



Black Performance and Body Dramaturgy in the *Batuque*

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ABSTRACT – Black Performance and Body Dramaturgy in the *Batuque* – The expansion of what can be considered as a scene, show or performance is a major contribution of Ethnoscenology and Performance Studies to the field of the Performing Arts, breaking borders that are based on the colonialism of knowledge, which radically separated art from grassroots culture, putting creation and tradition in different poles. This shift of paradigm opens the possibility of thinking the body dramaturgy of the African-Brazilian rituals as a construct of the relationship between body and ancestry. It is in this perspective that this paper presents a discussion on the black performance of *batuque*, more specifically the *Suçã*, from Natividade (TO/Brazil).

Keywords: **Dramaturgy. Body. *Batuque*. Afro-Brazilian Performance.**

RÉSUMÉ – Performance Afro-Brésilienne et Dramaturgies Corporelles des *Batuques* – Une importante contribution de l’ethnocénologie et des études de la performance dans le domaine de l’art de la scène est l’expansion de ce qui peut être considéré comme la scène ou comme le spectacle, en brisant les frontières, fondées sur le colonialisme du savoir, qui ont séparé radicalement l’art de la culture populaire, en polarisant la création et la tradition. Cette rupture de paradigme ouvre la possibilité de penser les dramaturgies corporelles présentes dans les rituels africain-brésiliens comme une construction de la relation entre le corps et l’ancestralité. C’est dans cette perspective que cet article présente une discussion sur la performance africain-brésilienne des *batuques*, plus précisément la *Suçã*, de la ville de *Natividade*, située dans l’état du *Tocantins*, au Brésil.

Mots-clés: **Dramaturgie. Corps. *Batuque*. Performance Afro-Brésilienne.**

RESUMO – Performance Negra e a Dramaturgia de Corpo no *Batuque* – Uma importante contribuição da Etnocénologia e dos Estudos da Performance para o campo de estudo das Artes Cênicas é a ampliação do que pode ser considerado como cena, espetáculo ou performance, rompendo fronteiras, calcadas no colonialismo do saber, que separaram radicalmente arte e cultura popular, polarizando criação e tradição. Essa quebra de paradigma abre a possibilidade de pensar as dramaturgias corporais presente nos rituais afro-brasileiros como um constructo da relação corpo e ancestralidade. É nessa perspectiva que o presente artigo apresenta uma discussão sobre a performance negra dos *batuques*, mais especificamente a *Suçã*, da cidade de *Natividade*, estado do *Tocantins*.

Palavras-chave: **Dramaturgia. Corpo. *Batuque*. Performance Negra.**

Introduction

*Until the lions invent their own stories,
the hunters will always be the heroes
of the hunting narratives (African saying).*

As observed by Brah (1996), the questions of difference, diversity, pluralism and hybridism are in the center of the contemporary debates. It is an opportune moment for the Dance and Performing Arts theories and studies in general to cross the abyssal line that relegated the dramatical black-Africans and afro-Brazilians manifestations to the retrocession and confinement of the primitive and the folkloric, as a marker of the domination and subordination relation between colonizer and colonized.

Slenes (2011), when observing that the register of the dances of the enslaved, several times and for a long time, that is, from the 16th to the 20th century, was done by colonizers, being limited to understandings which were enrooted in prejudices, clarifies the mechanisms by which the *batuques* were made invisible in the scenario of the Brazilian dance history, making it difficult, even in contemporary times, to be part of dancers training, for instance.

Evoking the importance of *batuques* in the dance scene in Brazil does not intend to disregard the differences between a dance thought for the stage and a dance accomplished in circle by a certain community. Instead, it is to widen the analysis field of the body phenomenon in poetical transfigurations beyond the artistic canons, calling attention to three essential points: 1) the *batuques*, in spite of their organic and vital link with the *tradition*, were also forged through creation processes; 2) the *batuques* are live and active in contemporary times, that is, they are not artifacts of a forgotten and longing past; 3) the scenic dance, particularly the contemporary dance, makes us to perceive an ambiguity: at the same time that this manifestation is presented as privileged for the democratization of the body languages, all its structure, as well as its own techniques, are formed by conceptions and epistemologies that link it with quite a particular and hegemonic cultural universe.

That said, we approach the *batuques* as manifestations of Afro-Brazilian dance that present their corporal dramaturgy constructed in the

play and in the relation with the ancestry. Here, the concept of corporal dramaturgy, in its quality of poetical fabric agencied by the body in movement, looks appropriate to us, as the performing character of these manifestation would be tight and would impoverish when analyzed under the view of notions like step and choreography.

To avoid risking being under abstract generalizations, we will present the concept of *batuque* also from the ethnographic experience with the *Suça*, in the municipality of Natividade, Tocantins (TO) state, systemized in the MSc thesis *A Suça em Natividade: Festa, batuque e ancestralidade* (Rosa, 2015).

