What aspects related to the carnivalesque can be found in African-Brazilian manifestations of *Nego Fugido* and *Caretas do Acupe* as part of their strategies of subversion and resistance?

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The manifestations of folk carnival festivities represented the element of nonconformity in opposition to the authoritarianism of the official culture in European medieval societies. The elements forming this folk tradition traveled with European colonisers to the Americas, where they were met by diverse African and Indigenous traditions, giving birth to new forms of manifestation in the melting pot of cultures collateral to colonialism. This essay aims to discuss the elements of European folk carnival, analysed by Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His world* (1965), which were crossed with African traditions and resignified into hybridised strategies of cultural resistance, looking at the Brazilian cultural manifestations of *Caretas do Acupe* and *Nego Fugido*.

The double aspect of life manifested in folk carnival has been present since the earliest forms of society. Rituals and myths in ancient folklore were usually coupled with a nonofficial double or parody, of comic and/or abusive nature, which offered people an alternative and gay version of the world, deities and human relations, in festivities that people would not only watch, but live in during a given period of the year (Bakhtin, 1984). In medieval Europe, the progressive consolidation of state authority and a rigid society structure based on classes also meant the growing hegemony of an official version of culture. Emanating from the dominant sectors of society, this official culture gradually pushed folk humour manifestations that "laughed" at authoritarianism, narrow-mindedness and seriousness to the margins of culture, imposing them the mark of nonofficial, transgressive manifestations (Bakhtin, 1984). The comic re-creation of hegemonic rituals and ceremonies were a constant aspect of folk carnival festivals, "clowns and fools […] mimicked serious rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 5), mocking the seriousness of state and religion, suspending existing hierarchy, and using carnivalesque modes of representation to temporarily subvert the authority of the official institutions. Even though the hegemonic culture proclaimed the unchanging

nature of its rules, moral and religious values, and structure, the festive aspects of folk culture challenging this stable view of the world continued to exist in a limited and somehow controlled way, operating at the margins of society, “[they] had to be tolerated and even legalised outside the official sphere” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9), occupying its own space especially in the streets and the popular marketplace. Ultimately, this arrangement of hegemonic and marginal representations perpetuated the doubleness of folk carnival practices, assigning a carnivalesque counterpart, mostly based on laughter and the materiality of the body, to official, ecclesiastical ceremonies and feasts. The origin of the many elements composing the body of carnivalesque representations is varied. Bakhtin (1984) argues that they are mainly sourced from local folklore practices, however aspects related to Roman Saturnalia festivities are also part of its composition.

The forms of folk culture have been trying, for thousands of years, to expose and subvert hegemonic culture ideas, images and symbols through laughter and the materiality of the body. As Bakhtin points out in a rather romanticised fashion:

> “It was understood that fear never lurks behind laughter (which does not build stakes) and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask. Laughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear, but a feeling of strength.” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 95)

The sheer richness of its manifestations can be divided, Bakhtin (1984) argues, in three main forms:

1. Ritual spectacles, involving pageants and shows.
2. Comic verbal compositions, including by oral and written forms of parody.
3. Various genres of billingsgate, comprising oaths, popular blazons and oaths.

The folk carnival, as understood by Bakhtin, is not a spectacle to be seen from the outside. Its very nature is the inclusion of all people in its festivities. In this sense, for Bakhtin, the manifestations of folk carnival do not "belong to the sphere of art [*but*] to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7). This blurring of the line between different views of the world bestows the utopian truth carried by manifestations, to an extent, with a "real existing force", which can be used in the *carnivalesque reality* to punish enemies and subvert oppressive powers.

For its attempt to subvert anything that is stable, immortal and complete, carnival is also marked as the feast of renewal, changing and becoming. The *backward logic*, the *wrong way*, the *bottoms up*, and ultimately destruction of the old and the birth of the new are the principles of carnivalesque celebrations sustaining its ever changing nature. In folk carnival, however, the destroyed, dying old feed the new. To be destroyed is not to vanish, but to become a complementary part of the living carnivalesque body. As pointed by Stuart Hall (2019b), the carnivalesque nature doesn't operate its upturning of meanings while locking things within their original framework. This transformation, and the carnivalesque view of life itself, is a what Bakhtin calls a dialogic process. In folk carnival manifestations, "life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26). And this is one of the first lines connecting the objects of this essay.

