasar and St. Elesbão (Karasch 1987: 282-284). In Salvador, as many as six black and five mulatto confraternities were dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary at the end of the eighteenth century, and a further eleven black brotherhoods were devoted to other saints (Russell-Wood 1974: 576). Whilst some liberally admitted members from all ethnic backgrounds, others insisted on picking their members not only according to 'colour', but even on the basis of a more specific ethnic identity, excluding for instance all Angola slaves from their midst or being open to Jejes only. Most black brotherhoods admitted women, but denied them any participation in decision-making. Some black women founded exclusively female corporations, such as the sisterhoods of Our Lady of the God Death in Salvador and Cachoeira.

Membership of Catholic brotherhoods seemed to have allowed the strengthening of particular identities based on gender, class, colour and ethnicity. Black brotherhoods elected 'kings' and 'queens' of particular 'nations' who could be slaves or free. Accompanied by their 'court' and the sound of drums and other instruments, the royal couple, dressed in colourful costumes, paraded in the streets to raise money for the annual festival of the patron saint. On that day, a particularly glamorous procession provided a public exhibition of the importance and wealth of the brotherhood. Especially well documented are the elections of the Congo kings, usually associated with devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary. The so-called *congada* included a number of rituals representing the ceremony of a monarchy with its ambassadors and secretaries of state. White observers often ridiculed *congadas*, interpreting it as a grotesque imitation of European courts by ignorant slaves who attached weight only to the exterior trappings of royalty.

The importance of *congadas* has been reassessed by some scholars, who claim they reproduced political traditions of the Congo area, and can be seen as further evidence of African 'extensions' in Brazil (Kubik 1986: 134). Fernando Ortiz (1993: 291) has already linked the election of Congo kings in Cuba to the rituals carried out since the sixteenth century by the Christian kings in their capital Kongo-Mbanza. Although African imaginaries certainly played an important role, it has to be said that this type of parade was first performed by the black brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary at the monastery of St. Domingos in Lisbon. José Tinhorão (1988: 148-160) suggested that the spectacle, which saw the most important African sovereign paying tribute, was part of a strategy to display the power of the Portuguese monarchy. The Lisbon congregation, which served as the model for the Brazilian brotherhoods, also used to elect a whole court with king

and nobles among its members. It is therefore again difficult to attribute precise and unilateral 'origins' to such a multifaceted phenomenon, and safer to assume that different traditions of royalty converged in the celebration of these 'African kingdoms' under the mantle of the Church. Marina de Mello e Souza (2002: 329) has pointed out the cultural hybridity of the *congadas* and concluded that the black king was a 'symbol of a mythic and homogenized Africa'. Yet the *congadas* also preserved traditions of specific Central African rulers such as Queen Jinga. Thus the black brotherhoods not only represented 'the triumph of a continuing strategy to preserve a link to Africa', but constituted an 'intercontinental web' created by Atlantic creoles that stretched from Lisbon, São Tomé, Angola and Brazil (Kiddy 2002: 182, Berlin 1996: 275).

Not only the Congo slaves elected their kings, but those from other 'nations' as well. In Rio de Janeiro other ethnicities were also maintained and developed under the umbrella of the universalistic Catholic Church. The confraternity of St. Elesbão and St. Ephigenia, founded in 1740, admitted slaves from the Mina Coast (Agolin, Dagomé and Maki), from Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Mozambique, but initially excluded the Angolas, creoles and mulattos (*cabras*). Several 'kingdoms' or 'follies' (*reinados* or *folias*) co-existed within that brotherhood, the result of various subdivisions among the members along ethnic lines, resulting in a number of smaller *folias* each electing its own royal couple.<sup>5</sup>