Batuque: music and dance

In the African conception, from which the Brazilian *batuques* descend, music and dance hardly are distinguished, as they are completely amalgamated. Already in 1961, Edison Carneiro, in his classic book *Sambas de Umbigada*, evidences that in all the wide area of sugar cane, tobacco, cotton and coffee plantations, as well as in the mining works of which people from Angola and the Congo effectively took part, *batuques* were present, being called by the as *Sambas de Umbigada*. As already pointed in Silva (2010a), these forms of expression, initially rural, being played in farmyards, in contemporary times are in different urbanization processes, including the phenomenon of appropriation by the big capitals, as it has happened in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba, for instance, to where some traditional expressive manifestations of the interior or other regions of the country migrated and are being resignified.

Roger Bastide's studies (1959) on the African diaspora in Brazil show that the *banto* matrix, pertaining to several ethnicities of Congo, Angola and Mozambique, was the driving force of the sugar mills of Northeast Brazil since the 17th century, having, in the 18th century, been responsible for the gold and diamond extraction of Minas Gerais, and, in the 19th century, acted in the coffee plantations in the Southeast Brazil.

Dias (2001) clarifies that, for the rural enslaved, in its great majority of *banto* origin, the expressive manifestations, called by the colonial period chronic as *Batuques*, *Calundus* or *Sambas*, represented the long hoped moment of reunion, in which a certain class conscience was developing among

the captives, who, given the impossibility of organization between their own ethnicities, saw themselves in situations of conviviality, communion and multiethnic celebration, which traditionally could be made impracticable by historic rivalries. Here, it is worth mentioning that some *bantos*, over all from the Congo region, came to Brazil already indoctrinated by Catholic missionaries.

As already pointed by Silva (2010a) in a paper entitled *Sambas de Umbigada: considerações sobre jogo, performance, ritual e cultura*, the Bahian Edson Carneiro (1961), instead of *batuque* chooses for the term *samba*, from *semba*, which in the *banto* Africa means *umbigada* [someone's navel touching the other one's]. Thus, for Carneiro (1961), the *Sambas de Umbigada* comprise a set of manifestations characterized by the presence of *umbigada* or the mention of this gesture, characteristic of the *banto*-African ludic love dances. The author and researcher catalogued a total of 33 dances distributed throughout the Southeast, Northeast and North of Brazil.

On the other hand, Dias (2001) called attention to other characteristics present in *sambas de umbigada*, to which, however, he preferred to call generically as *batuques*: the drums made in hollowed tree trunks or in cooperages with one skin only set with nails, sharpened by fire, or their rhythmic-timber reinterpretation in *industrial* manufactured models instruments; voice tuning by the drum; vocal style in which short phrases alternate between solo and choir or in which the choir repeats a fixed refrain, while the soloist evolves with certain freedom; the improvised chant in the challenge form; the presence of strong metaphoric language, with subjects of historical and social chronicle of the community.

In this sense, Silva (2010b) observes that quite often these manifestations are situated in a sacred/secular liminal context, in which the religious attitude permeates organically the apparently secular party and vice versa. Such relation is manifested in the respect to the drums, ancestors and other spiritual entities.

Concerning the dance, the choreographic formations in circle value the individual or paired performance to the center, with exception of the São Paulo *batuque*, accomplished in lines. In the women, the twirled skirts or slightly twirled are used not only as clothing, but also as a scenic element, what confers a certain projection to the movement; the feet, bare or

not, are planted on the ground; and the vertebral column generally has a slight or an accentuated inclination of the axle forward, following the flexion in the knees and strong, or moderate, mobility in the hip.

Here, from Silva (2012), we will consider the *batuques* as manifestation of crossroads - a place of intersections through which the notions of sacred and secular, past and future overarch, in the quotidian where the liminal body inhabits. On its turn, the liminal body is the body in state of play in the ritual performance, that in the present-past becoming updates and re-signified corporal identifications inherited from a historical process of escape and fold of power, represented in the cultural operation that the installation and permanence of the *banto* matrix culture was in Brazil (Silva, 2012). Such identifications during the performance are materialized in the form of corporal dramaturgies.

The liminal body, as discussed by Silva (2012) from the Capoeira Angola and some *Sambas de Umbigada*, is provided with a dramaturgic power that we consider relevant for the study of dance in an anti-colonialist perspective, as it is presented as a receptacle of significant part of the plurality that constitutes the Brazilian culture.

The notion of liminal body, coined by Silva (2010b), had as its main backbone the vision of the anthropologist Turner (1974), who points that the instauration of a liminal space allows the search of sources of metapower, which certainly is body liberated, with its multiple resources not explored of pleasure, pain and expression. Under this perspective, it is possible to believe that in the *batuques* we are in face of bodies that deceived symbolically, at least in this instance, the microphysical power that manufactures docile bodies, already denounced by Foucault (1979).

The anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) discusses the phenomenon of *liminality* from the passage rituals. From the understanding that the Brazilian *batuques* are not, a priori, rituals of passage, as in them they do not have as function the distancing and, afterwards, the approximation of the individual with different social status, as for instance a change of place, state, social status or age group. However, these dances are happenings prescribed in occasions not dominated by the routine and related with the belief in beings or mystic forces, this way characterizing themselves as events

where the social structures are disorganized by the plays and by the chance established (Turner, 1974; Carlson, 1996).

