Festivities as Spaces of Identity Construction: The Brazilian *Jongo Rodas*

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ABSTRACT

Jongo is a cultural practice specific to the cities located in the Paraíba do Sul river valley, in the south-eastern region of Brazil. It is a form of expression rooted in the knowledge, rituals and beliefs of the African populations of Bantu language and which incorporates drum percussion, collective dance, and magic-religious, poetic elements. The *roda*, literally meaning “round,” is the performance space of the *jongo*. The quest for an “authentic *jongo* dance” at the time of the *rodas* often leads to disputes among various groups claiming the greater “purity” of their group, or the greater “truth” of their personal history. Indeed, during the *rodas*, the quest for the “afro authenticity” of the *jongo* becomes the ground for identity construction and for the recognition and legitimization of African origins. This paper focuses on the *jongo rodas* as a festive event that exhibits the African ancestral past of Brazilian blacks as well as the signs and symbols of a Brazilian black identity.

Festivities as Spaces of Identity Construction: The Example of the Brazilian *Jongo Rodas*

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Introduction

Jongo is a festive practice that developed historically among black populations forcibly brought from Africa to work on the coffee and sugar cane plantations of the Paraíba do Sul River, in the southeastern region of Brazil. In 2005, it became one of the first cultural expressions to be listed as “intangible heritage” by the Brazilian Department of Culture, following the creation of the National Intangible Heritage program in 2000. The *roda*, literally meaning “round,” is the major expression of this practice. This term evokes two meanings in this context. It expresses the performance of the jongo dance and a festivity where people gather to celebrate, drink and eat together, and live a convivial moment around the music and dance of jongo. As a space of performance of jongo, it is a circle (or semicircle) composed of men and women, inside of which a couple, a man and a woman, interact through creative movements and dance performance, mobilizing especially their hips. However, beyond physical performance inside a circle, the term *jongo roda* expresses also a moment of conviviality, collective interaction, and, in most cases, restoration. Thus, when we say “jongo rodas,” we announce the physical and musical performance of the jongo in a circle, but also a festive moment whose dance and music of jongo are the center.

This article is based on qualitative research conducted in 2014 for my doctoral thesis in ethnology, which aimed to understand the strategies used in the representation of authenticity and the policies of intangible cultural heritage. My fieldwork lasted about five months, from August to December 2014. During this period, I observed various jongo rodas in two of the four states of southeastern Brazil. One of my main objectives was to meet with *jongueiros* (people who are knowledgeable about jongo and/or who are members of jongo groups) from the region and with people with different views of this cultural practice. The Pontão de Cultura do Jongo, an institution in the state of Rio de Janeiro created to safeguard jongo after it gained the status of cultural heritage, was my main source of contact among the *jongueiros*.¹

In August 2014 in Niterói, a city located in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, I met Suellen through a mutual friend. Suellen, twenty-six years old at the time, is a *jongueira*, a Pontão de Cultura do Jongo fellowship recipient, a jongo teacher in a cultural association, and one of the leaders of the group Jongo da Serrinha. She introduced me to the activities of Pontão de Cultura do Jongo and, consequently, to a network of *jongueiros* and other people related to jongo. Geographic proximity between my hometown, Rio de Janeiro, and some of the events I attended especially fostered communication with the following groups: Jongo da Serrinha in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Jongo de Pinheiral in the city of Pinheiral, and Jongo Mistura da Raça, located in the city of São José dos Campos. Although my research focused on the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, I was also able to meet with *jongueiros* from two other states (Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo) at certain events, such as the Meeting of *Jongueiros*, a festival that brings together all the jongo groups from the Sudeste region.

1. Brazilian policy provides a plan for safeguarding immaterial goods registered as intangible culture heritage. In 2007, the Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), responsible for the registration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Brazil, conducted a series of meetings with consultants and partners to find a way to consolidate safeguarding actions for jongo. Among them was the Fluminense Federal University (UFF), which had a network of teachers involved in issues of jongo. In the same year, the Ministry of Culture issued a public call for

the establishment of the “Pontões de cultura of intangible cultural heritage” program to manage the actions for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Brazil. In this program, the Ministry of Culture, through IPHAN, established a contract with a civil society institution that undertook actions to safeguard intangible cultural heritage registered as a Brazilian cultural heritage. These actions are funded by the Ministry of Culture/IPHAN and set up by a civil society institution. At a seminar organized in December 2007 that brought together representatives of the Ministry of Culture, jongueiros and teachers of UFF, UFF was chosen as the managing institution of the Pontão de Cultura do Jongo, thanks to the experience of its teacher-researchers working on jongo. At the end of 2007, the contract established between UFF and IPHAN set up the Pontão de Cultura do Jongo. Three contracts were signed: the first between January 2008 and June 2009, the second between December 2009 and December 2010, and the third between April 2011 and April 2012. Without any prospects of a new contract, given IPHAN’s lack of resources, the Pontão de Cultura do Jongo today is a program developed by UFF to implement actions to support jongo.

2. Kimbundu, sometimes called North Mbundu or Loanda, is a Bantu language and one of the major languages of Angola and of its capital, Luanda. About one-third of the population of Angola of about twelve million speaks Kimbundu as their native language. See *Kimbundu* (Bloomington, IN: National African Language Resource Center, n.d.), <https://>

Notions of authenticity and tradition will serve as the analytical framework for assessing the relevance of the information collected in the field and the relationship between the jongo groups. Even if these notions are not native categories and were not present in the discourse of most of the jongueiros I met, I observed in their self-presentation a desire to showcase “traditional Africa” via gestures and clothing. Most participants affirmed their own performance of jongo as the “true Afro-Brazilian cultural practice.” My article thus seeks to study jongo rodas as festive events that highlight how Brazilian blacks use the signs and symbols of a Brazilian black identity to reclaim control over their lives.