What is the significance of this development of neo-African ethnic identities within the colonizer's institutions? At first sight one might be tempted to read it exclusively as a sign of the slaves' cultural resistance. Some data indeed suggests that the religious institutions organized along 'national' boundaries allowed the preservation of older, African practices. Brotherhoods, or the smaller 'kingdoms' they contained, were sometimes accused by outsiders or slaves belonging to other 'nations' of perpetuating 'superstitious' practices. This kind of 'retention' would support the idea of slave 'deception'. The re-approximation and eventually the fusion of groups that shared common cultural traits or a similar history of enslavement also resulted in the formation of colonial, neo-African 'nations' with the approval of the Church, and ran parallel to the process of inter-African syncretism occurring in proto-*candomblés*. In both cases the creole Angola, Benguela, Nagô or Jeje substituted for the original African identities. Nagô, for instance, is not just a Brazilian term for the Yoruba in West Africa, but rather the result of a specific, colonial process of ethno-genesis in Brazil that occurred parallel to the one in Nigeria.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand it is absolutely clear that slaveholders and authorities often encouraged the formation of these compartmentalised slave 'nations' as a means of social control. Similar to the *batuques*, celebrations such as the elections of a 'Congo King' were allowed because they seemed to perpetrate ethnic divisions among slaves and to stabilise the otherwise fragile domination of a relatively small white minority. It is thus difficult to locate the emergence of neo-African identities within a simple dichotomy of resistance versus accommodation. Brotherhoods served purposes of self-affirmation for slaves and freed persons, but they were also used by elites as a tool of social control. What is clear, however, is that these 'extended' neo-African identities acquired a rich texture of new meanings in the colonial context.

<sup>5</sup> The full account of this fascinating episode is told by Soares (2001).

<sup>6</sup> For the latter, see Lorand Matory (1999).

## 5. From Slave to Popular Culture

Whilst authorities and planters debated the best policy towards the *batuques*, and the police eventually tried to suppress them, the forms and social context of the practice slowly evolved. Originally danced by slaves from Kongo/Angola and Mozambique, creole slaves and the manumitted proved equally enthusiastic about the *batuque* and many of the free coloured also joined in.<sup>7</sup> They brought along the instruments they were familiar with, and soon not only scrapers, rattles, bells, xylophones and hand pianos (*marimbas*), but also string instruments (guitars, lutes and harps) entered the *batuque*. Since both drums and other percussion instruments were common to West Africa and Kongo/Angola, it does not always make much sense to establish clean genealogies of affiliation to particular African ethnicities. For instance, single and double metal bells were widely used in both West and Central Africa, and thus musical traditions from these two macro-regions reinforced each other in the New World. Known in Brazil under its Yoruba name, the *agogô* entered *candomblé*, *batuque* and capoeira alike. The Brazilian *berimbau* derives from Central African music bows, but the woven rattle (*caxixi*) that accompanies it in Brazil is likely to be of West African origin. On the other hand, Angolan instruments such as the *marimba* and *quiçanje* disappeared from the Brazilian *batuques*.

The diversification of instruments and audiences was also accompanied by changes in the songs. If the basic structure of one improvising solo singer and a chorus were maintained, Portuguese tended to replace African languages. Since one of the main attractions consisted precisely in the questions or comments thrown to the public by the solo singer, that change was necessary in order to adapt to a wider, multi-ethnic audience. Whilst swift change characterized instruments, audiences, and texts, the rhythmic patterns seemed to have remained more stable. Ethno-musicologists insist that in contrast to instruments, which were used across various culture zones, rhythmic patterns marked more specific, regional identities (Mukuna 2000: 132). Gerhard Kubik has called time-line patterns ‘the metric back-bone’ of African music: “They are orientation patterns, steering and holding together the motional process, with participating musicians and dancers depending on them. In this quality the removal or even slight modification of a time-line pattern immediately leads to the disintegration of the music concerned” (1979: 18). He asserts that these rhythmic key signatures enjoyed great constancy over time. Thus a twelve-pulse pattern in its seven-stroke version played on a bell can be identified as a West African Coastal tradition (Akan/Fon/Yoruba) or a sixteen-pulse pattern as coming from the Kongo/Angola region (Kubik 1986: 124-127). These rhythmic patterns were recognized by performers and audiences, and just like the ceremonial music of *candomblé*, they contributed to maintaining specific styles identified with neo-African ‘nations’.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on percussion, polyrhythm, improvisation, collective participation, vocal call and response, and dancing in a circle constituted not only

<sup>7</sup> Even some persons of higher rank came to like it. The German traveller Freyreiss reported that white ladies in 1814-15 ‘frenetically applauded’ a *batuque* (Casculo 1954: 151).

<sup>8</sup> Kubik (1986: 138-40) for instance links one contemporary form of *batuque* to rhythmic patterns of the Zambeze Valley.

Angolan or Bantu, but more general African features that were maintained in the Brazilian *batuques* and in capoeira. Yet in both Bahia and Rio de Janeiro *batuque* and capoeira were identified with Congos, Angolas and Benguelas. They were thus instrumental in the constitution of various 'Bantu' identities for slaves and their descendants in Brazil, despite incorporating features from other musical cultures.