When proposing that the ritual and the performing arts derive from the liminal axle of the social drama, Turner (1974) inserts the performance, thought here from Schechner's studies (2002), as forms of liminal power. It is in this sense that we consider here that the *batuques* of the Brazilian blacks, as an Afro-Brazilian performance, are constituted by forms of liminal power. *Batuques* like *Jongo*, *Suçã*, *Tambor de Crioula* and *Samba de Roda* are inhabited and signified by liminal bodies that, in turn, constitute the crossroad, a place where the triad playing the *batuque* - dancing - singing is constituted from the phenomenon of the ancestry.

The Dramaturgy of the Body Woven by the Ancestry

Culture is the movement of the ancestry. Ancestry is a fabric produced in the African weaving machine: in the weave of the weaving machine the horizon of the space; in the warp of the fabric it is the verticality of the time. By interlacing the threads of time and space, one creates the fabric of the world that articulates the weave and the warp of the existence (Oliveira, 2007, p. 245).

A sound of drum amidst the parties inherited from the colonial period, when the Catholic faith progresses and is updated. It is *batuque* de negro! And the drum as an agglutinating object and symbol of a specific community announces in its voice the sound of African ancestries.

In the ancestry's performance, tradition and memory are designed in the ritual space-time through a dramaturgy of the body. The ancestry, either of *banto* or *ioruba* matrix, among others forms, is announced in the sound of the drum and inscribes in the bodies that respond to it. "The drum touches the body and the body dances the drum" (Rosa, 2015, p. 40).

The African symbolic universe in Brazil is reterritorialized in the core of the Catholic hagiology inscribing new senses and meanings. There is, in the knowledge and language of the drums, the hindering of the emptying of memory. This echo of the drums with their timbres and enunciates results from a complex system of manufactures that inserts the subject in a collective black *corpus* and get pregnant of Africa the American lands (Rosa, 2015, p. 40).

In the *batuques*, in the *Congadas*, in the *Capoeira*, in the farmyards and through the drum, echoes the transgression of the order of the slavery system in which the black community inscribed an ethnic affirmation. Through this sound, the ancestry reverberated in the bodies of people who had their *human condition* violated by slavery and became a resistance that reverberates nowadays.

The ancestry concept becomes the core of the materialization of the *batuque* as manifestation of crossroads, where the liminal body manifests by means of a “dramatized memory” (Martins, 1997).

Another discussion proposed by the mentioned author consists of the ritual acts certifying the power of the individual and his responsibilities. In this understanding lies the individual dimension of identity and the appropriation of the traditional culture by the individual.

Even though the phenomenon of identity can to be understood as what qualifies the subject from social perspectives, we appeal here to Silva and Falcão’s conception (2015), who propose that, in the studies of cultural performances, the identity is thought from the human corporeality, as it is by the body that we happen in the world and it is in the symbolic dimension of the performance that we become culture makers.

The dramaturgy of the body in the *batuque* is formed by the poetical weave of bodies in movement in deep connection with the drum. It is the expression of the black in the world crossed by his individual and collective identifications that reverberate along the years in a resistant form.

The *batuque* is a way of announcing oneself in the world as Afro-descendant and creator of culture. A culture that resists and subverts the hegemonic aesthetic standards based on the invisibility or the making of the black body exotic.

The cruelty of the representations operated symbolically and physically in the body of the African and their children in the slavery process did not mute or paralyzed the capacity of expression by the black body that, nurtured by the myth, the memory and the imaginary resignified life by the ancestry (Rosa, 2015).

Permeated by individual and collective memories that resound throughout the times in resistant character, the black performance (Rosa, 2015) is the expression of black men and women in the world assimilating

the symbolic dimension of the body at that specific time and space and, therefore, the dramaturgic dimension of the body. This ancestral core also becomes sense. The ancestry is the power of the dramaturgy of the body in the black performance.

In this way, the memory of Africa, both historical and mythical and imagined, is what constitutes, first and foremost, the notion of ancestry that operates in the liminal bodies of the crossroads of *batuques* like the *Tambor de Crioula*, the *Samba de Roda*, the *Coco*, the *Jongo* and the *Suça*. On the other hand, the influences of the Catholic church that happened in the colonial period must also be considered as constituent element of the *batuques*, as, although having been presented in an ostensive way, the Catholic faith turned into sincere devotions for male and female saints.

It is from a glance toward the colonial Brazil that the resilience and capacity of negotiation of the black culture becomes evident, as it can be observed with the *Suça* in the municipality of Natividade (TO).

The *Suça*, that happens in the states of Goiás and Tocantins, results from a process of updating of the ancestry for an identitarian construction that rubs the acceptance of a Catholic faith, as it is established among the Feasts of the Holy Ghost, Saint Anthony and Saint Sebastian, with the affirmation and maintenance of a black identity through the *batuque*.

