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Afro-Brazilian identity in the Rio De Janeiro Carnaval samba enredo: Angola as an alternative to nagô narratives

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AFRO-BRAZILIAN IDENTITY IN THE
RIO DE JANEIRO CARNAVAL SAMBA ENREDO:
ANGOLA AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO NAGÔ NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes the samba enredo, a complex narrative composed by Rio de Janeiro samba schools for the annual Carnaval parade, as a vital primary source for understanding the construction of Afro-Brazilian identity in contemporary Brazilian society. Next, I provide an analysis of one specific samba enredo presented by the samba school Unidos da Vila Isabel in the 2012 Rio Carnaval, which portrays the cultural link between Angola and Brazil. I argue that the narrative Vila Isabel constructs is a thoughtful, albeit incomplete, alternative to the more common link drawn between Yoruba culture and Afro-Brazil. Furthermore, I ascertain that this samba enredo, and the academic sources used to compose it, lack a clear definition of the religious dimension of Angolan heritage in Afro-Brazilian culture because they place Central African conversions to Catholicism in the context of slavery and do not cite the impact that Catholicism makes in Angola before the context of slavery and the Diaspora encounter in colonial Brazil.
PREFACE

This thesis is interdisciplinary and combines my training in religious studies, African history, Latin American and Caribbean studies, and Diaspora studies. Many different schools of thought inform my inquiry as well as the formation of the primary sources I analyze herein. I propose the *samba enredo*, or samba plot, of Rio de Janeiro Carnaval schools are a significant document that represent a vital construction of historical and racial identity by Afro-Brazilian activists and artistic intelligentsia in contemporary Brazilian society. I argue that the Rio de Janeiro samba school composers are aligned with Afro-Brazilian activists in Rio de Janeiro and use the Carnaval as a discursive space to communicate a particularly alternate vision of national identity. Furthermore, I explain how the *samba enredo* has increasingly documented its engagement with intellectual schools of thought in order to produce thoughtful folkloric representations grounded in historical context.

The *samba enredo* is a complex message that has three dimensions produced by the samba school composers: a detailed written document, lyrics, and a series of visual allegories presented at the Carnaval parade. These three components should be analyzed together in order to understand the historical and contemporary context of the message each *samba enredo* produces. Samba
schools produce popular representations of historical themes connected to Brazilian national identity. The construction of Afro-Brazilian identity is inextricably tied to the religious dimension of the almost six million Africans brought to Brazil during the Atlantic slave trade. Samba school composers are among the vanguard of Brazilian cultural producers that articulate the import and character of this religious heritage. However, composers of samba enredos work with the existing Brazilian imaginary and draw upon the work of academics. Their discourse is based on existing discourses and marks thoughtful engagement with social context and intellectual developments.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Afro-Brazilian activists use the carnival of Rio de Janeiro, or “Rio Carnaval,” as a powerful tool of communication to express alternative narratives regarding the cultural impact of Africa on Brazilian national identity. These narratives are called *samba enredos* (samba plot) and have three key components—a detailed written document, a lyrical samba composition, and a visual presentation that combines allegorical floats, costumes, and dance choreographies. In 2012, one such narrative designed and performed by the samba school Unidos de Vila Isabel, or “Vila,” communicated a vision of Afro-Brazil focused on the “resistance and persistence” of Angola and the cultural link between this Lusophone African country and Brazil.¹ Central African heritage in Brazil has a strong religious component. One would expect to find this symbolized in Vila’s *samba enredo*, but it is not.

The important religious links, between Portugal and Africa and between creole Africa and colonial Brazil, are often overlooked by both scholars and cultural producers such as Carnaval composers because they lack the exotic appeal that commonly signals non-European African culture. Most Carnaval *enredos* dealing with Afro-Brazilian culture utilize indigenist tropes that contrast

with European colonialism. The process of cultural blending in Central Africa beginning in the late fifteenth century produced a Euro-African culture that historians Ira Berlin, Linda Heywood and John Thornton refer to as Atlantic Creole culture.\textsuperscript{2} A close analysis of the three aspects of Vila’s 2012 *samba enredo*, treated here as primary sources, reveal several missed opportunities by the composers, and based on academic references they cite, where the narrative could have represented Central African religious identity as it was brought to Brazil throughout the slave trade. In order to do so, all three components that comprise the *samba enredo* need to be examined in terms of the message and representation they communicate. The textual aspect of the *samba enredo* references a wide range of academic works that Vila’s composers used to construct historical context and contemporary relevance; this indicates an intellectual level of engagement that is also often overlooked by scholars who study the Rio Carnaval.

Based on the academic research that goes into composing a *samba enredo*, there is a connection between the anachronisms in Vila’s representation of Angolan religious identity that represent the wider appraisal of indigenous

Bantu religions. Close analysis of Vila’s narrative indicates a particular reluctance among Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and artists to acknowledge that, before many Africans arrival in Brazil, they self-identified as Catholics. As we see in this one remarkably complex narrative, the religions of Central Africa during the post-Columbian era—both non-Catholic and Catholic, but more so Catholic—are underrepresented in the construction of Afro-Brazilian religious identity.

Vila Isabel’s 2012 *samba enredo* was entitled “Você Semba Lá... Que Eu Sambo Cá,” (You Semba Over There . . . And I’ll Samba Over Here) and was composed by Rosa Magalhães and historian Alex Varela with the official mentoring of renowned popular music singer and samba school member, Martinho da Vila. Vila Isabel’s composers stated a clear intention to produce a salient counter-narrative in the textual documentation for the *samba enredo*.

In our enredo, the Negro is not seen as a mere passive subject in his/her relations with his/her masters. He/she is not just a thing, a property of the master. He/she is seen as having voice and as an agent able to face the inhuman relationships established in the institution of slavery.

In 2012, Angola celebrates ten years of peace . . . Brazil was the first country to acknowledge the independence of Angola. And today, [Brazil] cooperates in the process of economic growth and the construction of a democratic society in the country, being its sixth largest investor.
Vila Isabel sings for peace, thus contributing to further promote this moment of hope that is found in the Angolan people.

Once again, Vila Isabel is investing in a topic of strong cultural content, as we believe culture is able to transform and dignify humanity.3

These passages evidence an activist agenda wherein Vila’s composers define Brazilian identity in terms of race relations and cultural exchange with Africa. The *samba enredo* focuses the Brazilian imaginary on the slave trade, cultural links between Angola and Brazil, and the current cultural (and economic) relationship between the two countries.

The role Martinho da Vila played as a mentor to the main composers also indicates Vila’s sincere desire to produce a viable alternative narrative of Afro-Brazil vis-à-vis Central Africa. Martinho is an avid spokesperson for Lusophone African heritage in Brazilian culture who joined Vila Isabel in 1966 as a composer and released an album in honor of the samba school, thus gaining the title *da Vila*, of Vila (Isabel).4 His passion for Angola was lighted in the 1970s, when he performed with over sixty Brazilian musicians in a relief concert series throughout Angola called Projeto Kalunga. In 1980, Martinho spearheaded a cultural exchange called Kizomba, which brought African musicians from over

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twenty countries to Brazil to record music.\(^5\) In the lyrical component of Vila’s 2012 \textit{samba enredo}, an allusion is made to Martinho’s cultural exchange projects, “We are the pure root of samba . . . Incorporate Kizomba again and continue the mission.”\(^6\) Martinho drew a direct link between his activism and the Carnaval in 1988, when he composed Vila’s 1988 \textit{samba enredo} in honor of the centennial year of Brazilian abolition called Kizomba. Benedita da Silva, former governor of Rio de Janeiro and supporter of the Kalunga relief concert and Kizomba projects called Martinho, “one of the most important leaders of negro movements in Brazil.”\(^7\) Martinho da Vila’s collaboration on Vila’s 2012 \textit{samba enredo} about Angola demonstrates that Rio Carnaval narratives are made with a conscious effort to shape alternative visions of the cultural heritage of Brazil inspired by activism, and to offer new historical perspectives. Martinho’s vision centers, not only on Brazil’s African heritage, but also on cultural exchange with Africa.

Afro-Brazilian activist composers such as Martinho da Vila face challenges in establishing alternative visions of African heritage without invoking generic symbols in the Brazilian imaginary commonly used to equate Africa with Brazil.


\(^6\) Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 382.

Significant numbers of *samba enredos* produced in the Rio Carnaval have featured Afro-Brazilian themes on Central African heritage in Brazil, but without connecting them in some way to the familiar symbols of Candomblé, a Brazilian Yoruba religion of West African origins. This was not Vila Isabel’s first invocation of Afro-Brazilian culture, and particularly of the Central African variety, as a central enredo theme. Vila’s first Carnaval samba in 1947 was “Escrava Rainha,” Slave Queen.\(^8\) Since 1965, Vila has paraded forty-eight times and, of these, seven samba parades used Afro-Brazil as a primary theme and eight samba parades used Afro-Brazil as a secondary theme. Thus, one third of all the themes the school has performed used an aspect of African cultural heritage to formulate a samba dealing with Brazilian history.

As Vila’s *enredo* quotes cited above indicate, the production of Afro-Brazilian themes in the Rio Carnaval involves reconstructing the transmission of culture by African slaves sent to Brazil over the course of three centuries. According to the Voyages Database, almost eleven million slaves arrived in various ports in the Americas; five million of these (i.e. 45.5 percent)

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disembarked in Brazil. Of these, approximately 3.8 million slaves were brought from Central Africa to Brazil over the course of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, particularly from the region of Kongo and Angola in modern day Angola, Cabinda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In this region of Africa, Catholicism was established almost a decade before the discovery of Brazil in 1502, and approximately half a century before slaves were traded from there, and it flourished alongside non-Christian indigenous religion.

Vila’s textual portion of the enredo notes that the composers are aware of the demographic impact of Central Africa on Brazil,

Approximately forty percent of all the African slaves that arrived in New World ports were brought to our country. Of this total, an ample majority embarked in cities of the shoreline of modern day Angola. This is actually an overly modest estimate, but nevertheless confirms their awareness of the impact that Central Africans made on Brazilian society. It is therefore surprising to find that the religious dimension of the cultural encounter between European and Central African cultures before the Diaspora is not expressed in Vila’s enredo. The most striking example of this is that Catholicism is

\footnote{This figure is modest, as it does not include the period from 1867 to 1888, a period during which Brazil illegally continued to trade slaves. See David Eltis and Paul F. Lachance, “Estimates of the Size and Direction of Transatlantic Slave Trade,” accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.slavevoyages.org/downloads/estimates-method.pdf.}

\footnote{Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 259.}
presented in the context of colonial Brazil and as a purely European aspect of Brazilian culture. It is also notable that the representation of non-Christian or Bantu religion, as it is referred to by scholars, presents a deep contradiction between positive aspects as a healing tradition and negative attributes such as witchcraft.