Afro-Brazilian Culture and Popular Festivities

The term jongo comes from *ndjongö*, a Kimbundu² term from a Bantu linguistic group, which means “creation” or “descendant” and which has come to mean “family reunion” in Brazil.³ The Bantu linguistic group comprises approximately 450 related languages, spoken by 450 different ethnic groups.⁴ The map below shows the major language groups and ethnic groups in central, eastern, and southern Africa. Bantuphone groups are highlighted in brown.

Location of Bantuphone ethnic groups in Africa.

Photo credit: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niger-Congo_map.png.

nalrc.indiana.edu/doc/brochures/kimbundu.pdf (accessed March 21, 2019).

3. Nei Lopes, *Bantos, malês e identidade negra* (São Paulo: Forense Universitária, 1988), 161.

4. Luc de Heusch, "Bantou," *Encyclopædia universalis*, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/bantou/> (accessed July 17, 2015).

5. Lopes, *Bantos, malês e identidade negra*, 144.

6. Arthur Ramos, *O negro brasileiro: Ethnographia religiosa e psychanalyse* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização brasileira, 1934), 21.

7. Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, *Os Africanos no Brasil*, 4th ed. (São Paulo: Cia. Editora Nacional, 1976).

8. For example: *carimbo* (stamp), *quitanda* (vegetable market), *caçula* (the youngest), *moleque* (kid), and *quiabo* (okra). See Yeda Pessoa Castro, *Falares Africanos na Bahia: Um vocabulário Afro-Brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2001), cited in Rafael Sanzio Araújo Anjos, "The Brazilian Africa—Population and Territoriality," *Revista Eletrônica: Tempo-Técnica-Território* 1, no. 1 (2010): 16, <http://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/ciga/article/view/15873/14171>.

9. Lopes, *Bantos, malês e identidade negra*.

10. Paulo Dias, "Diásporas musicais Africanas no Brasil," *Moozyca*, 2016, <http://moozyca.com/artigo/diasporas-musicais-africanas-no-brasil>.

Almost all African captives brought to southeastern Brazil between 1790 and 1830 belonged to Bantu ethnic groups from the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique areas. From the port of Luanda came the Ki-Mbundu (Kimbundu or Bundo), Cabanga, Cabeza, Cagungo, Cazongo, Coanza, Hanga, Manga, Ocarimba, Quisama, and Quitana groups; from the port of Benguela, the U-Mbundu (Umbundus or Ovimbundos); and from Mozambique, people from the Baronga Bar-Tonga, Shope-Ba, Ba-Senga, Senga Ba-Ba-ngnoni (Nguni), Macua, and Ajaua groups.⁵ The Bantus who came to Brazil were Congo, Cabindas and Benguelas from the Congo and Angola, and Macua and Anjico from Mozambique.⁶

The first researchers of Afro-Brazilian populations, conducting research in the 1930s, such as Raimundo Nina Rodrigues and Arthur Ramos, considered Bantu culture to be poorer symbolically and ritually than Sudanese culture, in other words, the culture of ethnic groups located in the Gulf of Guinea region (present-day Nigeria and Benin).⁷ Most Africans who came to northeastern Brazil as slaves on the sugar cane plantations between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries originated from Sudanese groups. The role played by the ritual and symbolic practices of these groups in the formation of Afro-Brazilian religious practices, especially candomblé, was quickly highlighted by anthropologists. Candomblé actually became the Afro-Brazilian religious practice that most interested Brazilian and foreign researchers in the first half of the twentieth century. Bantu culture, on the other hand, was relegated to its linguistic aspects by the first Afro-Brazilian researchers; words of Bantu origin remain well integrated and present in the Brazilian daily language.⁸

At the end of the twentieth century, researchers finally turned their attention to the place of Bantu cultural practices in Brazilian culture. Historian Nei Lopes was one of the precursors in this discussion.⁹ Many authors followed him, including ethnomusicologist Paulo Dias who developed an analysis of the musical heritage of the Sudanese and Bantu in Brazil. According to him, the descendants of Sudanese people, who live mainly in the urban areas of northeastern Brazil (Bahia, Maranhão, Pernambuco), left their cultural imprint almost exclusively in the field of religion (candomblé).¹⁰ Meanwhile, Bantu music, songs, and dances were said to have strongly permeated profane and religious culture in the rural areas of northeastern Brazil and in the southeastern region of the country, thus exceeding the limits of Afro-Brazilian religions.

Bantu musical presence had first been evoked by foreign travelers who participated in scientific expeditions to Brazil between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries—such as Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, traveling from 1816 to 1822, or Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1938), traveling from 1817 to 1820.¹¹ According to researchers who, like Dias, analyzed the writings of these chroniclers, these excursionists mainly described two types of festivities related to Bantu musical presence.¹² One festivity, more private than the other, was carried out at night on the Sabbath in the *terreiros* (the dirt floor outside a house) and was called *batuques* by travelers. The other festivity was public. Slaves and freed or free-born individuals belonging to black Catholic brotherhoods elected a king and marched through the streets, singing, reciting improvised verses, and playing drums. These musical processions were called "black king celebrations" in the eighteenth century and *congadas* in the nineteenth, and are known today as "Kings of Kongo" festivals.¹³

11. Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, *Viagens pelas províncias do Rio de Janeiro e Minas Gerais* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia, 1975); and Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, *Viagem pelo Brasil*, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1938).