In the *Suça*, the hands stress the time reflecting on the dead (leather) skin that gains life in the drum, the feet touch the ground as to recognize it, the skirt flits and the smile escapes through the face (Rosa, 2015, p. 40).

Thus, we can consider the *Suça* as a trace of the black culture, and the black culture as the movement of the ancestry itself, which, in its turn, are put into motion and make the body move in the body of the male and female *Suça* dancers. There are senses in these black bodies that flow between the ancestral past and the present established in a body that “[...] is more than a memory, is a trajectory. An anteriority. An ancestry” (Oliveira, 2007, p. 107). A body where a dramaturgic potency stemming from the ancestry notion resides and that takes form in the performance.

When understanding the history of the black people in the Americas as a narrative of crossings and migrations, where the experience of the sacred represents more than a cultural resistance and, as well, a form of ethnic, political and social survival, the author Martins (1997, p. 24) claims

that “[...] in the body/corpus of the African and of African origin, it was not possible to erase the cultural, textual signs and all the complex symbolic constitution which were the founders of its alterity”.

It lies on the notion of ancestry, used in the Afro-Brazilian culture, the African deterritorialization and its historical and subjective consequences. This process is observed by Martins (1997), who highlights the crossing of the African oral traditions and memories that, throughout history, establish strategies of institution and restoration of the significance of its culture, a process of the “crossroad”.

And it is through these crossroads that the identity is woven as well, in a mobile vital process, an identity that can be thought as a fabric and a texture, in which the sayings and mnemonic gestures of the oral African archives, in the dynamic process of interaction with the other, transform and reupdate themselves, continuously, in new and differentiated rituals of language and expression, choreographing the black singularities and alterities (Martins, 1997, p. 26).

It is in the crossroads that the historic subjects, capable of weaving their identity by means of interaction processes between their subjectivity, the ancestral past and the performance (re)invent themselves. In Oliveira's conception (2007), in the crossroad, the body is immanence. And, in turn, it is a consequence of the context and circumstances of this context. The mentioned author points out that the context of the African diaspora presents to these subjects the need of owning a territory, that is, in truth, their own body.

It is homesickness that functions as utopia. Better: it is homesickness as a mobile of an action that is guided by the time of the ancestors and that wishes to recreate the ‘spirit’ of the time of the ancestors. It is homesickness in the sense that the African black and descendants keep a link with their tradition, although this link does not happen in an institutional bond or of belonging to a nation, identity or religion (Oliveira, 2007, p. 228).

Oliveira (2007) highlights that, despite the reason of the homesickness being time, homesickness of a time that one did not see and the hope for a time that is for coming. This perception of the time assigns materiality to the *batuques* as black performances. Felisberta, a female *Suçã* dancer from Natividade, brings in her speech the dimension of the ancestry approached by the author:

[...] It was like they were waking up the ancestral gods, like reliving things from their land, killing homesickness a little, because they also sang for nature. [...] (Felisberta, May 2013 apud Rosa, 2015, p. 45)¹.

The concept of ancestry can then be thought, especially from Oliveira's contribution (2007), as a cultural thought that leaves the body for a collective existence, as the body is the locus of the experience where the memory resides. The ancestry is not, thus, a return to the past, on the contrary, it is about an updating of the tradition in the experience of the body. It is inscribed in the body a transformation process of the tradition from exchanges with the environment. There is in the African-black corporal manifestations an arsenal of codes that compose the collective memory and that, in the *Suçã*, has as generating potency the ancestry, extending the understanding of *batuques* beyond the sense of resistance only.

The *Suçã* is a knowledge that resists, transforms and is recreated by the body and in the body. Thus, the *Suçã* is a black performance (Rosa, 2015, p. 45-46).

In societies and cultures where dance is a form of prayer and where the gods themselves are pictured dancing, it is possible to recognize the conceptual and symbolic centrality of the body. In this way, dance in the *batuque*, as well as in other expressive Afro-Brazilian manifestations, is constructed by a dramaturgy of the body woven by the ancestry.

The *Suçã*: *batuque* in the Brazilian center-west

Called *súcia*, *sussa* and *sússia*, the *Suçã* dance has as a matrix the *batuques* inherited from the period of the slavery and the exploration of gold in Goiás state. The presence of this dance in the north of Goiás and Tocantins marks the black influence in the grassroots culture of the center-west, easily designated by its strong bumpkin influence.

Suçã is fuss, is joy, is teasing as people say. And this is *Suçã*, it is a *batuque* of the slave quarters (Felisberta, *Suçã* Inventory, 2011)².

According to the discussion introduced in Rosa (2015), the geographic cartography of the *Suçã* in the region of Goiás and Tocantins was formed by the routes of escape of the enslaved ones during the colonial period. For Karash (1996), the fact that they worked in mining regions with few men to watch; a type of land that allowed natural hiding places and the presence

of three great rivers - the Araguaia in the west, the Tocantins the east and the Paran , connected to innumerable tributaries, allowed constant escapes of slaves and the formation of *quilombola* [runaway slaves] communities.

