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## THE CARNIVAL IN THE BIGGEST BRAZILIAN CITY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to understand the different uses of territory in the context of events, which are associated with the carnival, in São Paulo city. Given the different territorial uses by the Sambistas, there was a connection between the theory and the field work that achieved a critical explanation of the territorialities in the “world of Samba” and focused on a problem that involves both territory and culture. In this sense, the mechanisms through which the Samba occupy social practices and subjective representations became evident; they act as if “against-finality.” All of these practices benefit experiences and leisure over the whole year, not only at Carnival; they also structure sociability nets that generate territorialities in an essentially collective sense.

Keywords: territorialities, carnival, São Paulo

This paper presents concepts developed by Dozena (2012), in which we look to identify different aspects of Samba music<sup>1</sup>, relative to the division of territories in São Paulo, Brazil, and to understand the processes involved in establishing territorialities through the social practices and subjective representations that permeate all regions of the city. For this purpose, it was necessary to explore the relative characteristics of the territories demarcated by the Sambistas<sup>2</sup>, as well as the interactions taking place within these territories.

Important to note is the fact that Samba is not perceived solely as a musical style that is still preserved in the social imagination of the Brazilian people; to the foreigner, it is one of the most important forms of representation of Brazilianness (the quality or characteristic of being Brazilian). It is necessary to recognize that Samba is perceived as more than just a musical style, and that any relationships established by the Sambistas in these neighborhoods, generally, are not accessible to the whole of society, although they supply relevant symbolic signs where they happen.

Another misconception present in both the speech of the Sambistas, and of some scholars on the subject, can be realized in the ideas regarding the carnival, which are democratically defined in the cities. Furthermore, considering that the carnival is manifested in different districts, in general association

with musical groups, carnival blocks, or Samba schools<sup>3</sup> that do not parade in the Carnival Parade of Sambadrome<sup>4</sup>, it is of less importance, although it is full of spontaneity, improvisation, and symbolism.

This paper begins by pointing out that Samba presents a dimension more substantive than that of the carnival. Although the carnival party has been represented on television shows related to the Sambadrome ground as a stage, today it sews together new social relations from its own movement that occurs in the territories of the Samba, caused by the carnival blocks, Samba circles, and movements of Samba as well as the events that take place throughout the year in the courts of the Samba schools.

Yet, it is well worth differentiating the Samba of the carnival, which is a central element that resides exactly in the parties carried out in February or March, and is marked by the appropriation of some elements present in Samba. Equally, it is important to reaffirm that the “world of Samba” not only circumscribes a musical style, but also that the social-spatial practices and ways of life that coexist with the events of carnival have historically influenced the configuration and association with the carnival.

Another observation is that, more and more, the Samba movements and circles<sup>5</sup> inform the community

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<sup>1</sup> A Brazilian musical genre and dance style which has its roots in West Africa via the slave trade.

<sup>2</sup> Sambistas are persons that performs samba (samba dancers, samba musicians or samba lovers) and who participate in the activities associated with the Samba (carnival, parties of the Samba schools, and Samba circles).

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<sup>3</sup> Samba school is a cultural and social association of members joining together for the purpose of learning and performing Brazilian samba music, dance, and associated practices.

<sup>4</sup> Sambadrome of Anhembi is a space managed by the Municipal Town Hall of Sao Paulo where the carnival party acquires the dimensions of a television show.

<sup>5</sup> Samba circles functioned as territorialized spaces that generated social interactions and a sense of community; they literally mean Samba practiced in a circle. Principally after the 1990s, groups of local musicians, who had been gathering for years to play Samba with a common ideology, tried to achieve certain general goals together. Yet, the city of Sao Paulo has been passed by a “revitalizing wave” shaped by movements of

“socially”. In this respect, they are mostly set against the cultural values of immediate consumption, where a new means of constructing another reality is glimpsed.

From their direct commitment to Samba and communitarian values, the Sambistas seize territory as much for existence as for the production and reproduction of their material life. It is these appropriations of the geographical space that forms the social relations they produce, and these can strengthen an identity that utilizes territory as its reference. Therefore, the Sambistas develop symbolic exchanges with the territories in which they are inserted, when “constituting part of their equipment is the psychological-social acquired in their process of socialization and of life” (Moraes, 2001, p. 44).