Vila Isabel composers make a concerted effort grounded in academic sources to represent a complex plot that links Central Africa and Brazil over time and in relation to specific cultural symbols, even as they struggle to clearly or historically articulate the religious dimension of that exchange. Their endeavor represents one of a dozen equally complex narratives performed in the 2012 Rio Carnaval. Analyzing each component of their performance represents an innovative way of examining the production of historical and contemporary issues in the Brazilian imaginary. Traditional studies of Carnaval, mostly anthropological, have not addressed the content produced by samba schools such as Vila Isabel. One contribution my case study of the *samba enredo* makes is to expand the study of carnival to look at the dominant and alternative visions that the content of its performances either establishes or reinforces. Chapter Two begins with a brief review of traditional approaches to the study of carnival and proposes the *samba enredo* as a primary data set. The visual and textual structures
of the *samba enredo* are preliminarily outlined using the main components of Vila’s 2012 narrative. Various perspectives on the debate over the role that Rio Carnaval has in race relations, and to what degree Carnaval is a space of discursive transformation for the Afro-Brazilian community in Rio de Janeiro is discussed.

Analysis of Vila’s 2012 *samba enredo* begins in Chapter Three honing in on the title, “Você Semba Lá… Que Eu Sambo Cá.” Each component of the *samba enredo* is analyzed in terms of the visual component of the parade along with the textual and lyrical data. First, I set the historical context for the development of samba music and Carnaval, focused on how Vila’s composers reproduce a dominant, anachronistic, narrative of Afro-Brazilian culture. I analyze the connection between Angolan semba and Brazilian samba music and dance genres. The development of samba music and Carnaval occurred in tandem with the intellectual development of Afro-Brazilian studies, and both created a dominant discourse and folklore tradition that favored the Yoruba cultural group over all other African cultural groups brought to Brazil during the slave trade. The standard image of Candomblé as the encapsulation of Afro-Brazil was commercialized during the populist regime in the early half of the twentieth century, a period of time when the Rio Carnaval and samba music and dance
were also founded and established as symbols of Brazilian national identity. And while Candomblé is a vibrant and culturally complex religious tradition in Brazil, it simply does not adequately represent the diverse religious identities of the nearly six million slaves brought to Brazil during the colonial period.

Close analysis of Vila’s 2012 enredo continues in Chapter Four with three main elements of the samba enredo that point to missed opportunities where Vila’s composers draw an incomplete picture of the religious identity of Angolans brought to Brazil. First, I analyze Vila’s portrayal of religion in the slave trade from Angola to Brazil, which places the conversion of Central Africans at the port of embarkation even though most of the Africans taken from Angola would have been largely familiar with Catholicism if they were not already baptized and catechized. Next, I look at two dimensions of the historic figure of Queen Njinga Mbande of Angola represented in the samba enredo. The historical figure of Queen Njinga, the seventeenth century female leader of the kingdom of Ndongo is portrayed as a non-Christian although she was baptized in 1622.11 Also, the coronation ceremony of the King of Kongo and Queen Njinga, which is a religious musical festivity brought from Central African Catholic society is represented in the samba enredo as being first celebrated in Brazil rather than as

an Afro-Catholic tradition brought from Kongo and Angola to the colonial context in Brazil. These congas, as they are referred to in Portuguese, are also not given any religious significance in the enredo. These three allegories in the parade represent important points where a more historically grounded acknowledgement of the Angolan religious identity was overlooked. Each academic source that the composers of the samba enredo use to inform their design is brought into the analysis, followed by a discussion of other scholars who offer counterpoints and nuance. This examination shows that while the samba enredo has Angola as its central theme, and engaged serious historical tomes, it does not adequately address Angolan religious heritage either in its non-Catholic or Catholic forms. Instead, Vila delivers a vision of an exotic, non-Catholic, and specifically Yoruba Africa and omits cultural facets that represent a rich and varied transmission of both indigenous and creole culture from Central Africa.

Each subject in the samba enredo is discussed in terms of missed opportunities, where historical reference to Angola’s rich religious identity was not fully articulated. Vila’s enredo draws on both academic and popular conceptions of Afro-Brazilian religious identity and reflects the considerable confusion in scholarship regarding when and where Catholicism interacted with
African culture (and the form it took on both sides of the Atlantic) and the tendency in Afro-Brazilian studies to not fully articulate non-Christian Bantu religion. Vila’s portrayal, or lack thereof, of Angolan religious identity points to a significant problem in the articulation of an alternative discourse by both Carnaval composers and the scholars they rely as bibliographic resources. Historiography on Afro-Brazilian religious identity lacks sufficient acknowledgement of Central Africa as a source of African heritage and favors a construction centered on Yoruba (Nagô) culture, which it symbolically locates in Bahia in northeastern Brazil. Expanding the role of Kongo and Angola as key contributors to Afro-Brazilian culture requires a shift in how Catholicism is presented, as well as increased attention to the various elements in the Bantu religious worldview of the colonial period.

Many Central Africans were exposed to Catholicism and many converted well before they were enslaved and brought to the Americas. There is a tendency among scholars to construct black African descendants as lacking individual agency in determining whether or not to convert to Christianity. Conversion to Catholicism by enslaved Africans is therefore often downplayed and then used to lend strength to indigenous and syncretic forms of belief such as Candomblé and Umbanda. Historian John K. Thornton explains that the portrayal of
Catholicism as a foreign, imposed religion is limited because Catholicism grew in Kongo and Angola with minimal European ecclesial reinforcements during the earliest period of the Atlantic era when the slave trade began. Catholicism was used to legitimize European colonization, but it was also used to legitimize Kongo independent rule and statehood in international affairs. Issues of authenticity, origins, and struggle against colonizing systems, including religion, present the tension points where Kongo-Angolan Catholicism is either undermined, dismissed, or uncomfortably acknowledged in passing.

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Chapter Two: Rio Carnaval

Approaches to the Study of Carnaval

Rio Carnaval is a competitive parade of guilds called samba schools that combine performance, music, plastic arts, and dance into a *samba enredo*, or samba story. Each samba school uses this combination of aesthetics—song, costumes and allegorical floats—to convey a story related to Brazilian history. A *samba enredo* narrative represents a historical document of contemporary Afro-Brazilian authorship. Unfortunately, scholars have not focused on the historical topics the event curates and its relationship to widely held discourses, particularly regarding race, apropos Brazilian culture. Studies of Brazilian carnival have generally been a topic of study for anthropologists focused on the event as a whole—its structure, organization and relationship to society—or analyzed how social norms are altered during the festivities employing theory deriving from Victor Turner. However, it is possible to examine how the Rio Carnaval is much more than an inversion of social hierarchies, a time of play or a ritual of sensual indulgences.

As early as 1967, anthropologist Victor Turner wrote about the Rio de Janeiro Carnaval in relation to anthropological theories of play.13 He focused on

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how the Carnaval represented an anti-structure where private and public spaces and social roles are reversed. Social taboos are more permissible during the festivities and the poorest Cariocas—as people from Rio call themselves—leave aside their burdens, don resplendent clothes and sing songs of joy and pride. Turner’s explanation of the structure of the Rio Carnaval and the components of the parade is accurate enough. He nevertheless noted that his analysis was only a beginning and there are many layers to unpack. At the time of Turner’s study, the *samba enredo* had not reached the level of study it has in recent years, but Carnaval performances already invested considerable intellectual and artistic commitment to produce the aesthetic components of historical themes, such as costumes and symbolism.

Studies of the social dynamics during carnival examine power relations and how socio-economic status contributes to the structure of the event. In her study of the use of humor among poor communities in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s, anthropologist Donna Goldstein looks at whether the decrease of social inhibitions during Carnaval represented a conservative or liberating weapon used to cope with social class inequity. Goldstein stressed that Carnaval is an

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14 Ibid., 81.

15 Ibid., 88.
extremely important event in Rio that has become a key symbol of Brazilian culture. According to Goldstein, “Carnival is a looking glass image through which Brazilians define themselves and by which they present themselves to the world.”¹⁶ Goldstein focuses on negative aspects, such as poverty, in Rio’s Afro-Brazilian society, but she also concedes the positive social capital of Rio’s samba schools, the communities wherein Carnaval parades are imagined, curated and embodied,

The [samba schools are] centerpieces of community organization for the favelas of Rio, and their strength and continuity into the present are reminders of the Afro-Brazilian and popular roots of contemporary Carnival, the main festival of Rio’s poor.¹⁷

Samba schools offer solidarity to thousands of members throughout the year, offering a calendar of events.

Other anthropologists look at Rio Carnaval primarily in terms of its relationship to society. Nancy Schepel-Hughes follows the same line of argument as Goldstein, and cites the ambivalent role nostalgia began to play as the event became more consumerist. Schepel-Hughes looks at the rise of grievances from within the Carnaval community about the increasing cost of

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participating in the parade. Roberto da Matta builds on Victor Turner’s theory of play and analyzes the Carnaval in terms of social inversion. James Green looks at Carnaval in terms of sexual liberation, arguing that the experience of homosexuality intensifies during the week of festivities. Richard Parker also looks at sexuality and how Carnaval has been associated with uninhibited activity.

In 2006, Brazilian historian Andréea Braga Pessanha introduced the possibility of analyzing the cultural and symbolic world of Afro-Brazil using samba enredo data. Pessanha’s data samples a decade of samba enredo lyrics during the years 1986 to 1996 which included the centennial of abolition in Brazil and the tercentennial of the death of Zumbi, the leader of the maroon slave community of Palmares. This period uplifted the samba enredo as a noteworthy source of information about Afro-Brazilian society. Out of 183 enredos in

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Pessanha’s data, twenty-five had Afro-Brazil as a main theme and sixty-six had it as a secondary theme.23 Pessanha explains how, through affiliation with samba schools, the first element of the *samba enredo* the community interacts with are the samba lyrics. Each samba song that is part of the *samba enredo* compresses enormous amounts of cultural and historical reference, allusions to contemporary social challenges, and hopeful calls for the future. Pessanha makes a case for analyzing the content of *samba enredos* and explained that a significant segment of the Afro-Brazilian community in Rio embodies the themes of these songs by memorizing and repeating the lyrics of their favorite samba school each year. For Pessanha, *samba enredo* lyrics communicate history and build racial and cultural consciousness,

This involvement of large portions of the population with the samba, memorizing it, is a form of preservation/dissemination of Afro-Brazilian culture, as the sambas tell a history (or a story) that in many cases has the African universe as its primary or secondary theme; additionally, many composers insert allusions to their socio-cultural environment into their lyrics...24

Pessanha’s work represents a recent effort to begin exploring the specific lyrical and historical content of Carnaval. Her sample size is too large to be manageable and she does not analyze any of the *samba enredo* in detail. However, her work

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23 Pessanha, “De Isabel a Zumbi,” 5.
24 Ibid., 2.
contributes a preliminary discussion that is useful for establishing the samba enredo as a primary source. The work I present here explores a way to build on her important research.