Other slaves from the mines ran away to the mountains and the high lands. The Pireneus mountains, behind Meia Ponte (nowadays Piren polis), the Serra Dourada, close to Vila Boa, and the plateaus close to Arraias offered limitless possibilities of shelter. Although the savannahs made the escape harder, if the fugitives reached the woods, galleries and forests of *buritis* that bordered small streams, they could follow them to escape to the persecution of *capit es-do-mato* [bush captains]. In other areas, there were extensive woods in the 18th century, especially in the north, between the Araguaia and the Tocantins rivers, where *quilombolas* were often located and attacked, mainly in the dense forests, unexplored mountains, open savannahs, swamps infested with mosquitoes, hidden islands, innumerable rivers and a long distance from the whites; they had, at last, places where to raise *quilombos* [communities of runaway slaves] and life in freedom (Karash, 1996, p. 245).

This data is important in the understanding of the *Su a* in terms of territory, since this is located exactly in the east of Goi s and Tocantins states, being its constitution possibly related with the Tocantins river and the formation both of *quilombola* communities and municipalities like Natividade.

Karash (1996) also suggests that the region of Natividade, S o F lix, Arraias and Cavalcante, where the river Paran  also passes, may have formed a natural route that facilitated the movement of enslaved people in escape, propitiating the formation of *quilombos*, some remaining until the present.

The data collected by Rosa (2015) demonstrate that the *Su a* can be currently found in the limits of these regions as a manifestation of *quilombola* communities in Goi s (Cavalcante and Teresina de Goi s), as an urban manifestation, in the municipalities of Arraias, Natividade, S o Val rio de Natividade, Peixe, Paran , Porto Nacional, Concei o do Tocantins, all located in Tocantins state. There are oral accounts of the presence of the *Su a* in the northwest of Minas Gerais, Un i region.

It is important to highlight that, despite being an urban manifestation, the *Su a* also happens in *quilombola* communities of Tocantins, as is the

case of Redenção, 20 kilometers from the municipality of Natividade, also during the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost.

Next (Image 1), a map published in Frei Audrin's work (1963, p. 05) shows the mentioned regions where the *Suça* occurs, as well as the rivers that run in the region.

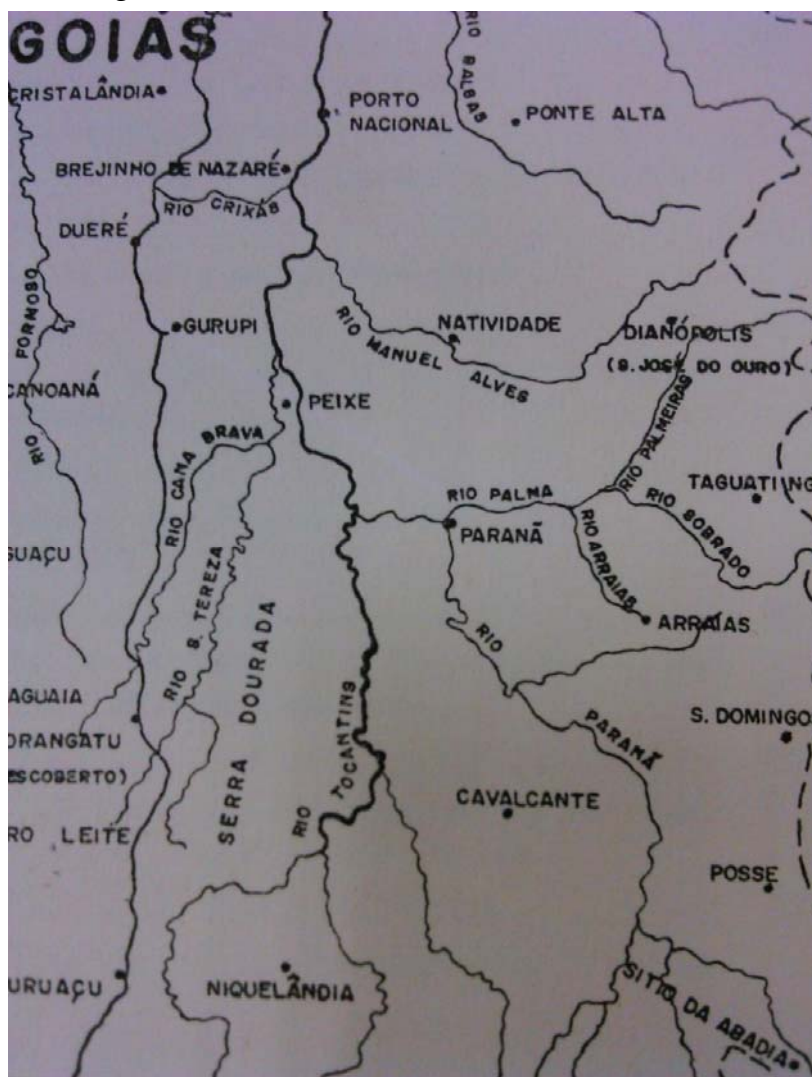


Image 1 – Map showing regions where the *Suça* occurs. Source: Audrin (1963).