The notion of Sambista includes the subject that drives the “evolution” of Samba, that which does not depend on one’s skin color, with actions and independent motivations, as a process grounded in improvisation. In this sense, it is from the demonstrations of the Sambistas that the territories discussed here are produced, as will be shown. The notion of territoriality that we are taking into account considers the appropriation and the control of the territory by the Sambistas: from spatial mediations of power, which stretch out from the concrete to the symbolic (Haesbaert, 2004; Souza, 1995). This notion was developed by contact with anthropologists, who posit questions of symbolism, inheritance, and ways of life. The territorialities are, therefore, the strategic actions of demarcation, of practice of power, control, and territorial existence practiced by the Sambistas, whereby “through this control there is made possible the imposition of the rules of access, of circulation and normativity of uses, of attitudes and behaviors” (Gomes, 2002, p. 12) on a piece of the ground.

Looking to interpret the representations and identifications present in the territory and to consider it as a dimension of the human experience and physical space, we start to appreciate the appropriation that occurs every day by the groups that inhabit these areas, and to articulate the production of symbolic interactions. While considering the territories in the “world of Samba” from São Paulo<sup>6</sup>, it is suggested that the appropriation “can be built from multiple vehicles, imagination, feelings, possession, property, use, without any of them always meaning the effective exercise of control over the objects and the social practices that there take place” (Gomes, 2002, p. 13).

The symbolic interactions illustrate the extent to which geography is not allowed to be prisoner to the

classic understanding of territory under the notion of territorial power. In this way, the knowledge of the territories of Samba is open to the possibility of being understood in conjunction with other understandings, enlarging the discussion from the concept of territory and recovering other dimensions connected with daily life. The Sambistas define their territory and geographical space from daily life. They are the appropriations of the geographical space that is turned into territories of Samba, appropriations assumed like mediation of the representations built from an imaginary connection to Samba, where the neighborhoods themselves start to promote representations of urban life.

The Samba courts and sheds<sup>7</sup> of the Samba schools, the viaducts appropriated for rehearsals, the cultural centers, the public squares, the samba pubs, the streets where the Samba circles happen—these are more than simple constructions or areas situated at some point of the city; these places acquire a diversity of meanings and values subjectively projected and territorialized.

It is interesting to note that several economic activities directed within the carnival exuberant parade are supported principally by temporary work, which includes a series of economic activities, such as the outsourced dressmakers’ production of fantasies and t-shirts, and the assembly of the floats carried out by specialized professionals, many of them originating from Parintins (AM). It can be confirmed that these activities mobilize a specific market located principally in the 25 of March Street (in the center) and are specialized in the sale of costumes, masks and props for the carnival.

Notably, there seems to exist a tendency for the media to guide the carnival, accompanied by the invasive logic of business management in the Samba schools. The latter have the obvious aim of competing in the carnival, although internally there is the possibility of other cultural demonstrations, and of social familiarity that is not always linked to this competition. Principally, owing to the high profitability achieved, the traditional posture of the media and of the public powers is to privilege the depiction of the carnival transmitted by television, and disregard, in most instances, the set of social relations established out of the events linked to the television parade.

In this sense, Samba works like a material and symbolic set of practices that contribute to well-being in the city of São Paulo, although the logic of the territorial concentration of cultural production is very often harnessed to economic factors. Yet, there is a “world of Samba” in São Paulo that takes as a starting point the relation between two complementary logics: that of the

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Samba that looked to rescue the “roots” of the Samba and to favor a reunion with the Samba musicians of the past, who left their contribution through musicians very often not still known by the current Sambistas themselves.

<sup>6</sup> The designation “world of Samba” aims to include the activities that take the samba as the central element; among these are what happens in the Samba schools, Samba circles, Samba pubs, projects, and movements of Samba. Owing to the scope available to the research, we focus the analysis on the Samba schools, Samba circles, and the movements of Samba. There was no attachment to the events of dance, Samba-rock and what takes place, or doesn’t in sophisticated pubs; this material would warrant another article.

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<sup>7</sup> The Samba courts are enclosed spaces where the rehearsals happens before the carnival parade. The sheds are the places where the Samba schools and much of the carnival blocks out use for the production of their fantasies and props, as well as the construction of the floats. In these places, the carnival organizer and the chief of the shed orientate the dressmakers, the locksmiths, the decorators, and the carpenters in the development of the stages of work necessary to the carnival parade.

city that turns part of the samba into a product for consumption (with preference for televised depictions of carnival), and that of the place--the traditional point of cultivation and enjoyment of bonds of belonging and sociability.

In this way, the public and private carnival events accomplished, practiced, and appreciated by the Sambistas, are revealed as other than a single instance. Other events that happen in the city during the year are of great importance, but are disregarded by some researchers, once they have visualized Samba in its singular association with the instance of the carnival.

The carnival party is considered the most profane of all, and incorporates elements of Samba. Therefore, Samba began to happen in Sambadromes, co-opted by an industry that changed the animal skin drums to artificial skins, which were produced in considerable numbers.