The songs performed during *batuques* or in capoeira circles were, however, shaped by local and emerging national traditions, and evolved further during the nineteenth century. From Spix and Martius' account we know that by the end of the colonial period not only improvised songs but also the emerging Brazilian *modinhas* were already sung at *batuques*. In Rio de Janeiro and some other regions a related genre, the *lundu*, emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century. Although the term is also of Angolan origin and seems to have originally designated a dance tradition from the eastern hinterland of Luanda (Karasch 1987: 244), most scholars consider the Brazilian *lundu* a further development of the *batuque*. Longer songs and more emphasis on the *viola* characterized the former, although the rhythmic pattern of the *batuque* was maintained. Dancers still executed the 'belly bounce' (*umbigada*), considered a key marker of Central African dances and also used the characteristic snapping of the fingers. The *lundu* was adopted by middle class composers, to the extent that some *lundu* songs came close to the more erudite *modinhas*.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the *lundu* strongly resembled another dance popular among the coloured lower classes, the Portuguese-derived *fado*, so that observers had difficulties in establishing a difference between them (Tinhorão 1991: 47-57, 84-89). The same holds for the difference between *lundu* and *batuque*: sources do not allow a clean separation (Abreu 1999b: 56, 83).

During the second half of the nineteenth century the *batuques* evolved further and led to the crystallization of specific regional expressions: the samba (in Maranhão, Bahia, the city of Rio and São Paulo), the *jongo* (in the interior of Rio and São Paulo) and the *coco* (in the Northeast from Alagoas to Ceará) (Carneiro 1982: 32-33). In Bahia, the different forms of samba (*samba de viola*, *samba de roda*, etc.) derived from the former *batuques*, but nobody has so far been able to establish precisely what changed and why the older denomination *batuque* was abandoned (Pinto 1991: 110). It appears as though one generic term for a range of related musical styles and dance performances replaced the other, both demarcating quite wide – although not identical – semantic fields.<sup>10</sup> The broad meaning of *batuque* in nineteenth-century Brazil is illustrated by the fact that the term ended up meaning a martial dance in Bahia, a belly dance in São Paulo, whereas in the Southern province of Rio Grande it became the overall denomination for Afro-Brazilian religion.

The practice of capoeira also evolved significantly during the second half of the nineteenth century. As urban slavery declined, capoeira was increasingly practiced by the free coloured population. Police records in Rio de Janeiro register a growing number

<sup>9</sup> Some authors suggest that *batuques* could include religious ceremonies with drums. Tinhorão (1990: 80) derives *lundu* from *calundu*, a colonial term for Afro-Brazilian religion.

<sup>10</sup> The term *samba* is clearly of Kongo/Angolan origin – even though scholars do not agree on its exact etymology (Mukuna 2000: 91-92). The song *Pelo telefone* (1917) marks the foundational moment for its contemporary Brazilian meaning.

of free black and mulattos arrested for *capoeiragem*. Even the poor migrants from Portugal, who shared the unhealthy downtown tenements with the free coloured, were frequently caught for practising the art. The change of socio-economic background of its practitioners and the recruitment of capoeira gangs by the two political parties also resulted in significant changes in practice. Razors – a weapon preferred by the Portuguese underworld – became the most popular weapon among *capoeiras*. Many expressions from the Lisbon underworld entered the capoeira jargon of Rio de Janeiro (Soares 1995: 179-181).

The ludic aspects of capoeira – at least in public perception and the existing sources – seem to have been de-emphasized during the second half of the nineteenth century in Rio. When not fighting each other or the police, *capoeiras* seemed to enjoy displaying their skills during public rituals – in front of Catholic processions, military or Carnival parades. This also resulted in mayhem and violent disorder (Soares 2002). In Salvador, in contrast, capoeira gang culture never developed to the same extent. Capoeira remained a game, played by workers in the port area or on Sundays in the poor neighbourhoods. It continued to be played during the cycle of festivals from December to Carnival, alongside samba and *batuques*. Each of these celebrations took place in and around a church, dedicated to a specific saint (and his/her corresponding *orixá*).