12. Dias, "Diásporas musicais Africanas no Brasil."

13. Ibid.; and Marina de Mello e Souza, "Kongo King Festivals in Brazil: From Kings of Nations to Kings of Kongo," *African Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (June 2015): 39–45. The *congado* or the *congada* is an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice present mainly in the state of Minas Gerais. It is a dramatic dance with songs and music that stages the crowning ceremony of the former African kings of the Kingdom of Kongo located in west-central Africa in what is now northern Angola, Cabinda, the Republic of the Congo, the western portion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the southernmost part of Gabon.

Various Brazilian cultural practices developed from these two categories of Bantu musicality. The congada category encompasses a variety of cultural expressions, including *maracatu*, *congo*, *congada*, *moçambique*, *ticumbi*, *catumbi*, *taieira*, *cambinda*, and *catope*, which can be found especially among the Afro-Brazilian population of Minas Gerais, where black Catholic brotherhoods played a key role in the life of Afro-descendants. *Batuque*, on the other hand, is a generic term that refers to a variety of cultural expressions currently known as *jongo*, *umbigada*, *batuque*, *candombe*, *zambê*, *tambor de crioula*, *carimbó*, etc. These practices feature a common dance performance inside a circle, punctuated by the sound of drums.

Jongo is thus part of the heritage of enslaved Bantu-speaking African peoples in Brazil. Its musical and choreographic elements, as well as its magical-religious and poetic aspects, are all inherited from the African populations of Bantu language. An examination of jongo can thus deepen our understanding of Bantu culture and heritage in Afro-Brazilian cultural rituals and performances.

Jongo Rodas and Jongo Groups

Jongo as a dance is performed by two individuals who interact through corporal movements in a festive atmosphere. Rodas are the major expression of this cultural practice and are carried out most often within local festivals and festive occasions. Even if jongo groups regularly organize rodas in celebrations that are specific to them, they all organize a roda for two common celebrations: May 13, the day when slavery was abolished in Brazil, and November 20, Black Awareness Day. Additionally, jongueiros are regularly invited to take part in university seminars, school activities, and television programs, all of which typically end with a small jongo roda.

Rodas usually take place at the headquarters of a group and they involve an entire neighborhood, plus a host of observers interested in "Afro culture" and/or "traditional Brazilian culture." Those who participate in the jongo rodas as dancers are usually members of the group that organizes them or know its members. Roda musicians play an essential role in the event, creating a playful atmosphere through gestures and their interactions with the dancers. Yet none of these drummers are professional musicians. Individuals interested in the expressiveness of the jongo and in Afro-Brazilian musicality usually come to jongo groups via the practice of dance and some then learn how to play drums from those who have already mastered the instrument. Indeed, jongo rodas mobilize knowledge that passes through generations. As a result, jongo dance and music was for a long time transmitted primarily within communities, without any particular formal teaching. Nowadays, most of the initial practice involves learning in a jongo group.

Jongo groups were developed to organize jongo gatherings. Each group displays a specific mode of material existence and social organization; it also has a unique way of dancing and playing the drum and unique aesthetics. Jongueiros generally describe the group as a family with whom they share joys, doubts, complaints, and stories of financial trouble. In most cases, the group's monetary resources are derived from fundraising, savings earned from festivities at their headquarters, and presentations of jongo dance at private institutions. Some groups are also sponsored by private companies or benefit from cultural programs funded by large public companies. All of the participants with whom I spoke insisted that relations among the groups are positive: "I have links with all the groups. We take a little of each and when we do workshops,

14. Nico Thomaz, interview by author, November 23, 2014.

15. All photographs are by author.

we also teach a little our own knowledge. We learn with them, just as we teach them a little about our practice.”¹⁴ While their statements point to group friendliness, my experience of living with them for several days in a row revealed (subtly expressed) animosity of certain jongueiros toward specific groups.

Afro-Brazilian Symbolism in the Jongo Rodas

During fieldwork, I attended a number of jongo rodas. This section describes three of them, performed by three different groups. In 2014, I went to a Saint Sebastian celebration organized by Jongo de Pinheiral, Saints Cosmas and Damian feast day celebrations sponsored by Jongo da Serrinha, and the Black Awareness Day celebration coordinated by Jongo Mistura da Raça. The ethnographic descriptions of these three celebrations are important because they can help locate a certain idea of Afro-Brazilian authenticity in jongo performances and show how roda acts as a paradigmatic space for the mobilization of a Brazilian black identity.

On Sunday, October 5, 2014, I left my home in Rio de Janeiro early in the morning and traveled sixty-seven miles in the direction of Pinheiral, a town located in the Paraíba do Sul River valley, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. I was invited by Fatinha, Jongo de Pinheiral’s director, to the final roda of the novena of Saint Sebastian (the group’s patron saint). I had met Fatinha during a class at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). Elaine Monteiro, a professor at UFF’s Institute of Education, had since 2014 been teaching an optional course on pedagogy titled “Jongo/Caxambu: Afro-Brazilian Heritage in Academia.” From August to December 2014 I audited this course, which allowed me to complete a lot of my fieldwork and meet several jongueiros. The day I met Fatinha, she gave a presentation in Monteiro’s course about her experience as a jongueira. After her presentation, I talked to her about my research and my desire to study her jongo group. She was enthusiastic and invited me to attend the closing feast of the novena of St. Sebastian at Pinheiral.

Painting representing a black woman.¹⁵

Portrait of an “old black man” (*preto velho*).