Innovative Approach to Carnaval: The Samba Enredo

Samba schools are mostly located in socio-economically poor communities in Rio’s suburbs where they function as community clubs. Yearlong activities happen in each samba school’s home neighborhood including patron saint festivities, lunches, parties and a circuit of carnival-related events throughout the year. Each fall, the samba schools announce a general theme and issue a call for sambas which very much resembles an academic call for papers. The composers and creative directors in each samba school break into smaller groups and present different samba enredos—a song and accompanying story with a main theme—which the samba school community then votes on. Once a plot and song is selected, the community goes to work learning the lyrics, as Pessanha describes. The samba school’s creative team designs costumes and thousands of samba school members rehearse for their role in the parade. Hundreds of occupations related to the event, such as managing costume wings, costume and float design, and leading drumming and dance rehearsals, keep each samba
school particularly busy from around November until the Carnaval in February/March.\textsuperscript{25}

Considerable research goes into writing the lyrics and storyline for a *samba enredo* and in recent years, this work has become increasingly well documented. Each samba school’s artistic team submits a *ficha técnica*, or technical key, with over a hundred pages describing their *samba enredo* to the organizing body of samba schools, LIESA, which then distributes it to the panel of judges.\textsuperscript{26} The judges use these detailed manuscripts about each *samba enredo* to understand performances beforehand so that they can focus on judging technical components such as timing, harmony, and overall aesthetic impact during the actual parade competition. LIESA began publishing the *ficha técnica* in 2008 on their website. The collection of the samba school’s *ficha técnica* is divided into a two-volume manuscript called the *Livro Abre-Alas*, Opening Wing Book.\textsuperscript{27}

This written component of the *samba enredo* explains the connection between the lyrics and the aesthetics of the performance in considerable detail. The *ficha técnica* provides a bibliography and filmography used by the creative

\textsuperscript{25} The Rio Carnaval is a pre-Lenten festivity, thus the date of the celebration varies from year to year.

\textsuperscript{26} LIESA, the Independent League of Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro was established in 1952 as the governing body for the top tier samba schools called the Grupo Especial, or Special Group. See LIESA official website, \url{http://liesa.globo.com/}.

\textsuperscript{27} So far, I have only located the *Livro Abre-Alas* online for the Carnaval’s of 2008 to the present.
directors to write the *samba enredo*. The *ficha* also includes two essays, the “Histórico do Enredo,” Historical Context of the Enredo, and the “Justificativa do Enredo,” Justification for the Enredo. Next, the *ficha técnica* has a section called the *Roteiro do Desfile*, Parade Itinerary, which categorizes the multitude of aesthetics within the performance, organized by sector and component. In Appendix II, I provide a translation of Vila’s 2012 Roteiro to show how the parade is structured in narrative and chronological forms. Members of each sector and component wear different sets of costumes that serve as symbolic representations that guide the viewer through the narrative of the *samba enredo*.

Composers in Rio’s samba schools, known as *carnavalescos*, create *samba enredos* using academic sources to inform the chosen theme for the year; these are submitted in a bibliography in the *ficha técnica*. Vila Isabel’s 2012 bibliography cites nine academic sources including the work of Mary Karasch on slave life in nineteenth century Rio and Luis Felipe de Alencastro on the bilateral nature of exchange between Brazil and Central Africa. These are just two examples of academic scholarship that were consulted by Vila’s 2012 *carnavalescos*; they also draw upon works of folklore to draw information and inspiration for their

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themes. Each year, a samba school constructs a central theme or message that indicates a modernizing agenda grounded in academic discourse. Sociologist Edison Silva Farias notes that the carnavalesco is a hybrid intellectual-artist who functions as both a visual arts specialist and a cultural legislator and who has a commitment to produce modernizing ideology.\(^\text{29}\) As the quantitative results of Pessanha’s research indicate, Rio samba schools favor themes on race and religion. However, analysis of Vila’s 2012 samba enredo indicates that composers are challenged when they attempt to divert from the most common construction of Afro-Brazilian identity in terms of Yoruba religion. This is, at least in part, due to their reliance on academic sources to validate their artistic rendering, which have produced a dominant and incomplete rendering of Afro-Brazilian culture by focusing on only one religious worldview brought to Brazil during the slave trade.

With regards to documentation of the samba enredos, LIESA has ramped up their yearly publications and made resources available online. The Livro Abre-Alas with the ficha técnica is only available in Portuguese, as is the LIESA magazine, Ensaio Geral, which provides news about the samba schools and

articles about the Carnaval.\textsuperscript{30} LIESA also publishes a trilingual (English, Spanish, and Portuguese) magazine, LIESA News, and a similar brochure format called \textit{Cante Gente!}, Sing People!, which contains the lyrics for each samba school along with a brief synopsis. The magazine \textit{Ensaio Geral} provides a second primary source with articles about the event and editorials with key members in the Carnaval community. These three written documents represent a trend in recent years towards increased documentary and commercial writing about the Rio Carnaval, which indicates increased intellectual engagement with the event from within its community.

Online availability of archival materials on Carnaval prior to 2008 varies from samba school to samba school. Excellent digital libraries, such as the \textit{Dicionário Cravo Albin da Música Popular Brasileira}, provide some data on older Carnavals.\textsuperscript{31} Brazilian carnival historians including Hiram Aráujo, Haroldo Costa, and Felipe Ferreira have published histories of Rio Carnaval in Portuguese that are not easily accessible in North America.\textsuperscript{32} Rio samba schools

\textsuperscript{30} The earliest copy of this magazine available online is 2005.
\textsuperscript{31} Dicionário Cravo Albin da Música Popular Brasileira official website, \url{http://www.dicionariompb.com.br}.
tend to have their own websites where they publish histories, photos, samba lyrics, and community news, but these are unstable sources of information where page content changes from year to year. In 2008, LIESA established various archives of Carnaval materials, which include image and sound archives and a center of cultural memory, as well as a small museum. These institutions legitimize Rio Carnaval as a central part of Brazilian national culture with a documented history, seeking to preserve and improve the quality of information used to communicate with Carnaval fans and the corporate and government sponsors who are the main patrons of the samba schools.

Visual components of each samba enredo also represent a source of data that the ficha técnica explains in considerable detail. The performance is split into various sections called sectors and components called allegories that appear in a stylized order to tell a narrative supported during the parade by the samba lyrics. Since 1937, each samba school must have a comissão de frente (front commission) of about a dozen performers who function as masters of ceremony and introduce the school. The first allegory is often opened with a carro

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**Século XIX E Outras Questões Carnavalescas, História, Cultura e Idéias** (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2005).

alegórico, a motorized float that might be thirteen meters high and sixty meters in length. In 2012, Vila introduced their samba with an allegorical float called “The African Savannah.” This first float is also called the carro abre alas, or opening wing. Each school can use up to eight allegorical representations to explain its enredo. Vila Isabel used seven allegories for their parade.

Several important figures, elected officials and famous personages, take important positions in the parade of each samba enredo. The titles for these roles reflect the colonial style of Catholic street processions, giving people status based on a model of royalty and baptism. Often, Brazilian celebrities play the role of rainha da bateria (percussion queen) wearing the most sensual costumes; these women are usually used to typify the Carnaval. Honorary titles reserved for committed members of the samba school include madrinha da bateria (percussion godmother), musa (muse), and princesa (princess). The godmother role is traditionally given to a woman who serves the community of the samba school

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34 See Appendix II.
35 There may be a connection between the carro abre- alas and Candomblé religion for some samba schools that merits inquiry. In Candomblé religion, rituals must begin with a sacrifice to Exú, the orixa of intersections who effectively opens the lines of communication between Orun (heaven) and Aye (world). In Brazil, Exu is called abre- alas, wing-opener, because he is the divinity who stands at the crossroads and either opens or shuts paths.
36 According to Costa, the role of percussion queen emerged in the 1970s when Aldele Fatima led the percussion band for the samba school Mocidade. According to Costa, some schools have a king of drums as well. Haroldo Costa, “Carnaval: Dos Ticumbís, Cucumbís, Entrudoe Sociedade Canavalescas Aos Dias Atuais,” Revista Textos do Brasil no. 11 (n.d.): 54–59.
or is very important to the history of the school. There are two to four couples called the mestre-sala and porta-bandeira (majordomo and flag-bearer) who dress in eighteenth-century regalia and perform a stylized dance that is strictly evaluated by the judges. Vila’s 2012 performance had two mestre-sala and porta-bandeira couples, called “The Strength of the Angolan Race/People” and “Nobility Hails the Arrival of Princess Tereza Cristina.”

*Baianas* are presented as a separate dance wing. These female dancers wear the traditional nineteenth century garb of large rounded skirts associated with nineteenth century Candomblé priestess-street vendors in Bahia. This aesthetic of an Afro-Brazilian woman became a folklorized representation of pure Africanicity during the Vargas era and as a result of the work of scholars such as Edison Carneiro, Arthuro Ramos, and Roger Bastide who presented Candomblé of Bahia as the Afro-Brazilian religion *par excellence*.37 *Baianas* are an official requirement for the performance that emerged in the 1930s as homage to the *tías de samba* (aunties of samba), such as Tia Ciata, which reflects the deeply

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synchronistic relationship between the construction of Afro-Brazilian folkloric identity and the Rio Carnaval. In Vila’s 2012 parade, the wing of baianas were entitled “African Memory,” and wore costumes with over a dozen different cloth patterns symbolizing the many fragments of culture African slaves brought with them to the Americas.  

Costumes and allegorical floats are the visual communications that function with the lyrics to convey the samba enredo to the Carnaval audience. Each allegory in the parade can be split into several different alas, or wings, of dancers comprised either of community members or professional dancers. A wing is generally made up of about two hundred individuals wearing the same costume and dancing in rows that stretch across the parade avenue. Some dance wings are much smaller and made up of professional circus performers, acrobats and other performance artists; these are highly stylized choreographed wings called Destaque de Chão (floor highlight). But most dance wings are made up of community members who don costumes and perform purely for enjoyment and to support their samba school winning the championship. Allegorical floats have several platforms called destaques (highlights) that function as individual stages. In 2012, Vila Isabel’s samba enredo was broken down into seven allegories with

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38 See Appendix II for the itinerary of the Vila Isabel 2012 parade (my translation) taken from Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012.
thirty-one wings of dancers in themed costumes, two masters of ceremony/flag-bearer couples, and nine highlights.\textsuperscript{39}

This discussion of the components—textual, lyrical, and visual—that comprise a \textit{samba enredo} demonstrates their utility as primary sources for examining the Carnaval in an innovative way. The \textit{samba enredo} presents a great source of data that is thoughtfully constructed and related both to academic discussions as well as to the production of Afro-Brazilian folklore. Its complexity does not end there because the historical context in which the event emerged is also significant to the construction of a particular notion of Afro-Brazil as a symbol of national identity. The founding of Rio Carnaval and the mainstreaming of samba music coalesced with the intellectual movement to define Afro-Brazilian culture as a symbol of national identity. During the Vargas era in the 1930s, Rio de Janeiro became a center of cultural production. However, the symbolic identity of Afro-Brazil was designated to the northeastern port city of Bahia. In the following section, this context of cultural production in populist Rio de Janeiro is examined, both in terms of Vila’s 2012 samba enredo and its use of the central theme of the samba genre and also in terms of varying opinions about whether Afro-Brazil has agency in the narratives they produce.