In general, the *Suça* can be understood as a manifestation resulting from the parties of colonial Brazil in its friction between the power and the Catholic faith with the African influences. In a general way, in the Brazilian *batuques*, it is possible to perceive the presence of the grassroots Catholicism, either in the *Sambas de Roda* in honor of Saint Cosmas and Damian or in the *Tambores de Crioula* to fulfill a vow to Saint Benedict. In the case of *Suça*, despite being a

manifestation that has its own life, it is strongly linked to the devotion and the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost (Image 2).

An Ethnographic Experience with *Suçá* in Natividade³



Image 2 – Mast of the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost (2014). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 113).

Easter Sunday marks the beginning of the season of the feasts in Natividade that, for 40 days, will cover by horse the rural region and the neighboring cities. It is three feasts that, gathered in January, choose the

routes. They collect contributions for the party and take the Christian message to each house where they pass. When opening their doors, families try to offer their best within their means and are rewarded with chants and blessings. It is believed that there is a place of emotion, prayer and celebration marked by the hope of a better life and world.

The *alferes* [lieutenant], the revelers, the snare drum player and the *arrieiros* are part of each feast. There is also the dispatcher who organizes the group, with an average of 15 men, and assumes the responsibility for the families of the revelers while they are not present. Each feast has more than one dispatcher. The leaders of the group are the *alferes*, who carry the Flag of the Divine during the journey. The movements of the feast (arrival, departure, blessing, prayer, warnings) are announced by the *caixeiro* (snare drum player). The *arrieiros* [herders] are responsible for taking care of the animals and provisions for the troops; they that the ones who arrive first in the landing of the feasts to organize the procession. Finally, the revelers are the musicians who sing, dance, play, pray, sing the lines and are received with their horses at night.

In the beginning of the night the revelers arrive to the property to do the welcoming ritual. The owner distributes candles to the presents and the feast sings two chants. The owner of house or one of its inhabitants catches the flag and turns three times passing the flag among the revelers and inhabitants, each one of them kissing the red flag with a white dove and white embroidering, with colorful ribbons in different colors.

When all have kissed the flag, the revelers pause the chant, store the country guitar and deliver the tambourines to the care of the responsible reveler to be tuned by the fire. Served the supper, the snare drummer, making his instrument sound, calls the people to enter the room and, before the banquet, there is a prayer when all sing, pray *Our Father*, the Holy Ghost prayer and then you hear the pots lids. Rice, beans, pasta, salad, meat, *farofa*, soft drinks and dessert... Everybody is served. Later, the benches and the table are removed for the revelers to sing the blessing. Two lines are formed, one in front of the other, and verses are sung in pairs. The feet, the voices, the guitar and the tambourines are used to mark the rhythm and play the music. *Cachaça* is served. It is served to all the revelers and to any other one interested in it. At the end, the snare drum enters and everybody goes outside the house. *Suça* is going to start. Playing the snare drum, the

tambourine and the country guitar, the revelers invite the inhabitants the house to dance:

I want to see, I want to see, the male owner of the house dancing, but I didn't see, I didn't see, the female owner of the house dancing.

I want to see, I want to see the male owner of the house dancing, but I only saw, I only saw, the male owner of the house running away.

All of them participate in the circle that, despite being brief, is intense. The *alferes* of this feast said that, sometimes, the *Suçã* is not played, “*it depends whether the owner of the house asked for that or not*”. The picture below (Image 3) shows this moment during the stop in Felisberta's house, in 2014.



Image 3 – *Suçã* danced in the stop in Felisberta's house (2014). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 51).

The three feasts turn in different directions: “the *Outro Lado* turns around the Manoel Alves river, the *Cima* turns in São Valério and the *Gerais* goes toward Santa Rosa and, sometimes, reaches Palmas. It is 40 days long and they meet in the ritual called Encounter of the Feasts, as it is possible to see in Image 4, below:



Image 4 – Encounter of the Feasts (Photo by Flávio Cavaleira, 2014). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 52).

When the 40-day cycle of the Tour of the Feast is completed along the farms, on Thursday, the Ascension of Christ day, the Encounter of the Feasts happens at the Mother Church Plaza and the party continues in the house of the Emperor. After this date, the Divine Triduum begins: a mass happens at 7 PM in the Our Lady of Nativity Church on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, during which the worshippers sing and praise the Holy Ghost. These moments are preparations for the party that will happen on the following Saturday and Sunday.

Comes Saturday and, during the day, there is a procession along the city streets, called *Esmola Geral* [General Pittance]. At dusk, the Captain of the Mast Feast begins. Soon after the mass, the Captain goes to the Mast, which is next to his house, and is carried on top of the Mast during the Tour until the door of the Mother Church. The men carry both the Captain and the Mast, simulating the movements of a ship in high seas (Image 5).



Image 5 – Mast Tour (Auro Giuliano, 2009. Archive Fundação Cultural do Tocantins). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 55).

The *Suça* opens way to the Mast and next to it go the players of *zabumba*, country accordion and triangle and the city band, in a hurried procession. In the end of the turn, fireworks are blown off, male and female dancers dance, marking their presence, and walk toward to the foods and liquors that are at their disposal.