16. Jongo de Pinheiral rents a space for its activities through funds provided for this purpose by the Brazilian state.

The festivity took place at the group's headquarters, not far from the city center. This was the first time I visited this city and my first time participating in a Jongo de Pinheiral roda. The festivity was supposed to start at noon, and I arrived at around 11:30 a.m. The space allocated to participants consisted of two houses.¹⁶ The larger house includes a large living room, a bathroom, and a kitchen, while the smaller had a living room and a bedroom. Between the two houses, there was a large courtyard where the group holds meetings, celebrations, and rehearsals. The larger house welcomed visitors. I was able to admire historical objects belonging to the group and to read panels telling its history and that of its ancestors. The second house functioned as a small library on Afro-Brazilian literature. It had a computer area with an internet connection and also included a dormitory that hosted researchers and students.

Statuette of Our Lady accompanied by the image of the Catholic Saints Cosmas and Damian, with offerings of sweets.

Statuettes of Catholic saints in front of drums.

Clay cups.

17. Food offerings to divinities, spirits, and ancestors are central in Afro-Brazilian religions. In Afro-Brazilian cosmology, the Yoruba god Ibeji was assimilated to Saints Cosmas and Damian and the offerings that are destined for this deity are sweets, such as cakes and biscuits.

18. The panel read: "The Pinheiral's Jongo originated in the fields of the São José do Pinheiro Farm owned by the Breves family, prospering in the spreading of coffee during the colonial period and the stronghold of one of the largest black slave nuclei in Brazil. This practice has been passed on from generation to generation and is preserved to this day by residents of Pinheiral, who are very proud of this cultural heritage. Pinheiral's jongo is characterized by its originality and tradition. Currently, the city has a 'Ponto de Cultura,' which is a reference center for jongo, a project carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Culture." All translations are mine.

19. The panel read: "April 7, civic jongo festival. Tribute to José de Oliveira 'Master Cabiúna,' a reference for Pinheiral's jongo (April 7, 1920–March 24, 1993). He was born on the Três Saltos farm and inherited jongo culture from his mother Dona Ivone Maria da Conceição. He became the greatest jongoeiro in Pinheiral and the region."

20. Ajibola Badiru, *Ifá-Olókun: Interpretação de sonhos na concepção dos búzios* (Paraíba: Centro de cultura afro brasileiro, 1989).

21. Arthur Ramos, *As culturas*

On the one hand, the large living room of Jongo de Pinheiral exhibited spiritual links to Catholicism, and on the other hand, it evoked an affiliation with black ancestors. There was a picture of an "old black man" (*preto velho*), who in Afro-Brazilian cosmology represents the old Africans or their descendants, wise and patient, who lived as slaves and who liked to narrate stories from the slavery period. Representations of Catholic saints in front of drums suggested the syncretism present in Afro-Brazilian religions, which associate Catholic saints with African divinities. In jongo, African deities are symbolized by drums. A statuette of Our Lady was accompanied by statuettes of Saints Cosmas and Damian, with offerings of sweets that also reflected this syncretism.¹⁷ In addition, clay and calabash cups evoke more particularly slavery in rural areas. The big lounge of the Jongo de Pinheiral head office also displayed panels about the group's ancestors and its current composition.

A little history of Jongo de Pinheiral's jongo with its participants.¹⁸

Panel tribute to José de Oliveira "Master Cabiúna."¹⁹

Posters depicted the group's historical and symbolic references. Ancestral heritage was represented by the group's choice to pay homage to one of its ancestors—José de Oliveira, also named "Master Cabiúna"—during the local jongo festival, as well as the way the group presented itself in public, dressed in white.²⁰ The large turbans and necklaces worn by the women of the jongo groups also convey a certain "African" aesthetic. In 1937, Ramos had already identified certain elements of black cultures in Brazil. Among them, he cited large necklaces made with beads, long earrings, and elements of Muslim influence, such as turbans and long skirts.²¹ Currently in Brazil, wearing a turban and long pearl necklaces often means that people are faithful to an Afro-Brazilian religion, or at least sympathize with it.

At noon, the festivity began with a small procession of participants, who left the lounge of the big house carrying statuettes of the patron saints. They then stood in front of the courtyard, where they prayed the last rosary of the novena of Saint Sebastian. A small roda followed, danced by the participants of the group. The roda was punctuated by the sound of musical instruments, especially drums, played mainly by three or four men who, together with other individuals, formed the circle. They sang chants (religious or profane) called *pontos*, repeated in chorus by all those who formed the roda. The audience also contributed to percussion by clapping.

negras no Novo Mundo (1937; repr., Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979), 77–78.

22. *Feijoada* allegedly originated during slavery when slaves added the least noble parts of pigs, rejected by their masters, to black beans before cooking them together.

Anyone who wished to start the dance turned toward the drummers and saluted them. Then, each participant approached a woman or a man, took their hands, and both moved to the center of the circle. They faced each other and the couple began to dance agilely, moving their hips. The performance of the couple ended when another participant wished to dance. The new participant approached the drums to salute them and then advanced toward the center of the circle. They then made a fast movement called *umbigada*, which consists of placing one's own navel (*umbigo* in Portuguese) against the navel of the one with whom one wishes to dance. The person thereby replaced moved back into the circle and the new couple performed. Things carried on this way until the drummers ended the *roda* by chanting "*machado*" or "*cachoeira*."

Closing procession during the Saint Sebastian novena.

Jongo roda in tribute to Saint Sebastian.

Jongo roda in tribute to Saint Sebastian.

The *umbigada*.