If African practices such as the *batuque* became increasingly creolized, so did European celebrations. The ‘Africanization’ of wider popular culture in Brazilian cities can be shown through the evolution of what constituted the most important annual celebrations, the Festival of the Holy Spirit in Rio de Janeiro and the Festival of Our Lord of the Good End in Salvador. Both festivals originated within the tradition of Portuguese Catholic devotions, but absorbed so many African elements that they became largely multi-cultural and syncretic. *Batuques* and sambas figured prominently in both celebrations to the point that ecclesiastical authorities recommended intervention and the police carried out rigorous repression. Yet despite periodic clampdowns, these festivals became privileged sites for intense vertical and horizontal cultural exchanges, mixing groups of diverse colour, class and status.<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

The relationship between *batuque*, samba, capoeira and *candomblé* exemplifies the process of horizontal circulation and reciprocal borrowing that occurred between distinctive, but related manifestations of slave culture in Brazil. Instruments, rhythms and entire songs were taken and adopted for other purposes.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between these dances, religion and capoeira is also entirely different from the way combat games were embedded into wider social and ritual practices in Africa. The close association between

<sup>11</sup> For the festival of the Holy Spirit in Rio, see the groundbreaking work of Abreu (1999b). For a brief English introduction to the festival of Bomfim in Bahia, see Silverstein (1995).

<sup>12</sup> For the use of *candomblé* chants in capoeira, see Carneiro (1937: 153-56). For the use of capoeira songs in samba, see Simon (1990: track 8). For the importance of *samba-de-roda* in capoeira, see CD *Academia de Capoeira de Angola* (1998).

music bow (*berimbau*) and combat game in Bahian capoeira illustrates to what extent capoeira is more than a simple derivation of a single African practice. The music bow has never been associated with combat or even with religious rituals in Africa (Mukuna 2000: 203). To place the *berimbau* at the heart of capoeira was clearly a New World invention, but to play rhythms and cultivate combat traditions of overseas ancestors was certainly an African extension.

During the colonial period and the nineteenth century, popular culture in Brazil underwent constant change and re-elaborations. This makes rigid classifications of its formal aspects or social context as strictly 'African' or 'Brazilian', 'Christian' or 'pagan', and even the distinction between 'tradition' or 'innovation' rather inadequate. Differences between, for instance, 'African', 'slave' or 'black' were often blurred, since audiences – in particular of recreational practices – rapidly changed and tended to lose any exclusive character (Abreu 1999b: 92). Even in *candomblé*, free mulattos and even whites already rose to leadership during the nineteenth century (Reis 2001: 119-122).

On the other hand, we should be aware – just as contemporaries were – that not only religion, but music, dance and combat games fulfilled important functions in the redefinition of ethnic identities and lifestyles. Whilst the deported Congos, Angolas, Minas or Moçambiques slowly disappeared from Brazil during the second half of the nineteenth century (most of them died in exile and only a small number returned to their homelands), these identities remained significant in Brazilian popular culture. In the realm of religion African 'nations' became theological concepts, ideological and ritual patterns defining specific religious groups (Lima 1976: 77). In capoeira, the neo-African 'nations' ended up designating specific rhythmic patterns and types of game (for example Angola, Benguela). Interestingly enough, names of saints (Santa Maria, São Bento) are used for the same purpose of identification, reflecting, once again, the complex relationship between popular Catholicism and ethnic identity. During the twentieth century, Angola eventually became the rallying term for a revivalist style of capoeira. Furthermore, Congo, Moçambique and other 'nations' also designate rhythmic patterns and dances in a wide range of other expressions of popular culture (*jongo*, *congada* etc.).

The widespread use of these neo-African 'nations' is perfectly in line with the historical formation of slave society and culture in Brazil. The evolution of their meaning in the Brazilian context illustrates the process of creolization as much as the rapid changes in the various forms of slave and popular culture. If creolization entailed fusions between different traditions and practices, we also need to recognize that fragmentation was as much a part of that process. Thus creolization was never a linear process of mixture, but always combined fusion and segmentation. Furthermore, the relocation of specific African practices in other contexts and wider cultural manifestations resulted in the permanent redefinition of their meanings independently of changes in formal aspects.

In other words, intense change does not necessarily exclude commitment to traditions as long as alterations remain within certain parameters. If tradition and innovation are not necessarily two excluding strategies, but rather the ingredients of any successful process of adaptation, we can understand why the Afro-Brazilian experience, and more generally that of Afro-Americans in the Diaspora, becomes so important in the current globalization process. They help people to adapt to change whilst remaining genuine. That is why the globalized forms of samba and capoeira remain, until this day, so distinctively African *and* Brazilian, or Afro-Brazilian.

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