It is also noticeable that within the territories, "wire" drivers and mediators of the dialog between tradition and modernity are acting, tradition that is dynamic and is reinvented daily, but not necessarily ruined by the transformation of the cultural demonstrations being displayed, as if there was an inexorable loss of tradition in the face of cultural transformation processes.

It is worth remembering that there are exchanges of relationships that are not commercial, even if all trade is an exchange that uses merchandise. It is worth remembering, also, that even with the processes of globalization, not everything "goes global," in that localism and regionalism are reinforced in a cultural process.

A fact that illustrates this dynamic of exchanges and negotiations between the traditional and the modern occurs at the opening of the São Paulo carnival, when Afóxés Filhos da Coroa de Dadá e Iyá Ominibú introduces the first night of parades at the Anhembi Sambadrome. The *afoxés* (a genre of afro-religious grouping) are sponsored and advised by parents and holy mothers-- members of terraces of Candomblé (a religion of African origin).

To understand the samba territories through the view of ruptures and continuities that have occurred in São Paulo's history, this paper employs the use of periodization, which is a fundamental key variable in the study of contemporary societies. It is also an important theoretical tool for territorial studies; as Milton Santos (1979, 1985) reflects, periodization enables the integration of temporal dimensions into geographical analysis. Therefore, we can understand the São Paulo Samba from its historical context, for "each period can be considered as a homogeneous segment of historical time, wherein the variables are kept in balance within the same combination" (Santos, 1979 p. 26).

The presupposition of this method allows us to reflect on rural and festive drums, as well as the religious rituals that occurred after the arrival of African immigrants in the slave quarters and in the interior yards of São Paulo. In this way, one can try to understand the transformations in the samba.

While specifying the present social, historical, and spatial complexity in the facts pertaining to Samba, we

try to recognize the multiple possible interpretations from the proposal of periodization of Samba from São Paulo (see Square 1). It is worth remembering that, like any synthetic approach, this periodization implicates an elevated degree of simplification, and begins from the eternal events that make up part of the history of Samba from São Paulo.

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1st Period: 1914 to 1969 - Rural drumming, festive drumming, religious drumming; Carnival Cords; first recordings on discs; presence of Samba on radio broadcasts; appropriation of culture and symbolism of Samba for the State; beginning of the dispersal of the Sambistas of the central districts to the periphery.

2nd Period: 1969 up to 1991 - Official designation of the carnival from São Paulo, Samba-like product of mass (Pagode); export of the Rio de Janeiro model of carnival; intensification of the founding of Samba schools; intensification of the dispersal of the Sambistas to the different regions of São Paulo.

3rd Period: 1991 up to today - Inauguration of the Anhembi Sambadrome; exacerbation of the carnival-like television spectacle; Samba-like product of mass (samba of roots, samba-rock); model of Samba school enterprises; intensification of the public and private commercial interests in the carnival; intensification of the social actions in the Samba schools; significant increase of the carnival blocks of the street.

Square 1: Periodization of Samba from Sao Paulo  
Source: Conception and preparation of the author

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It is believed that the object of research, carnival, should always be narrated to avoid a romanticized air. Nevertheless, it is not as this would deny that from a ritualistic point of view, Samba allows for the creation of sensations or states of mind impregnated with personal and deep existences, able to cause feelings of joy and of renewal.

On the other hand, although common sense dictates that it comes down to a musical style that is also one of the principal symbols of representation of the Brazilian identity in and outside of the country, it is also representative of the social face of the most national of Brazilian cultural expressions. We can consider the samba as a Brazilian commodity, a product submitted for export since the phenomenon of Carmen Miranda.

Samba transcends this meaning, reminding us that we understand Samba not only as a musical type, but also as a way of thinking, of feeling and of building private territories in the city. Therefore, it is also synonymous with sources of inspiration, of rhythmicity, of playfulness, of creative and libertarian power, of "religious exercise" for some, and poetic and revolutionary activity for others (though it is wrapped in a sociality placed in a hierarchical social structure).

It is here that our theory of which practices, speeches, and representations of the samba dancers guard a character of counter-finality; because of not always having finality themselves, they incorporate a playful and law-breaking character that does not

belong to the logic based on production but to that of the imagination and sensibility.

Recovering certain attributes of the life of the Sambistas, we can associate these reflections with the fact that the territories of Samba are concrete and/or symbolically dominated/appropriated by a signification that functions alongside his physical limits and his material use. These territories start to have a referential system of identity with the potential to strengthen a collective identity through territorial bases, and result in distinct and specific territorial appropriations within the city of São Paulo.