\textsuperscript{39} See Appendix II.
Who Controls Carnaval?

There are two main positions in the debate over the role of Carnaval. One favors Afro-Brazilian agency in the production of Carnaval and lauds its growth throughout the twentieth century as indicative of positive social capital, and the other remains critical of the role of the government and media seen as using the event to maintain a disparate society. From its inception, the Carnaval was a collaboration between Afro-Brazilian artists and the media. Mário Filho, the owner of the Brazilian newspaper Mundo Sportivo, officially sponsored the first competition at Praça Onze. Filho, his brother and playwright Nélson Rodrigues, and journalist Carlos Pimentel provided media coverage of the competition between twenty-three samba schools in 1932. There is debate over the level of creative agency held by Afro-Brazilian artists given their relationship with external and influential interest groups such as the media, government and private groups offering sponsorship. Historian John Charles Chasteen notes the debate over whether the Rio Carnaval is a legitimate space for Afro-Brazilian

expression or if the event has been co-opted by the local government, the show business industry or the white middle class of Rio. Chasteen asks,

Does it [Carnaval] confirm the very social hierarchies that it appears temporarily to alter, or does it offer a space where challenges to hierarchy can grow and develop?\(^{41}\)

This question is related not only to the relationship between samba schools and the media, but also to the political context of the 1930s in Brazil.

Carnaval emerged during the dawn of the populist Vargas dictatorship (1930-1945), a time of heightened government control over public events. In 1934, the General Union of Samba Schools was established by the mayor of Rio, Rufino dos Reis, offering the samba schools legitimacy and municipal subsidies if they adhered to parade rules, signed up for parade permits, registered a name for their school, and included an important event or figure in Brazilian history in their parade theme.\(^{42}\)

Early Rio samba schools used the competitive parade as a platform to establish the cultural importance of samba music and the Carnaval. Critics note that, during the Vargas era, there was some censorship of popular culture. For example, the samba school now known as Portela had to change its name from


\(^{42}\) Raphael, “From Popular Culture to Microenterprise,” 77.
Vai Como Pode (Come as You Are), and in 1937 the samba enredo entitled “O Bonde São Januário” by Wilson Batista had to be modified. However, samba schools expressed political opinions contrary to the regime as well. In 1938, a year after Vargas’ establishment of his dictatorship and the New State in Brazil, the samba school Portela paraded the samba enredo entitled “The Democracy of Samba” in critique of the new regime. A clear tension existed between increased government control and the samba schools making political statements through their performance, and speculation arose concerning who held power over this growing event.

Among scholars critical of the relationship between samba composers and external media and government influences is anthropologist Alison Raphael, who conducted fieldwork in Rio in 1975, including interviews with founders of the first samba schools and composers of the first samba songs. According to Raphael, the link between Afro-Brazilians and the Carnaval was compromised by government and private subsidies offered to samba schools. Relying on the nostalgic critiques of the changing times of her interlocutors, Raphael questions

43 “Música e censura na Era Vargas” BrasilEscola.com
Tamara Paola dos Santos Cruz. “Samba Schools Under Vigilance and Censure during Military Dictatorship: Memories and Forgetfulness”/“As escolas de samba sob vigilância e censura na ditadura militar: memórias e esquecimentos” http://www.historia.uff.br/stricto/td/1421.pdf
44 http://www.portelaweb.com/outro.php?codigo=43&cod_cat=1
the notion that Carnaval offers a discursive space for subversive discourse,

Samba schools have been used as a convenient vehicle through which the larger society has coopted and undermined a genuine manifestation of popular culture.45

While it bears notice that Carnaval has drastically changed over time, in line with economic growth and the rise of the tourism industry in 1970s Rio, Raphael’s contrast of samba schools and external resources such as media and government subsidies is outdated. Historical inquiry evidences that different interests have always worked in tandem to produce the Carnaval parade.

Anthropologist Natasha Pravaz directly responds to Chasteen’s question of whether the celebration of Afro-Brazilian culture in Carnaval narratives undermines the struggle for racial equality.46 In line with Raphael’s critique, Pravaz perceives the Carnaval in terms of the process of commodification it underwent in the twentieth century. Pravaz argued that Afro-Brazilian themes found in samba enredos quell social anxiety about racial diversity but do not impact the status quo of racial inequality.47 According to Pravaz the populist agenda of the Vargas era promoted a discourse of *mesticação*, or racial mixing,

45 Alison Raphael, Samba and Social Control: Popular Culture and Racial Democracy in Rio de Janeiro (Columbia University, 1980); Raphael, “From Popular Culture to Microenterprise.”


and celebrated Afro-Brazilian cultural forms as symbols of Brazilian-ness in order to deflect attention away from racially delineated socio-economic disparity. According to Pravaz, Carnaval celebrated racial fusion in themes on Afro-Brazil while also presenting an “unacknowledged undercurrent of racist exclusion and contempt.”

Voices within the Carnaval community that are not nostalgic about an idealized past argue that the Carnaval provides a vital space for Afro-Brazilian artistic agency. Brazilian historian and carnival composer, Haroldo Costa, disagrees with Raphael that this source of funding and regulation detracts creative independence from the themes samba schools compose. Costa explains each samba school as,

A historical entity...their condition as witnesses of their time and a mirror of anxieties and expectations...The samba schools have played a magnificent role in the recovery of historical characters and episodes, many of which have been ignored by official history.

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48 Ibid., 82.
Costa sees the samba schools as creators of alternative discourses in Brazilian history, what Chasteen calls “expressions of resistance to the cultural hegemony of the dominant class.”

Costa, an Afro-Brazilian activist, seems to embrace the anachronistic ideal of benign racial relations when he refers to Carnaval as a racial democracy. Costa’s use of historian Gilberto Freyre’s term “racial democracy,” coined in Freyre’s magnum opus, The Masters and the Slaves but, in fact, argues that Carnaval offers an alternative space of communication. In Costa’s own words,

Our Carnival today represents the most faithful translation of our inheritances, contradictions, perplexities and perspectives. That is where its originality and constant mutation reside . . .

Ultimately, Pravaz cedes that there are a “multiplicity of practices and voices that emerge” in Carnaval that both reproduce and transform social relations.

Afro-Brazilian scholars involved in the Rio Carnaval support the view that the event provides a space that represents racial diversity and allows for Afro-Brazilian cultural themes to gain positive attention. But critics such as Pravaz make important observations about the construction of Afro-Brazilian culture as

51 Gilberto Freyre, The masters and the slaves: a study in the development of Brazilian civilization (Berkeley [u.a.]: Univ. of California Press, 1986).
53 Pravaz, “Hybridity Brazilian Style,” 84.
a process involving internal and external persons. For example, regarding the
construction of samba as a genre, Pravaz notes,

Samba has two identities, one as a product of Afro-Brazilian culture and
the other as a hybrid of Afro-Brazilian and European dances. 54

While scholars such as Raphael take samba and carnival founder’s grievances as
literal indicators of a denigration of the social capital of Carnaval, scholars such
as Pravaz caution against a,

Romanticized line of thinking which discursively produces a place of
origins for Afro-Brazilian culture. Essentializing difference and
generalizing ‘black experience,’ the authors’ texts create a non-
problematized sequence of links between ‘Brazilian culture’ and ‘mother
Africa.’” 55

It is clear that Rio’s municipal government had a stake in setting structure to the
Carnaval as it grew. However, the base of creative energy and the geographic
centers where the narratives emerged from continued to be low-income and
predominately Afro-Brazilian. The samba schools became a source of both an
event that revitalized Rio de Janeiro, turning it into a tourist destination, and a
community resource that builds solidarity and gives organization to some of
Rio’s poorest communities.

There are very specific rules for the parade competition that were
developed throughout the twentieth century. Since 1960, when Carnaval began

54 Ibid., 83.
55 Ibid., 85.
attracting more international tourist spectators, performance time was set to eighty minutes for each samba school so that samba schools became what Raphael calls, “efficiency experts, calculating how many people could parade down the avenue at a given rhythm in a given period of time.” Harmony, speed, seamless progression along the Sambadrome street, and unity are important technical components scored by the panel of judges. The samba enredo is also judged according to how well the lyrics and discourse meld into a good melody.

The Carnaval is broadcast live on Brazil’s largest national channel, Rede Globo. The Rio Carnaval begins the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, and lasts for two long nights that roll into the dawn. Throughout the remainder of the week, the street blocos and salon parties occur. The winning samba school is announced the Saturday after Ash Wednesday and performs its parade once more the Saturday before Lent. Most of the audience of Carnaval does not look at the ficha técnica but may read a synopsis in one of LIESA’s editorials that explains the message of the samba enredo. The visual and allegorical representations and lyrical component of the samba enredo convey the message to the audience. The

textual component, found in the *ficha técnica* explains these other elements in more detail.
Chapter Three: Constructions of Afro-Brazilian Identity

Synopsis of Vila’s 2012 Samba Enredo

The bibliography in the *ficha técnica* cites several well-known historical tracts about the relationship between Angola and Brazil during the slave trade era including the work of Luis Felipe de Alencastro, Jaime Rodrigues, and Mary Karasch. Luis Felipe de Alencastro’s *O trato dos viventes* is a history of the slave trade era that focuses on the South Atlantic and explains the extensive bilateral relationship between Central Africa and Brazil. In *de costa a costa*, historian Jaime Rodrigues also looks at the South Atlantic during the slave trade era, and focuses on the economic and political dimensions of the trade. North American historian Mary Karasch writes about the lives of slaves in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro.

The *ficha técnica* also cites two books of historical folklore that are particularly influential in the construction of the *samba enredo* narrative. First is a folkloric rendering of African religious history by Brazilian historian, Nei Lopes. While much of the work Lopes produces reflects academic rigor, the book used in the *enredo*, entitled *Kitábu: The Book of Black-African Wisdom and Spirit* is a

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compilation of legends and oral traditions without a bibliography.\textsuperscript{58} The small section on Angola is found in the section on Kongo and the author gives no citation for the sources of his data; the “history” he provides is largely inaccurate.\textsuperscript{59} Lopes is a reliable scholar on the subject of Brazilian music and has made impressive and historically grounded arguments that distinguish Central African and West African heritages and their contributions to diverse contemporary musical genres. However, in \textit{Kitábu} he utilized no solid methodology.