In the Pentecost Sunday, in the morning, the Reign of the Emperor starts with a parade along the streets of the city until the Our Lord of Bonfim Church, where the mass starts. The city band follows the parade. Lots of churchgoers fill the church. It is believed that at this moment the Holy Ghost pours out blessings and grace in seven gifts: Wisdom, Understanding, Counselling, Strength, Science, Mercy and Respect for God. More and more churchgoers come to the follow the Mass and the choice of the new Captain and the new Emperor. The drawing is followed with enthusiasm. The commotion is disseminated, the ones who were drafted cry and thank to the Divine Holy Ghost. Next, in the square by the Church, there is another banquet with typical foods, cakes, sweets and drinks for the population. This ritual happens exactly like this every year.

All 'local' ones share beliefs and knowledge in common. Little can be improvised. And this is because *one knows* unequally what is going to happen

and one knows unequally how to behave that the rite recreates the known and, thus, renews the tradition; what must be repeated every year as *knowledge*, to be considered as common *value*. It renews a knowledge whose strength is to be the same to be accepted. Repeating itself until becoming, more than a knowledge on the sacred only, a socially considered knowledge (Brandão, 2010, p. 58).

Amidst so much devotion and Catholic faith, the *Suçã* in the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost, in Natividade, as described previously, happens on Saturday, day of the Captain of the Mast, under the responsibility of the city's *Suçã* group, called *Mãe Ana*. The three drums placed on the ground, one by the other, announce the black presence in the party and agglutinate the male and female *Suçã* dancers who, at this moment, form a *drum community*. Close by, the children who follow with the tambourine simulate playing the drums. The leader of *Mãe Ana* group, Felisberta, distributes skirts to the women. The music starts and the black ancestry occupies the space through the sound, the people who still were dispersed are touched by the sound and are convoked.

A chanter starts singing the line *Levanta a saia muié, não deixa a saia marrom* [Raise your skirt, woman, do not allow it to be brown] and the choir replies *a saia custa dinheiro e o dinheiro custa a ganhar* [the skirt costs money and the money is hard to get]. This type of chant, called responsorial, is characteristic of the Brazilian *batuques*, as the southeastern *Jongos*, the *Tambor de Crioula* from Maranhão and the *Samba de Roda* from Bahia.

The dance has as a standard movement a simple gesture that, in fact, is the dialogue of the body with the drum; these are movements that mark the rhythm of the music in the feet as wiggles and turns happen. The body has a vertical beat initiated in the movements of the feet, that reverberate in an alteration of level when dancing.



Image 6 – *Suça* Circle during the Mast Tour (2011). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 55).

For a more detailed account of the movement, let us take Dona Altina's example, in the picture above (Image 6). The female *Suça* dancer holds the skirt and makes movements with the arms, turning around her own axle, and moves with the feet strokes, in which a foot beats on the ground with the metatarsus while the other beats on the ground.

Although this is a general standard for the dance, each female *Suça* dancer develops her own way of dancing, playing and amusing herself in the *Suça*. Rosângela, for instance, performs different pulses with her feet, breaking the rhythm of the drum. On her turn, Felisberta projects her chin and her sternum for an upward diagonal. It is an inviting dance in which the dancers open space for the observers to enter the circle as well.

The circle is, in fact, an imaginary structure, as there are no space delimitations, only the drums are fixed and, as the number of people increases, the dance space is defined by the bodies that observe.

When describing the *Suça* in the Kalunga community in Goiás, Silva Júnior (2008) reports that in a big circle only two women enter at a time, making synchronized steps and that “[...] they bring their bodies closer, they push the waist sideways and they execute challenging or playful *umbigadas*” (Silva Júnior, 2008, p. 4). Thus, in this testimony on the *Suça*

dance in the Kalunga community, a structure quite similar to the *Jongo* and the *Samba de Roda* is perceivable, in which the women execute movements in pairs in the center of the circle.

The *jiquitaia* is an ultimate moment of the *Suça*, when its ludic character is emphasized. Men and women twist, swing the hips and wiggle the body simulating a reaction to an attack of ants. At this moment, all start to relate more directly, looking (and/or removing) ants from the body of the other with the hands, or even individually. This is when an atmosphere of laugh and play is established, motivated by a burlesque corporal movement.

A formiga que dói é jiquitaia
Ela morde, ela coça
Ela esconde na palha
Ela morde no pé e debaixo da saia
A formiga que dói é jiquitaia
[The ant that aches is jiquitaia
It bites, it scratches
It hides in the straw
It bites the foot and under the skirt
The ant that aches is jiquitaia]

In the different places where the *Suça* has already been registered, both in Goiás and in Tocantins, there is mention to the *jiquitaia* dance. Regarding the experience with *quilombola* feasts in the communities of the north of Goiás, Silva Júnior (2008, p. 04) comments:

In general, the *jiquitaia* is a dance that imitates the presence of ants on the body. Mentioning the constant attack of ants in the ancient *senzalas*, it is a kind of grassroots parody of one of the problems with which the slaves had to deal (Silva Júnior, 2008, p. 04).