The change occurring in the carnival in the last years has shown up and accompanied the process of urban expansion of São Paulo. It serves to remind us that the question of the successful changes in the carnival assumed that much was meant by those who were interviewed, although the speeches were predominately about profitability being the principal intention of the party. In the case of the alterations suffered by the samba, some believe that they really show up, for example, in the commercial logic present in the hundreds of bars and clubs, places where there is music featuring the Pagode (a musical style clearly turned into a commercial product).

In general, when one talks about the samba of roots, one is referring to a referential system valued for featuring a historical hallmark. Therefore, the tonic of this referential system is included in the general history of the samba, and in the productions undertaken by some master-songwriters. However, for the Sambistas who frequent the movements of samba or the Samba schools, there is a historical grounding better organized and based on knowledge transmitted by relatives themselves or by friends. In certain ways, the movements of samba are, in effect, a reagent to the commercial samba-like product sold, which has undergone the "gears" of the cultural industry.

Expressively, the transformation of the carnival cords in Samba schools, as well as the mercantile dynamic present in the schools, make up part of the reformation that took place and still takes place, in spite of the opposition presented principally by the most ancient Sambistas. The speech attributed by most of our interviewees approaches an attitude where everything that is ancient is "good." This nostalgia for the past disregards the dialectic movement intrinsically present in the transformation of the samba as a cultural demonstration; it considers authenticity to be a thing where the past is always better than the present. As discussed, although the samba has appeared as an expression of resistance, and although it has been incorporated by the dynamic of the carnival and of the media market, it still resists and denounces the mercantilist character of life and modes of existence.

Confirming the hypothesis indicated earlier, we can suggest that the practices of the Sambistas have a counter-finality, which makes for a less routinized and more magical life, one less mechanized and less administered. This support for our hypothesis speaks, in a certain way, to the conception of residue (Lefebvre, 1991), deviation (Certeau, 1994), and other rationalities (Santos, 2002).

Much of what is transmitted by the culture of samba is situated in the field of morality (where it has a tendency to discipline and to create territories moved by the logic of the functionality and bureaucracy) and not in that of literacy. In some cases, morality can work like a fountain of diversion, creating resistance to the powers that set up and affirm the territories of power, of discipline, of administration and of bureaucracy. However, the culture of samba is not created out of the dynamic brought about by modernity and the sheer dynamic of the market, but is recomposed and re-appropriated day after day by the modern, being inspired and challenged by it (as can be observed in the compositions of Adoniran Barbosa).

Through the testimonies and the behavior itself of those interviewed, we note the existence of an opposition between the public space and the space of the Samba school, of the movement, or of the wheel of samba. While the former is replete of standards and codes of participation, the latter is accessible to anyone. In other words, public space is opened to the circulation of difference: in the tests of carnival blocks, in the festive dates, or in the project Rua do Samba Paulista (Street of Samba Paulista), for example.

As we begin to participate in the events related to samba, we are moved by the question of mutual help and friendship (although this situation coexists with the conflicts and contradictions inherent in social relations). It is enough to point out that the typical sociability of the "world of Samba" is an especially lively element of joy among the participants.

Regarding the movements of the Sambistas and Samba circles in the city of São Paulo, it was demonstrated that these last a long time because they are supported by a composition that perseveres despite the scorn of the media (exceptional to Samba of the Candle), and the inevitable changes that have occurred in the carnival. In its ritualistic form, it is meetings with others that evoke the past, and accommodate it to the current circumstances and to the net of relations woven by the daily scenarios. Thus the movements and Samba circles, at the same time as they excite and celebrate articulations in the flow of the day by day, are not events of distinctive character but are those of everyday customs; in them are characteristics of daily life that show up through the compositions played and sung in the Samba circles.

We believe that samba's movements can be identified as owners of different and new elements in the dynamics of the "world of Samba", by having organized themselves into emergent and specific spatial arrangements of resistance to the "commodified" samba that is undertaken in most schools of samba of the Special Group. In this way, a great many of them lack standards and authority, and are looking for the actuation of something that is in the memory of the local community and concerns the ancient Samba circles, although perhaps these did not happen in the forms in which they now occur. A realization in our field work was that these movements produce relations much more local than the Samba schools, and are principally those already co-opted by an economic logic.