The second source is Roberto Moura’s \textit{Tia Ciata e Little Africa of Rio de Janeiro}, which also offers a folklorized history of Afro-Brazilian identity in Rio de Janeiro.\textsuperscript{60} The central trope of Moura’s work is that during the early nineteenth century, blacks from Bahia descended upon Rio de Janeiro and brought with them the foundations of African culture that became national symbols such as samba music and Candomblé religion. This popular narrative about the formation of twentieth century Afro-Brazilian identity is centered in the neighborhood known as Little Africa and it folklorizes the academic trajectory of

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studies on Afro-Brazilian culture from the first half of the twentieth century. The historical trajectory Moura presents is highly problematic. According to slave trade data, the population of Rio was overwhelmingly from Angola. Also, the migration of African descendants from the Northeast of Brazil to Rio and other destinations in the south was not only from Bahia. Pernambuco represents a substantial part of Afro-Brazilian migration in the early twentieth century, and had a very strong Central African base.

Historian composer of the *enredo* Alex Varela explains in the justification essays in the *ficha* document that the 2012 enredo is meant to highlight Central Africans and their cultural practices such as dances, rhythms, and religion and look at the cultural vestiges brought from Angola to Brazil. Yet, the *enredo* imprecisely presents Angola as a non-Christian society and also conveys a problematic rendering of non-Christian Bantu religion. Furthermore, at one point the *enredo* reproduces what is commonly referred to as a nagô-centric narrative of Afro-Brazilian culture, which extols Yoruba culture from West Africa, rather than to create a narrative centered on Central African culture. The *enredo* could have shown how Catholicism was an indigenous religion brought from Africa to Brazil and convey the non-Christian religious worldview of

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61 Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 360.
Central Africa as a system that endured both within and alongside Angolan Catholicism. Instead, the samba enredo reproduces a fragmented sense of Angola’s religious heritage. While artistic license is expected in such a narrative, various issues in the portrayal of Angolan slaves’ religious identity unnecessarily contribute to a folklorization that lacks any historical basis.

The title of the *enredo* indicates an etymological relationship between Brazilian *samba* and Angolan *semba*. It is a symbol in the *samba enredo* with two meanings, a historical meaning based on Moura’s book and a contemporary meaning based on the work of Martinho da Vila. Moura’s history follows from a long line of folkloric histories of Afro-Brazil, which overlooks the exchange of culture between Angola and Brazil. Therefore, the allegory depicting the link between the two dance forms focuses on Yoruba heritage and reproduces a dominant trajectory used to construct the transmission of African culture to Brazil. The eleventh verse in the lyrics tell us that the historical figure of Tia Ciata—a Candomblé priestess who moved from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and hosted parties, packaged samba music. This element of the performance reflects a discursive shift that is prevalent in the construction of Afro-Brazilian identity, which undermines the role of Central African culture

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62 Kimbundu agape website.
63 Ficha tecnica or appendix.
and favors the model of African religion in Candomblé. The contemporary musical exchange between Angola and Brazil is the visually depicted in the closing allegory of Vila’s parade. Riding atop the final float in the Carnaval procession, Martinho da Vila, the mentor of the *samba enredo* and a well-known Brazilian samba singer in Brazil was given homage. So the title and chorus of the *samba enredo* are visually represented in the last sector and allegory of the parade.

The enredo begins with the visual allegory of exotic Central Africa, an amazing allegorical float designed by Afro-English artist Yinka Sonibare that hydraulically transforms between a savannah and a rhinoceros. At once a reproduction of the colonialist wonder with the flora and fauna they encountered and also a critique of early travelers, missionaries, and explorers characterization of the people they encountered as beasts because of their dark skin. This opening aesthetic component in the enredo presents exotic Africa, focusing a positive lens on the “wonder and fear” of the European gaze. It contributed to a depiction of Angola as a heathen nation of people, with dancers painted black dressed in animal skins and straw skirts.

The second allegory depicts Angolan religion using the symbol of the *imbondeiro* tree. This is the national tree of Angola, and is indeed extolled for its medicinal properties but it does not encapsulate the religious worldview of the
nation which was predominately Afro-Catholic by the time of the slave trade. This section of the *enredo* relies on Lopes book of folklore, and is therefore highly problematic in terms of historical veracity. In the lyrics, we find a reference to Bantu religion in the fourth verse, “African drum echoing, sorcerer soil (*solo feiticeiro*),” that relates to the religious symbolism of the *imbondeiro* tree and carelessly invokes the persecution of certain indigenous religious practices as sorcery. Mary Karasch’s work, which relies on police reports for documentation of African religious practices in nineteenth century Rio also focuses on *feiticeiro*, an “evil witchdoctor or sorcerer.”

In the second allegory, the people of Angola are depicted as two distinct groups, the Ambundos and the Jagas, and described as excellent warriors and metal workers. These traits generally invoke a motif of resistance to European colonization, and are generally accurate. The Central African kingdoms of Kongo and Angola produced manufactured metal of high quality and did successfully resist Portuguese domination through military resistance. The Jagas, more accurately known as Imbangalas, were not a distinct Angolan people, but instead small bands of mercenary soldiers who changed allegiance between Angolan and Portuguese sides of the battles for Luanda during the period between the 1620s

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Ambundo is a general term taken from Lopes; it refers to the local population of Angola. Lopes omits any reference to creolization, but the historical reality is one of considerable cultural exchange between Angolan and Portuguese culture. Religious change was prominent in Central Africa and created a local expression of Catholicism that competed in the religious landscape. The visual depiction of Jagas and Ambundos in costumes of loincloths and headdresses is only partially true to the historical context.

The third allegory and several accompanying components of the *samba enredo* portray Queen Njinga. Apart from the complete lack of a religious identity for this Central African queen, the depiction of her court is creative and draws accurate historical connections. Njinga’s role as a female leader is emphasized in the *samba enredo*, and her royal court including a harem of men dressed as women is represented through various dance wings. The composers rely on scant information about Njinga in Lopes book, and thus do not have the tools to unpack this extraordinary leader’s life and prolonged resistance to Portuguese domination. Njinga was a Catholic for most of her life, but in the *samba enredo* she is portrayed as a non-Christian exotic figure. Also she is inaccurately

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portrayed as a leader who was opposed to the slave trade. Queen Njinga resisted Portuguese colonization and fought impressively to hold her royal title, but like other African leaders she negotiated terms for the slave trade in her kingdom.

The slave trade is depicted in the fourth allegory with a visually impressive allegorical float. Here we see another reference made to religion, in the form of slaves being converted en masse at the port of Luanda, Angola. This is a powerful visual allegory, with an enormous slave ship float and several accompanying wings of dancers representing the suffering of so many Africans sold or captured into captivity. In this allegory, we see the wing of baiana dancers representing the fragments of African memory brought to Brazil by Central African slaves; this is a representation of “social death” and “perpetual exile.”⁶⁷ Vila’s composers rely on Alencastro’s history of the Angolan trade to inform their idea of Catholicism as a colonial religion forced upon slaves at the port of embarkation. While Alencastro does explain the absorption of Catholicism into Kongo and Angolan societies to some extent, he largely depicts religious conversion as an arm of European colonialism. This rendering results in a sense that African slaves lost their ability to determine their own religious worldview as a result of captivity, when in fact, historical documentation reveals that all

⁶⁷ Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 356.
Africans brought their religious worldviews with them to the Americas.

In the fifth allegory, the samba enredo arrives in Brazil at the Valongo Wharf. This was the main port of disembarkation for Africans during the nineteenth century. The Valongo quay is currently under excavation in Rio de Janeiro. It is where slaves were also held until their sale in the market. This allegory is visually depicted in terms of two identities, one as a slaveholding center and the other as a whitewashed entrance for Portuguese nobles fleeing the Napoleonic wars. In 1843, the wharf was refurbished for the arrival of Portuguese princess and future empress Tereza Cristina. The princess arrived with her mother, Queen Isabel, who is revered in the samba enredo for her role in the abolition of slavery. So the fifth allegory shifts the audience’s focus to the Brazilian colonial context, the advent of abolition and the African cultural practices that flourished in Rio de Janeiro. The festivities and cultural practices of Africans in Rio, especially the coronation of a King of Kongo and Queen Njinga held by black Catholic confraternities known as congadas, is portrayed in a strictly colonial context and in the ficha técnica no recognition is made of how this festivity is rooted in Central African religious identity.

The next allegory portrays the origins of samba music and makes a discursive shift from Central Africa to a dominant understanding in Afro-
Brazilian culture of West African superiority. This section relies on the work of Roberto Moura and Mary Karasch, both of whom do not draw links between Angola and Brazil in their conceptions of Afro-Brazilian music forms such as samba. In the following chapter, an in-depth analysis of this allegory shows how the construction of Afro-Brazilian identity is associated with the Yoruba cultural group, and also how the city of Bahia is used to symbolize the resistance and persistence of African culture in Brazilian society. The final visual allegory pays homage to Martinho da Vila, highlighting his work as an unofficial “cultural ambassador” between Central Africa and Brazil. In the ficha técnica, Martinho’s dedication to music exchange projects and his longstanding allegiance to the Vila Isabel samba school are celebrated.

Overall, the samba enredo creates a folkloric rendering of the connection between Angola and Brazil, but struggles in terms of developing the religious aspect of this link. There are several tropes that are reproduced in the allegories that are so clearly founded on bibliographic research, and clearly this means that the overall understanding of the religious dimension of Central African diaspora to Brazil is lacking historical context. The portrayal of Catholicism as an arm of the slave trade, used to coerce African slaves and somehow strip them of their cultural identity is inaccurate in the case of Central Africans. There was a
longstanding cultural exchange between European culture and the Kingdoms of Kongo and Angola that created various levels of cultural blending including a considerable amount of religious exchange, musical adaptation, and shifting tastes. The slave trade brought so many Central Africans to Brazil, and yet their cultural contribution is obscured by the fact that it was characterized by creolization. The task of inserting a Central African trope into the larger folkloric rendering of Afro-Brazilian identity, which Vila set out to do, occurs in a visible tension with the existing national imaginary that began being crafted in the early twentieth century during a time of political preoccupation with the pervasively racially mixed society of Brazil.