After the small *roda* of *jongo* in tribute to Saint Sebastian, the festivity continued around a meal, in which the main dish was a *feijoada*, a stew of beans with beef and pork, one of Brazil's national dishes.²² Participants in *Jongo de Pinheiral* prepared the meal and visitors who wished

to eat bought a ticket. The majority of visitors were friends and family members of the group's participants. There were also a few students. A team of cinema majors from UFF was there to shoot a documentary about the group. After lunch, a large roda of jongo began. The roda started around 2:00 p.m. and when I left the festivity at around 9:00 p.m., the drummers were still playing and people were still dancing.

Tents with tables set up for lunch.

The drums of Pinheiral's jongo.

Fatinha salutes the drums to initiate the roda.

Couple dancing in the center of the roda.

Most women wore long colorful skirts, which allowed them to perform beautiful movements while dancing. Men and women often danced barefoot, a deliberate choice because according to them, it allowed a better connection with ancestors. The songs, pontos, were intoned by a soloist, who interpreted a first melodic phrase, onto which he added the chorus. The majority of the pontos in a roda were led by men. Some were created at the time of the roda, some were part of a specific group's repertoire, and some were commonly sung by all jongo groups. People who were not directly related to jongo groups could participate in the roda to dance but they could not be pontos soloist or play drums.

23. Serrinha is the name of a favela located in the north of Rio de Janeiro, in the Madureira neighborhood. It suffers from the ills ordinarily associated with favelas, in other words, a combination of social exclusion, lack of infrastructure (water, electricity), illegal drug trafficking, and armed confrontations with the police. In Rio de Janeiro, favelas accommodate one-third of the population.

24. The Yorubas are a large ethnic group in Africa, mostly present in Nigeria, on the right bank of the Niger River, but also in Benin, Ghana, and Togo. The term brings together several peoples speaking the Yoruba language and having a similar cosmology.

The Saints Cosmas and Damian feast day celebrations took place on September 27, 2014, at the headquarters of Jongo da Serrinha.²³ I was invited by Suellen, my first interviewee and one of the leaders of the group. The headquarters of Jongo da Serrinha was also a house in which the group rehearsed, socialized, and celebrated. At the entrance, there was a living room with a library, a computer, and pictures of the group's "elders." Images of Catholic saints and African *orixás* (gods from Yoruba origin, present in many religions of the Americas and in particular in candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil) could be seen next to books and paintings.²⁴ Adjacent to the living room were the bathrooms and a small kitchen. The kitchen door opened onto stairs leading to a large courtyard, where there was a storage space for clothes, objects, and musical instruments. The house was not only the gathering place for the group's participants but also a space where the children and teenagers of the Serrinha favela could learn about jongo dance and music, as well as other artistic cultural practices, such as traditional Brazilian dances and the *cavaquinho* (a musical instrument of Portuguese origin with four plucked strings resembling a small guitar).

Library of the Jongo da Serrinha headquarters lounge.

Photos of the group's ancestors.

The festivity began at 10:00 a.m. with a performance by children participating in artistic workshops. Afterward, the event was oriented toward university students, many of whom were studying fine arts at UFF. During a face painting workshop, for instance, students were encouraged to create their own African motifs. Morning activities ended with a small *roda* of jongo, conducted by the group's participants, children, visitors, and university students.

Performance by drum course students.

Face painting workshops conducted by students of fine arts.

Roda by Jongo da Serrinha jongo group members.

Roda by children participating in the jongo dance workshop.

Roda participants.

Cake and bags of sweets honoring Saints Cosmas and Damian.

25. *Samba* is a Brazilian musical genre and dance style with roots in Africa via the West African slave trade and African religious traditions, particularly from Angola and the Congo.

26. The *pandeiro's* drumhead is tunable and the rim holds metal jingles (*platinelas*), which are cupped. This creates a crisper, less-sustained tone on the *pandeiro* than on the tambourine.

Toward 1:00 p.m., lunch was served and the main course, offered by the group, was also *feijoada*. The majority of attendees were either Jongo da Serrinha members or students from the workshops, sometimes accompanied by their families. I also saw students and researchers from UFF. During the afternoon, children were honored by festivities related to Saints Cosmas and Damian. Indeed, in Brazilian popular culture, September 27 is a day to celebrate children (*dia das crianças*) as well as the feast of these twin saints. Families who celebrate this day prepare small bags specially sold for this occasion and fill them with sweets, some of which are all-time favorites, such as candied coconut and pumpkin. This practice has its origin in Afro-Brazilian religions and in particular in the orixá Ibeji, which consists of twins who protect children and keep the memory of the spirits of dead children. On the day of the festivity, Jongo da Serrinha members prepared a cake for children, and adults were invited to distribute candy among them. I personally prepared fifty bags of sweets for the children.

The festivity ended with a *samba roda*, a common practice in Rio de Janeiro.²⁵ Unlike the jongo roda executed in a circle, samba rodas are a gathering of people singing and dancing around a table where musicians play instruments, such as *cavaquinho* and *pandeiro* (a type of hand-frame drum popular in Brazil),²⁶ and drink beer. Usually, the songs are popular sambas known by most Brazilians.

27. It was first enacted in 2003, by Law No. 10.639 / 2003, and made national by Law No. 12.519 / 2011.

28. Black Awareness Day is celebrated throughout the national territory on November 20 but states are not obligated by national law to make it a holiday.

Samba roda.

Samba roda.