"I was born from the womb of a ship" (Mendes, 2005)

When discussing about the black cultural identity in the diaspora, Stuart Hall argues against the ideas of racial identity purity and embraces the concept of a changing and incomplete Black representation, where forming aspects coexist in a system of hegemony, which "is not the disappearance or destruction of difference [*but*] the articulation of differences which do not disappear" (Hall, 2019a, Chapter 2, para.

88). Taking in account the effects of the experiences of exile and displacement (Gilroy, 1993), Black diasporic culture can never be simplified through binary oppositions. It is, by nature, a *contradictory space*, a site of *strategic contestation* (Hall, 2019b). Officially born to the world in the colonial enterprise (Rufino, 2019), the Black culture in the diaspora came to life chained to the violent imposition of slavery, *in the midst of the incomprehensible* that characterises the colonial experience (Bhabha, 1994), a culture of the in-between which cannot be apprehended through a logic of binary opposition that insists in classes and orders (Rufino, 2019). Existing under a colonial system willing to suppress any subversive or marginal aspects, diasporic Black culture had to formulate answers to Hall's question: "can identity itself be rethought and relived, in and through difference?" (Hall, 2019a, Chapter 2, para. 03)

Brazilian scholar Luiz Rufino (2019) argues that "the African diaspora is a crossroad, an event marked by tragedy, but resignified by the need of invention" (p.105). Referencing Paul Gilroy, Rufino asserts that the African diaspora is the counter cultural advent of modernity, where resilience *is* reconstruction (Rufino, 2019). As such, diasporic Black culture possess no primordial, fixed identity. It is positional, a kind of representation, an evolving narrative continually being told. Moreover, it escapes the anthropological and ascribed aspects dear to colonialist thinking and is revealed as more associational and political (Hall, 2019c). Essentially, it is formed by the confluence of various cultural traditions and their partial synchronisation, hybridised by "negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions, of the subterranean strategies of receding and transcoding, of critical signification, of signifying" (Hall, 2019b, Chapter 3, para. 18).

The culture of African diaspora is ambivalent, changing continually and, for Rufino (2019) associated with the African concept of Yangí: a condensed point that is shattered in infinite pieces, and from each piece new possibilities, bodies and paths

arise. The *black* signifier in Black popular culture symbolises its contradictory and mutable nature, always in danger of being incorporated or excluded (Hall, 2019b), articulating meanings that are rather positional, with no clear origin or final destination as in the concept of *différance* formulated by Jacques Derrida (1972). All these aspects of Black culture aim the transgression of the dominant culture oppressing the margins of society, they aim to incorporate the knowledge from the crossroads of the Black Americas to other new worlds, through acts of shattering and reconstruction (Rufino, 2019).

The process of cultural hybridisation is arguably found in every large movement of people throughout history. It is not a term related to changes in the racial composition of a population, but to the inescapable interchange of ideas, values and behaviours between peoples, which is all the more evident in minority communities and multicultural diasporas (Hall, 2019c) where routes become roots (Gilroy, 1993). It is essentially a process of cultural translation which not only implies appropriation and adaptation but a revision of one's own view of the world. In dealing with different, at times contradictory, cultural frameworks, this process of translation is always ambiguous and incomplete, a continuous negotiation of positions that will not transfer seamlessly between cultures, and is this same conflictual aspect that allows the birth of the newness (Hall, 2019c).

The Africans who crossed the *Great Calunga*, a term meaning *great cemetery* and used by enslaved African peoples to name the Atlantic ocean (Rufino, 2019), emerged on the shores of the Americas still carrying the most meaningful aspects of their cultures, including myths, metaphysical systems, music and forms of performance. The forced cross-cultural contact between a number of previously isolated African cultures enabled a fast paced revision of their ideological framework and the incorporation of resignified coloniser cultures, whether English, French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese, resulting in the gradual emergence of a new African

culture, cooked from the most compelling ideas, forms, and fragments available (Gates, 2014). Bhabha argues that this process of hybridisation opens the possibility of contestation at the centre of colonial representation, once it adds ambiguity to the sign of the dominant signified in the culture of the colonised (Bhabha, 1994).