Although not related directly, the Samba schools are sources of stimuli for the movements of samba, in which they look to value the most ancient composers of São Paulo, who were like guardians of Samba in the city. Perhaps it is there where the samba demonstrates its greatest resistance, where it accompanies the march to restore the conception of community and of new relations between the Sambistas and the samba, and of the Sambistas with the carnival. The media spectacle and profitability that gained momentum with the entry of the television transmission of the carnival's dynamics from the 1970s, was such that the parades started to suffer gradual modifications on behalf of an aesthetics that normalized and valued the appearance and uniform movement of the marchers. This process of change also came accompanied by the introduction of professional set designers in the preparation of the allegorical cars, which also contributed to the enlargement of the spectacular dimension of the television carnival. While turning out to the rhythm imposed by the standards of television, the Samba schools admitted acceleration in the steps and a consequent damage to the spontaneity of the samba in the foot. This observation is demonstrated, for example, in the impressive pressure performed by the security guards in the dispersion area of the Sambadrome of Anhembi. Yet that is surpassed by a sensation of ecstasy at the end of the parade when, crossing the "line of arrival," the marchers are necessarily obliged to retire. The introduction of the logic of competition between the Samba schools is accompanied by the possibility of greater control of a population that does not perform the carnival in the streets, but in the Sambadrome. In this way, the commotion that might happen with the occupation of the streets during the carnival parties is reduced. On the other hand, the social hierarchy is maintained inside the spectacularized parades, with the presence of posts with bigger distinction and visibility (caught by televisions with bigger quality, generally in the highest points of the allegorical cars).

Generally, the one who occupies such elevated posts is someone who presents a status equally elevated to near the association and/or the society. The dynamic of the spectacularized carnival not only presents a hierarchy, but one that is politically and economically transacted and controlled by profitable interests; these equally guarantee an enormous expressiveness and beauty to the party and still constitute a relevant popular demonstration. The quick growth of the city of São Paulo, that took place principally from the 1950s, was accompanied by a process of chaotic urbanization in its periphery, and also the dispersal of the samba to the distant areas of the ancient center. With the dispersal of the Sambistas, the aspects related to the territorialities of the samba came to the surface, accompanied by a plurality of revealing scenarios involving the dialectics of resistances and counter-speeches. In the territories of the samba, we note a great mosaic constituted by means of social resistance; however, public power customarily is disregarded or

proves ineffective in relation to the orientation of social policies<sup>8</sup>.

In addition, while trying to understand the notion of communitarianism belonging to São Paulo's reality, which is based on a feeling of adherence to a locality, we realize that this approach to community is unable to translate, under the influence of previous theoretical presuppositions, the circulation, the familiarity and the rootlessness communitarianism presents in current metropolitan contexts. For this reason, any researchers that are available to explore the territorialities of samba in São Paulo, with the preoccupation of discovering the carnival in the biggest Brazilian city, will come across a huge thematic richness, much of which refers as much to the forms of structuring and use of the territory, as it does to the Sambistas' ways of living. In the context of all these reflections about the "world of Samba" in São Paulo, we took as a "backdrop" the images and the scenarios realized alongside our experiences in the field. In them, we look to understand the city as a dynamic and dialectic totality, where the Sambistas survive in their daily lives with relative intensity, in the particular nets of sociability where they reside. At the same time, they build in their imagination a point of referential identity with the city and, not exclusively, with their district. Very expressively, the experience of participant observation offered the opportunity to discover our "cultural essence" as Brazilians. The richness of this experience of surviving in the field was great as was the contact with the Sambistas from all the regions of the city. In the contact established with this reality, we revised and questioned some simplifying slogans: it is that the authentic samba is in Rio de Janeiro; it is that the samba only exists and is conceived of in the peripheries; or it is that the carnival is a party that only takes place in the Sambadrome of Anhembi, among others. Yet, we could note that the Samba circles and bars of Samba are not present only to a privileged, particular place, but are present in nearly the whole city of São Paulo. The field work gained amplitude because it perceptibly affected my subjectivity while resident in a city that I began to know better.

Needless to say, the production of a documentary-video contributed to the best understanding of the territorialities of samba in São Paulo, proving that other rationalities based on the geographical imagination can collaborate for the scientific advancement of geographical theory and method.

In fact, we believe that following scientific parameters and guided by an analytical clear cutting, this tool was appropriate for capturing some insight that is not always otherwise translatable for the more artistic forms of understanding reality<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> In the last years we find an explosion of city blocks, something that is connected with the necessity of social expression and the support originating from the Municipal City Hall. For further details, listen to the interview in Portuguese: <http://cbn.globoradio.globo.com/programas/cbn-sao-paulo/2015/02/14/EXPLOSAO-DE-BLOCOS-VEM-DANECESSIDADE-DOS-PAULISTANOS-SE-EXPRESSAREM.htm>

<sup>9</sup> This documentary can be seen in two parts, in the You Tube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6ytZZxngOQ>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI7-D6ehGwc>

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