The last jongo festivity that I attended took place on Black Awareness Day and was performed by the group Jongo Mistura da Raça in the city of São José dos Campos, sixty-two miles from the city of São Paulo, in the Paraíba do Sul River valley. Black Awareness Day in Brazil, celebrated on November 20, has been a national holiday since 2011.²⁷ The purpose of this holiday is to reflect on racial discrimination in Brazilian society. The states of Alagoas, Amazonas, Amapá, Mato Grosso, and Rio de Janeiro have declared November 20 a public holiday in all of their cities through regional decrees.²⁸ In other states, responsibility rests with municipalities, which decide on its implementation. The date was chosen to coincide with the death of Zumbi in 1695. Zumbi was one of the leading warlords of Quilombo dos Palmares, a fugitive community founded in the seventeenth century by insurgent slaves in northeastern Brazil. He remains an icon of anti-slavery and anti-colonialist resistance, and is a hero for Afro-Brazilians and Afro-descendants in Latin America. Thus, November 20, the anniversary of his death, is observed as the day of Afro-Brazilian awareness and resistance. On that day, I was invited by Luciana, one of the leaders of the Jongo Mistura da Raça. I knew Luciana through Suellen. They both belonged to a Pontão de Cultura do Jongo subgroup called Young Jongueiros Network, which brings together young representatives of jongo groups. The space dedicated to rehearsals, meetings, and celebrations was not the head office of the group but a building called Celebreiros, maintained by a combination of private and public institutions that promote various cultural actions, such as the Jongo Mistura da Raça and the Mobile Art Project, focusing on the diversity of hip-hop culture.

Front of the Celebreiros building.

Banner of the Black Awareness festivity.

29. A *senzala* was a large dwelling intended for slaves at the time of colonial Brazil on sugar cane plantations and coffee farms.

30. "Odoyá" is the greeting to the orixá Yemanjá, the Yoruba divinity that reigns over salt waters. Zambi is another name for Zumbi.

31. The *maracatu* is an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice from the Brazilian northeast and in particular from the state of Pernambuco.

The *maracatu* is a combination of rhythmic music with costumes, dances, songs, and parades during Carnival. Like the *congadas*,

the *maracatu* is the scene of the coronation of the king of the Congo. Taubaté is a municipality in the state of São Paulo, located in the Paraíba do Sul River valley,

130 kilometers from the state capital, São Paulo. In a *capoeira* roda, the *capoeirists* form a circle

in the center of which two of them compete. The movements executed require great flexibility. The other *capoeirists* around the circle sing, clap their hands, and play percussion instruments.

The *capoeira* roda is made up of a group of people, men and women, including a master and disciples. The master is the holder and custodian of the knowledge circulating in the roda.

The festivity began at around 10:00 a.m. with a ceremony honoring Saint Benedict, also called Benedict the Moor or Benedict the Black, who was the first black man to be canonized by the Catholic Church. In Brazilian popular Catholicism, this saint and slave of African origin is considered the protector of black people. Devotion to him is unconnected to Yoruba cosmology. After prayers to Saint Benedict, the group executed a *roda* of jongo. This was followed by a conversation with the audience on the problems encountered by black people in contemporary Brazilian society: prejudice, violence, and inequalities in higher education and the workplace. At noon, a *feijoada* prepared by the organizers was offered to the public for ten Brazilian reais (around four dollars). The audience was primarily composed of persons linked to the cultural institutions participating in the event. There were also relatives and friends of Jongo Mistura da Raça.

Small shrine in honor of Saint Benedict next to the drums of Jongo Mistura da Raça.

Devotion to Saint Benedict with prayers and dances.

Jongo roda.

The audience.

After lunch, the celebration continued with the artistic presentations of groups and associations working on themes related to Afro-Brazilian history and culture. The first presentation, "Revolt at the senzala," resembled a play on the theme of slavery.²⁹ The play was performed by a *capoeira* (an Afro-Brazilian martial art that draws its roots from the fighting methods and dances of Africans) group from the city of São José dos Campos. Following this, there was a presentation by a drum group named Odoyá and a *congada* group from São José dos Campos called the Filhos de Zambi folkloric group.³⁰ The next performers were the *maracatu* group from the city of Taubaté (also in São Paulo state), followed by a *capoeira* roda.³¹ Finally, a samba roda closed the celebration at around 10 p.m.

Drum performance by Odoyá.

Presentation of the congada group.

32. Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, "A modernidade negra," *Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política* 1, no. 42 (2003): 57.

33. Livio Sansone, "Da África ao afro: Uso e abuso da África entre os intelectuais e na cultura popular brasileira durante o século XX," *Afro-Ásia* 27 (2002): 249–69.

These three celebrations reveal symbolic elements present in the Afro-Brazilian historical and cultural universe. The dates chosen may highlight Afro-Brazilian cosmology, as in the feast of Saints Comas and Damian and feast of Saint Sebastian. The former saints are syncretized with Ibeji, the divinity of the Yoruba twins, and Saint Sebastian with Oxóssi, god of hunting, abundance, and subsistence. On the other hand, Black Awareness Day represents Afro-Brazilian resistance, in a country heavily dominated by racial inequality between blacks and whites. It reflects the increasingly "racist" and "Africanist" course that black militancy has taken in Brazil, seeking to redefine as "black," in other words "ethnic," cultural practices that were once thought as mixed and mestizo.³²

The three festivities also reveal a special relationship between the jongo universe and the academic world and the part of the white middle class that is interested in the cultural practices of the popular classes. In fact, Brazil has a strong and enduring relationship between intellectuals and the practices of Brazilian popular culture. Since the end of the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first, intellectuals have wrestled with a question directly related to national identity: "Who are we?" For many of them, the answer to this question is found in popular (or folkloric) cultural practices, which they consider one of the most effective aspects of asserting national identity. From the 1930s these Brazilian intellectuals, mostly linked to the petite bourgeoisie, began to conceive popular traditions as a way not only to preserve the "national soul" but also to educate the "people" in the place of its practices in the construction of national identity. Intellectuals thus placed themselves in the role of revealing to the people the importance of their traditions. Though this paternalistic positioning has been increasingly criticized among intellectuals working in the humanities, it is still a reason, whether conscious or unconscious, for the involvement of many teachers and students in traditional cultural practices. Jongo also has an "Afro" dimension, which is strongly emphasized by many intellectuals in the social sciences. The promotion of Afro-Brazilian culture by intellectuals, as anthropologist Livio Sansone explains, is a creative adaptation to oppression and racism.³³