The *jiquitaia* can be played and danced in some moments of the *Suça* circle, however, it is perceived that it is always executed when the players want to reach the utmost animation in the circle. Another characteristic that can be observed in the *Suça* dance is balancing bottles on the head.

When finishing the Captain of the Mast mass, a flow of people coming from the church approaches the place where the *Suça* happens, distributing bamboo wicks to be lit during the Mast Tour. The number of people close to the circle increases, fireworks silence the drums, the band of the city comes closer and, then, the Mast Tour begins.

Traditionally, in the opening of the Mast Tour, the *Suçã* must go to the front, covering several *cruzeiros* [holy crosses]. In each *cruzeiro* the *Suçã* is played and danced, while the Mast approaches. When the Mast arrives, everybody runs, holding the drum, skirts and slippers in the hands, until the next *cruzeiro*. In the Tour, the factor of displacement is inserted in the *Suçã*, that starts to happen in a delimited time and spaces previously defined. At this instant, the strokes of the drum are sped up and the dance follows the rhythm.

At the end of the Tour, there is the encounter of the Mast with the *Suçã*, next to the Our Lady of Nativity Church. At this moment, the circle is quite tight, due to the amount of people approaching and observing (Image 7). The pulse of the drums covers the collective body, even those people who only watch the *Suçã* are involved by the contagious rhythm, that inscribes in the Feast do Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost of Natividade the marks of a dramaturgy of the ancestry.



Image 7 – End of the Mast Circle and the *Suçã* circle (2014). Source: Rosa (2015, p. 59).

At this point, the participation of the *Suçã* in the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost of Natividade ends, leaving traces and noises of a *batuque* that, as many others that were inscribed in the Brazilian territory from the African diaspora, affirm the dance as a dramaturgy of the ancestry.

Final Remarks

Few Brazilians know or have heard of Natividade. They know even less the *batuque* that is played there, a Brazilian black dance that has its meanings and senses constructed by bodies that are the very movement of their culture. Bodies that are crossed by the rhythm of the drums and that, on their turn, cross with the same power the Feast do Divine Holy Ghost, reiterating the African ancestry and occupying a place of identity affirmation.

Among the adherences and attritions of the Brazilian cultural formation process, marked by an atrocious colonization project, *batuques* like *Suçã*, in the quality of black performance, were constituted from embodied reminiscences of the Brazilian culture based on African roots (Rosa, 2015).

In a *Suçã* circle an immanence plan is established, creating a crack for another reality. The flitting of skirts passing through the shins, the sound of the drums, the game, the trick, the *jiquitaia*... This time/space is a cross-road between the Catholic faith and the ancestry of the blacks, that also operates in other *batuques*, like *Samba de Roda*, *Jongo*, *Batuque* and *Tambor de Crioula*.

The *batuques* are the movement of the ancestry, dance of resistance, *bargaining*, to play, to seduce and to recollect. Capable of creating and recreating worlds through its social actors and their views of art and culture, so coupled to the mystic universe, of the magic and its enchantment.

In the *Suçã*, as in other *batuques* when the drum starts to sound, its vibration is in consonance with the past, echoing in the subjects of the present. The polarities body and drum, music and dance, past and present, individual and collective create a scenic play that is the very dramaturgy of the Brazilian black dance, in which the notions of step and choreography does not cope with the vivacity, dynamism and, many times, simplicity of the expressive traditional manifestations. In this space/time of *batuques*, more than the mere execution of *dance steps*, it is possible to see, live and hear the voice of the subalterns⁴ who pronounce themselves through their bodies, that is, their existence.

Considering that the historical constructs are processual and that the discourses that stem from them result from power forces, the displacement

of the analysis of *batuques* from the folklorist context, marked by an obvious and classic division of class (literate - illiterate, white - black, colonizers - colonized, artists - craftsmen, art - grassroots culture) represents an important step of the critical field of the art towards the post-colonialist studies, in respect to the diversity and for an ecology of knowledge.

In this way, it is possible to open ways so that a *batuque* like *Suçã*, from Natividade, be appreciated not for being exotic, but rather for its aesthetic power, forged in a process of creation that is, in fact, its own historical process of resistance and negotiation. However, besides being appreciated, the *batuques* can also be experienced in the body of performing artists as part of a plural training, extending thus the possibilities of poetical and technical references and walking effectively towards the democratization of the languages of the body in the performing arts.

Notes

- ¹ Interview with Felisberta Pereira da Silva to Eloisa Marques Rosa during the Festival of the Divine Holy Ghost in May 23 and 24, 2013.
- ² Interview with Felisberta Pereira da Silva to the *Suçã* Inventory in Tocantins, produced by Fundação Cultural de Tocantins. Palmas: Fundação Estadual de Cultura, 2011.
- ³ The ethnography above described refers to the research developed in Eloisa Marques Rosa's MSc thesis on Cultural Performances (Rosa, 2015).
- ⁴ Reference to Spivak's work (1988).

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