The experience of slavery in the New world, the forced work in plantations, informed the creative products of diasporic Black culture in ways far more complex than any binary vision of coloniser versus colonised can encompass. Black popular culture born in the diaspora is based in previous traditions and experiences of African peoples, connected with the local hopes, aspirations and tragedies of those who occupy to this day the margins of society — the ordinary folks of the street —, and re-articulating European ideologies, cultures and institutions with this heritage (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 2019b; Rufino, 2019). In this sense, the Black culture of diaspora is linked with Bakhtin's concept of *the vulgar* — popular, informal, alternative, and outsider — and, as such, has always been battled by the dominant culture in fear of being overtaken by the *carnivalesque* living at the margins (Hall, 2019b). The Black culture emerging from the plantations had speech, music, gesture, and dance as equally important forms of communication, and the message they carried included instructions for surviving in and rebelling against the oppressive colonial system (Edwards, 2009; Glissant, 1989 as cited in Gilroy, 1993). The resistance against dominant power through the crossing of its culture was an important part of surviving in this environment, and can be exemplified by the way Eurocentric catholicism was resignified in the United States by Martin Luther King Jr., and Marcus Garvey, who drew political power from the biblical story of slavery presented in Exodus applied to the trajectory of black slavery (Gilroy, 1993) ; and the fusion of religious practices in Brazil, where catholic practices can be observed in Candomblé temples and also the other way around, exposing negotiations and crossings that take place in the (re)construction of a cultural identity (Rufino, 2019). Therefore, the cultural crossroad also flows the other way.

“If hybridity is heresy, to blaspheme is to dream.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 226)

To the colonial Eurocentric power, “hell is other people — the blacks, indigenous, […] uncivilised, […] in short, inhuman.” (Rufino, 2019, p. 49) In the effort for stereotyping and demonising the Other, and specifically the blacks, the colonial power opens up for the ambivalence of representation, the ambiguity of defence and desire. The Negro disrupts the coloniser fantasy, the darkness of black skin carries the signs of birth and death, savage and servant, sexuality and innocence (Bhabha, 1994). In the linkage between black/blasphemy, the African myth of Exu — related to ambivalence, crossroads, sexuality, dynamic forces and creative power — becomes the double of the catholic Devil. However, as in the carnivalesque world of Rabelais, devils can also be “excellent and jovial fellows” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 41). Therefore, to resist the oppression of the colonial power and “subvert or correct Eurocentric perceptions” (Edwards, 2009, p. 169) , the Black culture emerging from this crossing attacks the dominant system with a *carnivalesque* view of the world, using the transgression of laughter, doubling the voice to tell without saying, hitting in the counter attack, and celebrating death as life (Rufino, 2019). It is by occupying these spaces of the in-between, by infiltrating the old cracks at the margins of the coloniser traditions, that the diasporic Black culture starts to “dream of translation as *survival*” (Bhabha, 1994).

Hybridity as a concept emerged in the 1990s as a tool to understand a changing world. The term rejects binary approaches of socio cultural phenomenons and is described by García-Canclini as a form of oblique power, an important tool of resistance, “interweaving of power and culture between and within social classes, ethnic groups, and national communities” (Kraidy, 2017, Chapter 28, p. 92). Drawing from their past experiences, Black communities in diaspora managed to articulate and resignify diverse cultural elements creating cultural representations as means to

perform and re-create an identity through acts that are socially perceived as carrying meanings and, however mixed and contradictory in its aspects, encapsulated the characteristic playfulness of transatlantic Black creativity and carried the mark of popular culture, with traditions that draw their strength from communities past experiences (Georgiou, 2017; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 2019b). The hybrid way these new traditions used to communicate can also be understood through Bakhtin's concept of double-voicedness, in which the message is supposed to be *read* through its dominant meaning and also the meaning representing the point of view of the marginal speaker, the signal of the difference. Some characteristics of this Black mode of discourse striving to transgress the colonial dominance are indirection, irony, humour, rhythmic fluency, punning and word play, the unexpected and the inclusion of the present audience, often the street, the marketplace (Gates, 2014; Rufino, 2019). These manifestations operating from the periphery of society do not rely on a fixed tradition, their power comes from the ability to reinvent traditions and re-staging the past in that third space, the in-between where the cultural symbols can be "appropriated, translated, rehistoricized" (Bhabha, 1994) by the disobedient subjects playing in the ambivalent spaces of the colonial mentality (Rufino, 2019).