Rodas and the Quest for Authenticity

Jongo rodas are legitimized as a "genuine" Afro-Brazilian cultural practice through the organization of jongo festivals. The quest for authenticity in festivities makes sense both for the persons directly involved in the practice of jongo and for the audiences. Each group tries to show

34. Eva Lúcia, informal conversation with author; Fatinha, informal conversation with author; and Cacalo, informal conversation with author.

35. Agent is one of the terms used in sociology to qualify the individual. This notion emphasizes the agency of individuals (their capacity for invention and improvisation). We find the term especially in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and those who claim it. Pierre Bourdieu, *Méditations pascaliennes* (Paris: Seuil, 1994, 67).

36. Cacalo, interview by author, March 10, 2014.

37. The term *raiz* is often used in Brazilian popular culture to characterize not only jongs but also other cultural practices like samba.

38. Cacalo, interview by author. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: éd. de Minuit, 1979).

that their jongo roda is more traditional than that of other groups, thereby buttressing their claims to authenticity. Among the aspects used to prove ancestral heritage are the pontos (songs), barefoot dancing in the terreiro, and drumming techniques. The construction of authenticity also involves the affirmation of personal and family ties with enslaved persons. In addition, people create and use new aesthetic tools, such as costumes, makeup, and hairstyles, during the performance of the jongo. Aesthetic, corporeal, and discursive strategies used in the rodas may also reveal disputes between the groups, each of which strives to legitimize their own practices by displaying the greatest traditionalism.

Among the strategies employed by these groups to exhibit tradition, playing the drum is one of the most visible and important. The drum is presented as an object embodying the traditionalism of jongo. It is idealized as the object that links jongueiros to Africa and thus legitimizes their African ancestry. During fieldwork, I noted how the jongueiros of different groups talked about the drums: "A drum, for a jongoeiro who really considers jongoeiro, is the best thing that exists. If a person does not know how to respect this, they cannot respect their father or mother"; "The roda is theirs (the drums), if they are not there, there is no roda"; "We who are from a traditional community cannot dance without any kind of drum rhythm."³⁴ These statements suggest the agents³⁵ (jongueiros) discursive strategies to assert their knowledge of the drum's role in this context and at the same time justify their belonging to a traditional group. This discourse is also a way to show to other groups and other jongueiros their traditionalism and authenticity. Some jongueiros addressed their remarks to specific groups: "the group of the Serrinha has several instruments, like the guitar and the *cavaquinho*, while we have only two drums. The drums represent our ancestors. Our jongo is the 'jongo de raiz.'"³⁶ The expression "jongo de raiz" refers primarily to the traditional aspect of the gathering, through the word for "root" (*raiz*).³⁷ In this case, the authenticity of the group is defended almost aggressively.

Disputes about the traditionalism of a jongo group are also evidenced by the visual aspects that the jongueiros choose to put on display in a roda. The discourse on the importance of being barefoot in a roda serves to justify the African origin of the gatherings put forward by practitioners: "The earth transmits energy and this must be maintained and respected, it is our tradition."³⁸ The reference to an idealized Africa is felt even more through clothing, makeup, and hairstyles, as seen in the photos below.

Luciana Carvalho from Jongo Mistura da Raça.

Participants in Jongo da Serrinha.

39. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: éd. de Minuit, 1979).

40. Humberto Machado, *Escravos, senhores e café: A crise da cafeicultura escravista no Vale do Paraíba Fluminense, 1860–1888* (Niterói: Editora Cromos – Clube de Literatura, 1993); Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Histórias de Quilombolas: Mocambos e Comunidades de Senzalas no Rio de Janeiro século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1996); and Manolo Florentino and José Roberto Góes, *A paz na senzala: Famílias escravas e tráfico Atlântico, Rio de Janeiro, c.1790–c.1850* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1997).

Although these aspects are not directly related to the “jongo tradition,” since the first practitioners of jongo did not use special costumes and makeup in the rodas, they have been put into practice so that the group and its members can assert a relationship with this idealized Africa. I have deduced that the better a participant can express ties to Africa, the closer to authenticity he or she is in the eyes of the public.

Disputes and antagonisms over legitimacy and authenticity often occur among agents with different quantities of symbolic capital.³⁹ Among these are social capital (established by their relations with other agents and the social networks that they mobilize), economic capital (established by their incomes and heritage), and cultural capital (established by their positions within cultural and academic institutions). In my analysis I suggest that those who own a greater amount of social capital, which in this context are those responsible for jongo groups and those with leading positions in cultural and academic institutions, occupy dominant positions in the formulation of discourses on the Afro-Brazilian authenticity of the jongo. Those with a greater quantity of such capital are more likely to “win” the disputes, either through their rhetoric or through their representation of “African signs” in their groups and the rodas.