Historical Context of Rio Carnaval and Samba Music

During the time of the first carnival competition in Rio de Janeiro held in the home of Zé Espinguela in the Rio neighborhood called “Little Africa” in 1929, Rio became a melting pot of Afro-Brazilians. Significant numbers of black Brazilians moved to Rio from the northeast due to changing economic tides, the demise of the sugar industry due to droughts and the rise of the coffee and mining industries in the south. Thus the formation of the Carnaval spectacle coincided with a demographic shift, but also with the formation of an ideology aimed at encapsulating and conveying Afro-Brazilian culture as a
complementary part of Brazilian society. The folklorization of Little Africa is often a central component of the narrative of this newly branded “Afro-Brazilian” culture. Little Africa is considered the physical hub where samba was created presents one of the main issues in Vila’s 2012 samba enredo and indicates a point of contest over the origins of Afro-Brazilian culture.

The title of Vila’s samba enredo—“You Semba Over There . . . And I’ll Samba Over Here”—implied that the link between the Angolan music and dance genre, semba, would be addressed in the plot. If Vila had presented samba in terms of the exchange of music between Brazil and Lusophone Africa—which undoubtedly occurred at the very least as a byproduct of the sheer volume of bilateral trade and the demographic impact that Central African slaves had particularly in Rio de Janeiro—it would have made a significantly unique statement. At most, scholars have only linked the various urban genres of music that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Brazil by looking at African percussion traditions from West Africa, called batuque, and various European and South American music genres including the polka and the tango. Vila points to the musical exchange between Angola and Rio in the title, and Martinho’s own activism has focused on that aspect of cultural exchange. Unfortunately, the samba enredo used a generic and scantily documented
narrative of Little Africa and reproduces a tale that says more about folkloric production than it does about the actual role that Angola undoubtedly played in the trajectory of samba music.

According to the *ficha técnica* the Vila composers conveyed the origins of samba music as being brought to Rio de Janeiro by Tia Ciata, a renowned Candomblé priestess. The ficha explains the life and contribution of Tia Ciata as follows:

Tia Ciata was born in Salvador [Bahia] in 1854, and at age 22, brought samba from Bahia to Rio. She was the most famous of the Bahiana tias, also bringing a candomblé, of which she was a ialorixa [priestess]. [In her home] was created the first recorded samba on vinyl, in 1916 . . . (my inserts).  

This account in the written component of the *samba enredo* is taken from Roberto Moura’s history entitled *Tia Ciata and the Little Africa in Rio de Janeiro*, which explains the establishment of Afro-Brazilian popular music in Little Africa of 1920s Rio in terms of the arrival of Afro-Brazilians from northeastern Brazil.  

Moura clearly states that Bantu culture forms the demographic majority of Afro-Brazilians in Brazil, “the strong presence of bantus always remained,” but he argues that a cultural collapse occurred when Brazil abolished slavery, which

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68 Ferreira, *O Livro de Ouro Do Carnaval Brasileiro*, 357.
enabled Afro-Brazilians from the northeast to impose themselves as cultural leaders in Rio de Janeiro.

Moura book begins with a seeming skepticism of dominant narratives, but is ultimately unable to wrest himself from the logic of the early Brazilianist ethnographers who were captivated by the contrast that Yoruba and Mina African cultures display when compared to colonial Brazilian society. Moura notes that Bantus in Rio existed, and that there was a vibrant musical culture in urban Rio, but he argues that the wave (which he does not quantify) of migrated Yorubas from the northeast coopted existing Bantu traditions of street festivities in Rio with the intention of being the central cultural producers, “Indeed, the Bahians imposed themselves on the Carioca [Rio] world around their leaders from the ranks of Candomblé.”

Nei Lopes explains that during the early twentieth century, Candomblé priestess Mãe Aninha and priest Martiniano do Bomfim reorganized their religious communities in Bahia, Recife and Rio de Janeiro as migrations began so that they came to be seen as the main reference in the civilizing process of the African diaspora in Brazil, “so that Yorubas came to

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70 Moura, Tia Ciatá E a Pequena Africa No Rio de Janeiro, 121.
be seen as the main reference in the process of civilizing the African Diaspora in Brazil.”

Moura’s own work reproduced an essentialist folkloric rendering of Afro-Brazilian culture as predominately Yoruba. Combining the economic shifts in post-Abolition Brazil with the mainstreaming of musical and festive forms of samba into the conscious movement of Candomblé leaders to contrast themselves from other Afro-Brazilians as well as from Euro-Brazilian culture, Moura weaves an elitist narrative. All the complexity and nuance of a vast network of African descendants is lost in his conclusions about how an incoming migrant minority of Yoruba Afro-Brazilians revitalize a cultural wasteland in Rio.

Furthermore, Moura characterizes Afro-Brazilian Catholicism either in terms of Yoruba ethnic resistance or syncretism with Yoruba religion because he only looks at Afro-Brazilian religious culture in Bahia. Catholicism is, “religião dos senhores, usada como uma máscara” (the religion of masters, used like a mask). Afro-Brazilian Catholicism is discredited completely, and the possible contribution of non-Yoruba, non-Bahian Afro-Brazilians to the formation of

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72 Pravaz, “Hybridity Brazilian Style,” 85.
samba music is lost in this overarching narrative. The contribution that Catholic Afro-Brazilians made to the arts is not addressed in his work and the Afro-Brazilians who dwelt in Rio before the arrival of Yoruba Bahians are completely left out of the history he presents.

In the visual component of Vila’s 2012 *samba enredo*, the final visual sector was entitled, “Samba is Born … Angolan Origens –Semba.” Instead of allegorically depicting Angolan semba dance, the representations were of Tia Ciata, Yoruba deities (oriṣas), and rogue street dancers. The depiction of Tia Ciata, a Candomblé priestess, as the central harbinger of Candomblé religion and samba music to Rio de Janeiro in Vila’s parade reinforced the notion that “pure” Afro-Brazilian culture did not exist in Rio before the arrival of northeastern migrants. This representation falls in line with the portrayal of Rio de Janeiro Afro-Brazilians so many scholars embrace, and feeds into a historically inaccurate narrative that has dominated the cultural imaginary since the era when samba music emerged. Vila’s limited portrayal of link between Angolan semba and Brazilian samba should be understood not as their own error, but more so as a continuation of a well-established intellectual construction of Afro-Brazilian identity along the lines of one particular African cultural group.
Nagô-Centrism: The Dominant Discourse of Afro-Brazil

Candomblé and its priestesses have been convenient journalistic canvasses for escapist white fantasies and political allegories about *communitas* ...\(^7^4\)

Brazilian studies of Afro-Brazilian have generally tended to focus on Yoruba culture in the city of Bahia, Brazil and Candomblé religion. Bahia was one of the largest geographic recipients of slaves, along with Pernambuco, but neither city received as many slaves as Rio de Janeiro, which supplied labor to various locations further inland and also had its own significant market. West Africans did not comprise the demographic majority in these Brazilian cities, but their religious worldview became a national symbol. In his book on the transnational construction of Candomblé, *The Black Atlantic*, J. Loran Matory explained that scholars, mostly psychologists and anthropologists, unwittingly biased information on Afro-Brazilian religion by focusing on the vibrant religious tradition of Candomblé over other religious practices of Afro-Brazilian cultural groups. According to Matory, the homogenization of Afro-Brazilian religion in the framework of Candomblé was had a twofold result, becoming

Not only a homogenizing influence and idiom of community among dislocated migrants but also a major tourist attraction, whose economic potential few state governments were unwilling to exploit.\(^7^5\)


\(^7^5\) Ibid.
Matory’s explanation fits in well with Moura’s history of samba used by Vila’s composers of their *samba enredo*. The intellectual trend of favoring Candomblé as the Afro-Brazilian religion *par excellence* began in the late nineteenth century, most notably with the work of Brazilian medical anthropologist Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906) who wrote *The Animism and Fetichism of Black Bahians* in 1900 and *Africans in Brazil*, which was posthumously published in 1932.  

Rodrigues set out to systematize all of the African cultural groups in Brazil but his research focused exclusively on the religious worldview of several Candomblé practitioners in Bahia. According to American historian Robert Cottrol, Rodrigues was among many physicians influenced by racially biased evolutionary theories,

> His studies of Afro-Brazilian religious practices served to reinforce his convictions that Afro-Brazilians were innately primitive, incapable of truly absorbing a modern, sophisticated, Western religion like Roman Catholicism.”

A product of his times, Rodrigues’ work has its flaws. Nevertheless, his concept of provenience, a term used to refer to the specific ethnic African origins of Afro-

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Rodrigues’ contemporary, Manuel Raimundo Querino (1851-1923), was the first Afro-Brazilian historian to study African culture in Brazil. Querino contested Rodrigues’ negative stereotypes and employed a vindicationist tenor in his scholarship. Querino worked with the idea of racial mixture, or *mesticagem*, thus departing from the binary of white master and black slave and honing in on the very real source of anxiety in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century: that the nation was not “white” and could not claim purely European heritage. Querino focused on the persecution of Candomblé and worked with government officials as an activist. American historian Russell G. Hamilton explains that, while Querino looked at the colonial slave context in terms of collaboration, he was also the first to focus on organized resistance, and “by no means depicts the African as generally being submissively accepting of his or her status as a slave.”

Brazilian scholar Arturo Ramos followed Rodrigues’ ethnographical-medical model, and also exclusively studied the worldview of Candomblé.

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practitioners of Bahia. Ramos argued that Bantu mythology was impoverished compared to that of the West African cultural groups. Ramos’ work on Afro-Brazilian folklore influenced historian Gilberto Freyre, also an advocate of Candomblé as the central symbol of Afro-Brazilian religion, whose depiction of benevolent master-slave relations in Brazil in his most cited work, *Masters and Slaves*, was used by Austrian-American historian Frank Tannenbaum to draw contrast of harsher slave systems in North America.

These scholarly works on Candomblé became the official tomes on Afro-Brazilian culture and the romantic conceptions of Freyre’s utopian slave plantation made their way into the arts, where literary writers such as Jorge Amado mythologized and exoticized the Afro-Brazilian as supplicant to the status quo of deep racial inequality. Matory explains the complex matrix of relationships between intellectuals, Yoruba religious leaders in Brazil and Nigeria, and government officials that constructed Candomblé as a national symbol and emphasized a regional (i.e. Bahia-centered) presentation of black Brazilian identity, such that “black replaced the Indian as the indigenist trope par excellence in Brazil.”

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79 Ramos, *O Negro Brasileiro*.
81 Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-
Brazilians—both as a link between their communities and the government, as well as a space for communication—are often described in terms of “racial democracy” even though some believe it is a disguise used to propagate the myth that racial inequality is not an issue in Brazilian society. The era of cultural production saw a movement in Bahia towards regional ethnic valorization through alliances made between scholars, religious leaders, and government officials, as well as a movement in Rio de Janeiro towards increased collaboration between artists and government. These two coinciding trajectories are often used as evidence that race relations in Brazil became equitable during the early twentieth century.