In Brazil, many of these marginal manifestations happen as festivals connected to the period of catholic celebrations. Both following manifestations, *Caretas do Acupe* and *Nego Fugido*, occur in July, a month dedicated to catholic celebrations of Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint John and Saint Peter, but which origins are believed to be connected to summer solstice festivals in 12th century medieval Europe (Amaral, 1998). Since the colonial period, popular festivals are the place and time where people experiences, and social expectations and struggles are diluted, celebrated, ironised, ritualised or sacralised, notes Brazilian scholar Amaral (1998), also arguing that, in this sense, the ritual is always commenting on a double, external or social meaning. Accordingly, many of the underlying narratives present in these festivals

are about self-creation and self-emancipation which, Gilroy says, are “a founding motif within the expressive culture of the African diaspora” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 69).

The town of Acupe, where these festivals take place, is originated from a *quilombola* community, meaning its original population were black ex-slaves from nearby sugarcane plantations, freed after the slavery abolition in Brazil (1888). Arguably a crossroad of African, European and Indigenous traditions, its people carry strong African-Brazilian cultural identity and a shared memory of colonial times and slavery practices, which are often reflected in their cultural manifestations (Pinto, 2012), being the *Nego Fugido* and the Caretas two of the most notorious examples. The *Nego Fugido* is a collective manifestation performed on the streets of Acupe during four Sundays, staging a colonial period narrative of rebellion and resistance of enslaved people which, scholar Monílson Pinto (2012) argues, also function as an allegory for current racial, social and political issues affecting the community. The characters are: the blacks, representing enslaved people, painted with a make-up similar to black face and having a kind of red juice simulating blood in their mouths; the slave hunters, also with the same make-up, traditional leather hats, musket rifles, shirts, and skirts made from dried banana tree leaves; the overseer, commanding the slave hunters, dressed in a traditional all brown leather suit; the guards and the king of Portugal dressed in carnivalesque versions of European costumes. The narrative presented is the following: the blacks run on the streets, trying to escape the hunters but are then captured. They are forced to ask people on the street — including locals, tourists, photographers, etc — for money to buy their freedom, being thrown on the ground by the slave hunters and begging on their knees. The overseer is all the while whipping blacks and hunters and giving orders. The guards and the king follow the group and receive the collected money in the end. That happens during the first three Sundays. On the fourth and last Sunday of *Nego Fugido*, on the last act of the performance, the blacks rebel, followed by slave hunters and the overseer (all blacks), and demand that the king of Portugal present

the document that gives them freedom. The king lies saying the guards have the document, and they are then beaten by the blacks and surrender. So the king hand in the document which is read publicly by the overseer. All the blacks free and empowered, the king of Portugal is then captured and an auction to buy him begins, mirroring to the auctions conducted to sell slaves in colonial times. It goes on until some benevolent person on the street buys the king's freedom for a couple coins, all ending with the blacks celebrating to the sound of drummers playing and chanting traditional African-Brazilian music (Alves, 2019).