The most typical strategies are the promotion of African traditionalism by signs that refer to this continent. In this context, the history of slavery is appropriate, with the aim of reinforcing discourse on the authenticity of the jongo. The history of the transatlantic slave trade has been mythologized, romanticized even, by some academics and jongueiros and has been appropriated by other practitioners/followers as their link with the African continent. While on the one hand, the trade of souls between Africa and Brazil was a powerful tool of Portuguese colonial control, on the other hand, it had a structural role in Africa, reinforcing internal inequalities. The African slave supply lasted for more than three centuries without the need for European and American traffickers to demand Africans as tribute. Nevertheless, in the speeches given by local scholars and defended by jongo practitioners, the role played by African elites in the consolidation of the slavery regime is not taken into account. Their most common discourse is that “Africans” were one population enslaved by the Portuguese alone.

Moreover, even if the jongueiros insist on the resistance of their ancestors who knew how to preserve the jongo, the popular image of the slave in the jongo universe is that of a suffering person. The history of slavery as written by historians, however, shows that Africans who were forced to leave for Brazil devised strategies to defend themselves from the slave system. Various forms of protest, some discreet, some obvious, were used at different times by the captives: running away, forming communities with other fugitive slaves, killing masters and foremen, and sabotaging production by slowing down work or damaging work tools.⁴⁰

Finally, the participants of the jongo groups legitimize the African ancestry of their gatherings through territorial anchorage. They claim that the jongo is present in the Brazilian cities with the greatest concentration of African slaves in the nineteenth century. The southeast region of Brazil, and especially the Valley of the Paraíba, is thereby designed as “black land.” Usages and discourses present in the jongo groups’ conception of this region influence how black identity is forged. The way space is elaborated by the practitioners of jongo indicates a relationship between past and future shaped by memory work.

41. IPHAN, *Jongo no Sudeste* (Brasília: IPHAN, 2007), http://portal.IPHAN.gov.br/uploads/publicacao/PatImDos_jongo_m.pdf.

42. Raymonde Séchet and Vincent Veschambre, *Penser et faire la géographie sociale: Contribution à une épistémologie de la géographie sociale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006).

43. Vincent Veschambre, "Le processus de patrimonialisation: Revalorisation, appropriation et marquage de l'espace," *Cafés géographiques* (2007): <http://cafe-geo.net/wp-content/uploads/processus-patrimonialisation.pdf>.

44. Christine Servais, "Appartenance politique et appropriation identitaire: La question de l'esthétique," *Semiotica*, no. 159 (2006): 55–73.

45. Ibid.

46. Marie-Odile Géraud, "Esthétiques de l'authenticité: Tourisme et touristes chez les Hmong de Guyane française," *Ethnologie française* 32, no. 3 (2002): 447–59.

47. Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 21.

Influenced by the results of academic research, jongo practitioners are now developing a discursive image of black Africa based on the signs and symbols of pre-slavery Bantu culture. The "Africa" highlighted by the jongueiros uses drums and words as a means of communication with African ancestors who were enslaved. The history of slavery, as conceived primarily by those who master the tools of this symbolic discourse, contributed to jongo's definition as a cultural practice of Brazilian blacks and as a Brazilian cultural heritage. This history is constantly evoked to support the argument of a black identity rooted in the solid origins of the past and in African ancestry. Ethnomusicologist Elizabeth Travassos also appropriated this history in writing the dossier for the registration of jongo as intangible heritage, casting this dance as an authentic Afro-Brazilian cultural practice contributing to the construction of Brazilian identity.⁴¹

Conclusion: The Problem with "Authenticity"

The discourse of authenticity is implicit in statements by jongueiros that their practices are "*raiz*." Methods of authenticating jongo within the festivities and rodas appear as a privileged support for the construction of collective memories and cultural references. The rodas presents itself as an identification mark that promotes the construction and social recognition of a relationship between individuals and social groups. The celebration becomes an attribute of Afro-Brazilian identity that constitutes both a resource and symbolic capital.

Jongo and the roda thus actively (re)construct cultural memory. As geographers Raymonde Séchet and Vincent Veschambre have argued, collective identities are projected, materialized, constructed, and reproduced through different markers of appropriation.⁴² The jongo universe appropriates drums, long skirts, white pants, makeup, and Afro hairstyles as symbolic markers that become a form of materialization of Afro-Brazilian identity, both individual and collective.⁴³ The space of such appropriation, as Christine Servais, an information and communication scientist, has shown, is a fictitious identity based on an imaginary investment.⁴⁴ Collective identity is not the fruit of intersubjective communication but is, rather, operated and reaffirmed by a process of mediation: the narration. The stories told by jongueiros about African slaves in Brazil, and especially in the valley of Paraíba, legitimize the discourses of a common social and cultural identity. The roda's identifying force resides, as Servais remarks, in the pragmatic system of permutation of narrators and referents.⁴⁵

The analytical methods used in this study reveal that actors in the jongo universe, consciously or unconsciously, devise strategies to confirm the greater authenticity of their cultural practice. Inspired by anthropologist Marie-Odile Géraud's analysis, I would argue that jongo participants are valued by the status assigned to them, by academics and other actors in this context, as representatives of Afro-Brazilian culture.⁴⁶ The singularity of their cultural expression is one of the main values defended by these agents. As reported by ethnologist Regina Bendix the desire for authenticity remains deeply embedded in scholarly approaches to cultural analysis. According to Bendix, declaring something as authentic legitimizes it and the statement can also legitimize the authenticator.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, such issues as social position, education, and the ability to promote opinions also play a role here. The notion of authenticity implies the existence of its opposite, the false, and this dichotomous construction is at the heart of what makes "authenticity" problematic. The identification of certain cultural expressions or artifacts

as authentic simultaneously implies that other manifestations are false and even illegitimate.⁴⁸ Authentication processes thus divide communities more than they unite them.

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