In the 1930s, North American and European scholars such as Claude Levi-Strauss, Fernand Braudel, and Melville Herskovits came to Brazil to study its indigenous cultures. Brazilian ethnologist Edison Carneiro used Herskovits model of “cultural survivals” to study African culture that survived intact from the acculturation process. Carneiro dedicated one work to examine the traditions of the Bantu cultural group, *Os Negros Bantus*, published in 1937.83}

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Carneiro’s central thesis argued that Bantu religious traditions deteriorated over time, that Bantus “forgot” their gods and myths and absorbed the jëjë-nagô (West African) worldview that formed Candomblé. While Carneiro critiqued Rodrigues for not giving enough importance to Bantus and recognized the increasing trend to over-emphasize West African jëjë and nagô cultural groups, Carneiro’s own work contributed to the oversight of all Bantu religion that did not fit into the structure of Candomblé. Carneiro focused on one syncretic sect of Candomblé that self-identified with Angola and noted that much of the terminology in Candomblé is Bantu even when the mythical-liturgical structure is jëjë-nagô. He left the non-Candomblé Bantu practices in Brazil such as congadas and capoeira for the end of his tome, and handled them in a cursory and dismissive manner.

Many subsequent scholars of Afro-Brazilian religion follow the pattern Carneiro sets, first introducing the ideologically constructed monopoly of jëjë-nagô culture as an oversimplification, and then adding to the centrist tendency by not looking at other African cultural forms without comparing them to Candomblé. While Carneiro notes that his theoretical framework is simply a tool of reduction used to facilitate study, his search for a purely Bantu Candomblé

84 Ibid., 29.
results in scant findings. Matory explains that Freyre and Carneiro were “regionalists” who both organized scholarly conferences on Afro-Brazilian religion that effectively, “polished Candomblé’s image as a national ‘folk’ institution” located in Bahia.\textsuperscript{85}

Another noteworthy scholar in the Herskovitz School was the French expatriate sociologist-anthropologist Roger Bastide. Not only was Bastide a prolific author, he was also a participant-observer, which means he was initiated into Candomblé as he studied it. Bastide’s intention was to explain what he saw as the most African religious expression in Brazil, a religious system with complex rituals, liturgy, and social organization. Bastide’s work reflects a naïveté about the consciousness of his ethnographic informants constructing a notion of ritual purity and ethnic superiority. Nevertheless, his work greatly advanced the systematization of Candomblé religion in Bahia and represents one of the most thoughtful studies of the worldview and its growth in twentieth century Brazilian society.

The Nagô-centrism (read: Yoruba-centrism) that these scholars helped to establish fueled both external and internal religious bias and prejudice and Yoruba-Bahian cultural elitism that persists to the present. One overarching

\textsuperscript{85} Matory, \textit{Black Atlantic Religion Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé}, 164.
narrative of Afro-Brazilian religious identity was achieved in the national imaginary such that every other instance of black culture is tied to it. Both early scholars such as Carneiro as well as more recent scholars such as Moura acknowledge there are other Afro-Brazilian cultural groups with their own religious beliefs and practices, but do not find a way to discuss them without comparison to Yoruba religion, Candomblé. While recognizing and attempting to articulate more ethnic diversity in their construction of Afro-Brazilian identity, they tend to look in the same place as their predecessors and consequently reproduce existing narratives.

Part of the reason Candomblé was successfully constructed into the central national symbol of Afro-Brazilian culture and religious identity is explained by Matory’s thesis that Candomblé leaders and their scholar observers promoted a “discourse of African racial and cultural ‘purity’ in the early 20th-century” based on “a late 19th-century movement of racial and cultural nationalism in colonial Lagos, British West Africa” and introduced to Bahia by “hundreds of Afro-Brazilian elites” traveling between Brazil and West Africa.86 Another reason that Matory did not focus on is that Afro-Brazilian culture is often defined in juxtaposition with European culture, which consequently

86 Ibid., 117.
obscures the cultural identity of African descendants in Brazil who came from a creolized cultures that are better characterized in terms of similarity with Europe and creolization rather than indigeneity.

The most popular element of Candomblé used in visual allegories in Rio Carnaval is that of the oriṣa, the sacred forces that are defined by some as philosophical entities and by others as deities. Carnaval composer Milton Cunha confirms this, “the pantheon of Yorubá-Nagô Gods is exhaustively used by carnavalescos and composers as inspiration for their parades.”87 In Vila’s 2012 samba enredo, no bibliographic source was consulted to create the design for the wing of dancers dressed like the most popular Yoruba spirits—Shango, the force of thunder in red and white with a large curved sword; Yemanja, the ocean goddess in flowing blue and white; Ochun, deity of sweet river water resplendent in yellow; and Oxala, the highest of all the oriṣa in shimmering white—which evidences that the oriṣa are very familiar in the Brazilian imaginary. The use of oriṣa in a samba enredo about Central Africa is anachronistic, but the average spectator would not notice it as a flaw. Instead, the oriṣa wing actually invokes a familiar motif of Afro-Brazil, one that the audience can relate to and easily identify. It would have been more challenging for the

samba school to communicate a less familiar image of Afro-Brazil: that of Central Africa.

Bantu Culture: The Bedrock of Afro-Brazilian Culture

In the seminal works on Afro-Brazilian religion briefly discussed above, the only acknowledgement of the impact Bantu culture independently had on Brazil is in terms of its linguistic resilience in Brazilian culture. The meaning of the title of the samba enredo and the allegory in the visual component of the parade that deals with the genre of samba makes a linguistic link between Angola and Brazil. The linguistic heritage of Angola is also the only solid link that Vila’s samba enredo makes between semba and samba music styles. In the ficha técnica, the composers explain,

The term SAMBA, possesses clear Angolan origins. The verb kusamba means to jump or leap, probably in the expression of a great sense of happiness.\(^{88}\)

The textual component of the samba enredo is correct that the term samba is linguistically Angolan in origin. In a short article the composers did not reference, Nei Lopes explains that the term samba is more accurately traced to the Angola, where the term semba means “jump, leap” and that among Kongos and Angolans samba designates a type of dance.

\(^{88}\) Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 358.
Thornton notes that the synthesis of musical traditions between Europe and Africa, beginning in West Central Africa though the importation of Christian church music, developed for some time before moving across the Atlantic through the slave trade. This synthesis has not been fully understood.

It is not clear how important this new synthesis of music in central Africa was in forming the Christian religious music of Africans in America. Certainly thousands of Kongos poured every year into the slave trade . . . All carried in their heads, or at least in their tastes, both European music from the church and their own continuing musical tradition, and most likely a synthesis of the two.\(^99\)

In terms of Vila’s goal of constructing Afro-Brazilian musical culture in Rio de Janeiro in particular, it is unfortunate that the composers did not look more closely at the impact Angolans made on urban music. Vila’s portrayal of the musical links between Angola and Brazil is one of the great missed opportunities in the *samba enredo*. Central Africans had familiarity with some European musical instruments before being brought to Brazil, and they also brought their own designs such as the *berimbau*.\(^90\)

The linguistic attribution the composers make to Angolan semba music and dance does not impact the overall message in the *enredo*. The visual and lyrical components obfuscate Bantu influence on Brazilian music and portray Tia

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\(^90\) Ibid., 390.
Ciata and her Yoruba associates as the harbingers of musical culture to Rio de Janeiro. This part of the *samba enredo* reflects how little scholars of Afro-Brazilian religion have dedicated their attention to the impact Central African culture made on colonial Brazilian society. Mary Karasch is cited in the *ficha técnica* for her theory that samba music is based on Yoruba *batuque* musical style.\(^{91}\) In contrast to Moura’s history of samba, Lopes also attributes the heritage of the musical style of samba to Central Africans,

> It was certainly Africans of the large ethnolinguistic Bantu group that bequeathed to Brazilian music the basis of samba and the wide variety of varieties [of the genre].\(^{92}\)

Relying on the travel chronicle of Alfredo Sarmento, Lopes explains that the key and style of Brazilian samba has its origins in Angolan, not Yoruba, drumming songs wherein lyrics are improvised and commonly consist of narratives of romantic escapades or battles.\(^{93}\) Lopes goes on to explain that the genre derived from the Yoruba matrix is that of *afósé*, which is commonly accompanied by the percussion of *atabaque*, *agogô*, and *xéquerê* drums and in a rhythm traditionally known as *ijexá*.\(^{94}\)

The complexity of cross-cultural synthesis that occurred in Central African

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\(^{91}\) *Livro “Abre-Alas”* 2012, 357.

\(^{92}\) Lopes, “A presença Africana na música popular brasileira,” 3.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.

\(^{94}\) Ibid.
before and throughout the slave trade is not fully acknowledged by scholars, so
it is not surprising that Vila’s composers did not construct a historically sound
link. Karasch clearly states that her work is intended to recover the history of
slaves in nineteenth century Rio, argue that Bahia was the exception rather than
the norm of Afro-Brazilian culture, and highlight the “many African customs and
religions…primarily from West Africa and East Africa” in Brazil.”

However, her construction of Afro-Catholic practice is problematic. On the one hand she
describes them as insincere converts, on the other as willing converts barred from religious practices. Next, she admits that slaves
who “were able to do so” participated in a wide range of Catholic practices and
traditions and had their own confraternities and priests. Karasch’s work builds
a historical context to say something larger about Umbanda religion in
contemporary Rio, but while she is interested in establishing the syncretic
relationship between Catholic saints and “African spirits and deities,” but her
research does not take into consideration that some Catholic saints were
Africanized in the Kongo and Angolan worldviews before their debut in
Brazilian colonial slave society. Karasch’s work makes a unique contribution of

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95 Karasch, Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808-1850.
96 Ibid., 258.
97 Ibid., 259.
focusing on urban slave life, and corrects the idea that all slaves brought to Brazil worked in a plantation society. However, in terms of the religious dimension, her work does not draw sufficient correlation between indigenous, creole, and colonial elements. Furthermore, Karasch does not take African Catholicism seriously, presenting it as a foil or tool of upward mobility that slaves insincerely utilized for social status and community presence.\textsuperscript{98}

The characterizations of non-Christian Bantu religion, which Vila’s composers drew from the work of Lopes and Karasch are also problematic. Neither Lopes nor Karasch employ a hermeneutics of suspicion in their analysis of colonial documentation, which uses the word \textit{feitico}, or witchcraft to denote religious practice that does not fall in the purview of Catholicism but without noting the colonial context of the term itself. Now, it is important to note that the Catholicism brought to Central Africa is best understood as a “syncretic religion in which the Kongo reinterpreted Catholic rituals and actors according to their own religious system,” or what Thornton calls an \textit{inclusive} conception of Catholicism wherein,

All aspects of the culture of the target country that are not directly contrary to the fundamental doctrine of the Church are considered acceptable.\textsuperscript{99}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[98] Ibid., 257–261.
\item[99] Thornton, “African Catholic Church,” 151.
\end{footnotes}
David Birmingham explains that existing rituals and sacred objects were incorporated into Kongo Catholic ceremonies and sacred spaces. In Angola, the context of conversion was more so characterized by mission, but it also involved a catechism in the Kimbundu language and employed local Central Africans as religious leaders. Missionaries were always in shortage in the region, so their reports on the thousands upon thousands of conversion do not reflect their own personal work but a locally supported religious institution from Kongo.