Figure 1 - Slavehunter. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 2 - Slavehunter. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 3 - Slavehunter. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 4 - The blacks. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 5 - The overseer. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 6 - Musician. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

The *Nego Fugido* manifestation stages an alternative story of the process of slavery abolition, connected to the memories of local community, and does so through crossing Afrocentric stylistic features such as the use of rhythm and body movements, call-and-response, and audience connection (Edwards, 2009) and the carnivalesque elements of its narrative, such as the comic representations of the official authorities, the active participation of the audience on the streets and the final inversion of power, where the king becomes the “clown”. It serves to strengthen local collective identity, commenting on current struggles related to racism, and suggesting strategies of resistance (Alves, 2019; Sousa, 2014). Therefore, the *Nego Fugido* fits a process described by Bhabha (1994) in which

> “[by] signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but the strategy of representing authority in terms of the archaic.” (p. 35)

And yet

> “[in] staging the past as *symbol*, memory, history, the ancestral — but past whose iterative *value as sign* re-inscribes the ‘lessons of the past’ into the very textuality of the present.” (Ibid, 1994, p. 247)

Figure 7 - The blacks. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 8 - The blacks. Nego Fugido manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

The caricatural representation of power connected to Bakhtin's popular festive forms – where "the king is the clown, […] abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 197) –, as well as other aspects such as the re-staging of colonial/dominant practices, the blurred line between performance and life enabling deeper social inclusion, all performed under the sign of the carnivalesque, became a way for subaltern classes to create their own double-voiced representations, where they perform the past, a resignified past, in a counter-narrative that serves as tool for coping and healing historic wounds, and resisting contemporary struggles (Edwards, 2009).

The *Caretas do Acupe* manifestation also closely relates carnivalesque elements with African-Brazilian cultural resistance. The participants wear costumes composed of colourful fabrics and paper maché masks covering the whole face, painted and shaped with exaggerated horns, noses, spikes, evoking animals and devils, themes and proportions which can be identified with the carnivalesque representation of the grotesque (Bakhtin, 1984). The multiple origins associated with this manifestation are already resignifications of the past immersed in the carnival atmosphere. As it is told in one version, around 1850 Portuguese colonisers brought European masks for them to wear during carnival celebrations. The enslaved black people then made their own carnival masks and the Portuguese liked them so much that they allowed the blacks to participate in the celebrations (Sousa, 2014, p. 14). Other version tells the story of a cruel Portuguese slave owner who decided to have a carnival ball for his guests. The enslaved blacks then made primitive and horrendous carnival masks, very different from the European design, broke into the ball running, screaming and playfully scaring some terrified guests (Alves, 2016, p. 47). A third story also mentions the ball, but only one black man showed up using a mask, unidentified. He played with and amused the guests, but used it as a distraction to escape free by the end of the ball (Alves, 2016, p. 47). Other versions are more

Figure 9. Caretas manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

Figure 10. Caretas manifestation, Acupe de Santo Amaro (own photo).

related with African traditional practices, telling that the masks would protect against the death entity *Iku* connected to African rituals (Alves, 2016, p. 50), as well as the use of the mask by fugitive slaves to scare slave hunters and colonisers, as an element related to magical powers associated to forests and Indigenous entities (Pinto, 2014, p. 39, p. 66). The use of masks is closely associated to African traditional practices and rituals, as disguise and protection (Alves, 2016), and also associated with European medieval festivals and the representation of the carnivalesque body. The different versions of the Caretas' origin reveal a point of ambivalence in the colonial discourse, where the Other can be an object of desire and derision. “What such a reading reveals are the boundaries of colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of otherness” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 67).

These manifestations display instances where African traditional practices crossed and resignified aspects of European culture, using the *carnivalesque* as the sign of double articulation that enabled them to create counter-narratives to mock, disrupt and resist colonial power. The popular traditions invented by Black people in the diaspora served to give them agency to tell their own versions of the narrative (Edwards, 2009), give them the power to “form new readings, new perspectives, new combinations, and new cultures” which allow us to resist against dominant

forces (Duncombe, 2017, p. 179). They had, and still have, the role of "[organise] the consciousness of the "racial" group socially and [strike] the important balance between inside and outside activity […] that are required to invent, maintain, and renew identity"(Gilroy, 1993, p. 198)

These strategies, as mentioned, pervade African-American manifestations associated with black cultural resistance. As the European catholic religion, one of the ideological pillars of colonial mentality, was imposed to colonised people, translated and adapted to accommodate their original cultures (Alves, 2016), the marginal double, the carnivalesque, the Other of catholicism, seems to have also made its way, resignified to become the symbolic system that could enable the counter-attack against the oppressive power, then and now.

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