The second allegory is a symbolic rendering of non-Christian Bantu religion in the form of an *imbondeiro*, the national tree of Angola. With its thick trunk and small branches, the *imbondeiro* tree is a rare example of the regional fauna found only in particular regions of Central Africa. The enredo calls it the “tree of life” and eulogizes its sacred healing powers. In contemporary Kongo society, the roots, leaves, and bark of the *imbondeiro* are used for their healing powers. The allegory of the *imbondeiro* tree also represents Bantu belief in ancestors’ coexistence with humans.

The rendering of indigenous religion is also expressed through lyrics that allude to witchcraft, going completely against the image of healing intended in the allegory of the *imbondeiro*. Visual reference to the “solo feitiçheiro,” sorcerer

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soil of Angola was achieved with a figure representing a sorcerer standing at the foot of the *imbondeiro* allegory dressed in an exotic feather headdress with a painted face and sashes of animal skin across his chest and waist. Even though it hardly uplifts the most positive aspects of indigenous religion, the term *feitiço* is common in popular Brazilian music, and denotes witchcraft. Witchcraft is an interesting subject in the formation of Central African religion, especially during the early sixteenth century when Catholicism was further instituted as a local religion.

Historian Wyatt MacGaffey argued that anti-witchcraft activities were a part of Kongo religion before Catholicism was established, included as a community practice of destroying sacred objects used to inflict harm on others. King Afonso of Kongo (r. 1506-1545) tolerated some aspects of Kongo religion even as he concertedly worked to establish Catholicism as the state religion, but he adamantly persecuted witchcraft. Thus the negative attitude towards *feitiço* in Kongo may be seen as a continuity of an indigenous practice that translated into Kongo Christianity. Newly established Catholic praxis may or may not have resulted in the persecution of religious practice that was not actually witchcraft. However, even in the context of indigenous Bantu religion as it is portrayed in the *samba enredo*, it is difficult to ascertain how the term *feitiço* portrays a positive
characterization of African religion.

Thornton explains some of the most salient features of original central African religiosity as including a concept of transmigration of souls and two types of otherworldly beings,

Remote and powerful spirits that we might describe as deities, and the souls of the recently dead ancestors of the living.\textsuperscript{101}

But he also argues that Catholicism was genuinely embraced by many Kongos and Angolans because there was so much common ground and symbolic-referential space for Central Africans to meld their existing worldview into the Catholic system. But scholars who intend to present a purely indigenous conception of Central African religion do not acknowledge conversion in terms of translation, synthesis, or syncretism if and when they acknowledge Catholicism on the African side of the Atlantic.

Lopes folklore of Central Africa is careless, lacking any citation for the source of his information. Lopes argues that the reason there is no cult for \textit{Nzambi}, the indigenous term for the creator divinity, is because he is inaccessible to the material world. Lopes completely omits the role of Catholicism and so he does not realize that, for Central Africans, conversion focused on their

declaration that Nzambi was the creator of all things. He does include a section on witchcraft, wherein he argues that it was an indigenous practice of last recourse that “disturbs the established order, spreads harm, sterilizes (sic) nature.”

Thornton’s work details a case of witchcraft where the rival of a claimant to the Kongo throne performs a soul flight during the night and destroys all of the crops in his path. It seems that focusing on the most negative aspect of indigenous culture is not the most salient way to uplift cross-cultural currents, thus even though there is some veracity in Vila’s depiction of indigenous religion it is left wanting.

Thus far, we have looked at the overall symbolic thrust of Vila’s samba enredo by analyzing the title and the corresponding (sixth) allegory. This segment of the plot is the only one where we see an actual disjoint in the discursive shift from Bantu culture to the existing and pervasive Nagô-centric construction of Afro-Brazilian identity. Overall, Bantu culture in its religious dimension is not properly understood by many scholars and so creative intelligentsia such as Vila’s composers are bound to construct a faulty folkloric representation. Scholars such as Moura, Lopes and Karasch focus on an indigenist trope that does not acknowledge cultural synthesis as a sincere and prolonged situation for

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103 Thornton, “Afro-Christian Syncretism.”
Central Africans. It is difficult to reconcile cultural synthesis between Europe and Africa with the morally disturbing consequences of the slave trade, and the goal of conceptualizing Africa independent of Europe’s impact is an important endeavor. However, there are problems with the portrayal of a strict binary between Europe and Africa, especially in the case of Central Africa. Many of the cultural practices brought to Brazil from Kongo and Angola were, in fact, Afro-Catholic in nature. Furthermore, it is unnecessary to dismiss the sincerity, ingenuity, and enterprise of so many creolized African slaves when constructing a symbolic reference of African heritage in the cultural imaginary.
Chapter Four: Central Africa in Vila’s *Samba Enredo*

Exoticizing Africa

In the first visual allegory of the *samba enredo*, Yinka Sonibare’s larger-than-life hydraulic allegorical float changes from a savannah into a rhinoceros every few minutes during the parade. The introduction of the *ficha técnica* describes Central Africa by reproducing the exotic appeal that captures the attention and imagination and then making a nuanced critique of that appeal that is lost in the visual component. The historical essay in the ficha quotes a description of Africa by the Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval (1577-1652), which is found in the bibliographical source by Alencastro. Sandoval’s is actually not an eyewitness account; he was a missionary in Cartagena, Columbia that learned what he knew about the continent from other Jesuits, as well as ship captains and crews. To quote de Sandoval,

> The heat and the deserts of Africa mingled all species and breeds of animals around water wells, creating a particular ecosystem capable of engendering monstrous hybridizations. This circumstance made Africa the continent of all bestiality, the choice territory of the devil.¹⁰⁴

This portrayal shows both European fascinations with the wildlife they encountered as well as their ignorant and racist appraisal of Central Africans. Jesuit records are among the most contemporary and lengthy for the region, and

yet they must not be considered representative of the general opinion Europeans, or even simple European missionaries, had of Central Africans. Jesuit reports actually pale in comparison to the Capuchin records, which are the bulk of eyewitness documentation of Angola during the early modern period.

Historical documentation shows that the Jesuits were particularly critical of Central Africans not because they were barbarians, but because the Jesuits experienced considerable resistance when they tried to take control of the institutionalization of the church from King Diogo I of Kongo in 1548-1555. John Thornton warns that Jesuit reports of the mid-sixteenth century must be read with caution,

They had come to Kongo expecting that the entire religious life of the country would be put in their hands, and Diogo, while initially respecting them, consistently favoured locally recruited clergy over them. The Jesuits eventually accepted Kongo’s role in establishing the church locally, and they resumed their missionary project in 1620. Alencastro does not recognize this nuance and simply uses de Sandoval to explain European justifications for the slave trade.

The visual allegory is aesthetically impressive, but ultimately portrays Central Africa as an arid savannah with naught other than beasts and semi-clad

heathens. Linda Heywood explains that the growth of an Afro-Lusitanian population in Angola by the eighteenth century reflects how deep cultural interpenetration went, reaching beyond politics and warfare to encompass aspects of daily life including food and fashion, dance and music, religion and even biological mixing.\footnote{Linda Heywood, “Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Cultures,” in Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660, ed. Linda Heywood (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93.} Luanda was a developed Atlantic creole center, a major hub of activity with bilateral exchange from the early seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. The portrayal of Africa in terms of the exotic thus represents another missed opportunity in Vila’s samba enredo. The audience is left with an opening message about Angola through this allegory, which is an exoticization of African culture and geography that emphasizes stark contrast to the West and is not provided with what would be a surprise to them. The imaginary of Africa is not transformed by this metaphor, and the critique that colonials conflated Africans with the beasts of the savannah they may have encountered on their travels does little by way of raising race consciousness.

Queen Njinga and the People of Angola

The second and third allegories in the samba enredo portray several separate components of seventeenth century Angola and the resistance of Queen
Njinga of Ndongo and Matamba kingdoms against Portuguese colonization. The components of the visual allegory include wings of dancers depicting Njinga’s royal court and the people of Angola. Queen Njinga Mbande was a remarkable woman who was sent by her brother, whom she succeeded to the throne of Ndongo in 1624, as an ambassador to negotiate a treaty with the Portuguese in 1622. Njinga ruled until 1663 and successfully resisted Portuguese colonization of all territories except the coastal outpost of Luanda. As the enredo explains, Queen Njinga is a central figure of resistance against Portuguese colonialism, a woman who reversed gender norms in order to assert herself as sovereign leader over Mbundu society.

Njinga is often invoked as a proto-nationalist heroine in Angolan folklore. Historian Joseph C. Miller explains that there are two central narratives about her life, the Angolan nationalist narrative of her “mastery of internal Mbundu politics” and the Portuguese histories that “tend to neglect Nzinga’s hostility to Europeans but praise instead her conversion to Catholicism . . .”107 The visual allegory of Njinga’s court highlights her reversal of gender roles with a wing of male dancers dressed as females called “Njinga’s Harem.”108 The portrayal of

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108 See Appendix II, Allegory 3.
Njinga as a wise leader who effectively resisted the Portuguese and overcame her own society’s norms against female leadership is historically accurate. While many scholars differ on their opinions of her political tactics, her military prowess and remarkable role as a female leader in a patriarchal society is evident from contemporary primary sources.

None of the components of the *samba enredo* deal with Njinga’s religious, Catholic, identity, which she adhered to for most of her life as a ruler. Njinga was baptized in 1622 to solidify a treaty with the Portuguese and, although she put aside her faith for some time and practiced blood sacrifices and infanticide while she fought alongside mercenary bands of soldiers known as Jagas or Imbangalas to her side, she reconverted in the late 1640s and repudiated her activities and in 1657 formally welcomed Catholic presence in her territory.¹⁰⁹

The samba enredo tries to encapsulate a narrative about the history of Angola and its relationship with Brazil that reflects resilience and resistance. The historical context essay in the ficha portrays the Portuguese as only being interested in slaves, and not taking notice of mineral wealth in the region. However, during the early decades of the seventeenth century Portuguese aggressions to acquire mines, lands, and slaves actually aggravated the existing

instable situation of civil war in the region of Ndongo (modern day Angola). There were several other markets of exchange that fueled the Trans-Atlantic slave trade including metal goods, foodstuff, tobacco, alcohol, and textiles. Thornton argues that “Africa’s trade with Europe was largely moved by prestige, fancy, changing taste, and a desire for variety.”

The *ficha técnica* states that Njinga was descended from two distinct peoples, the Ambundos and the Jagas. This is not historically accurate information, and could not be located in any of the bibliographic sources cited by Vila’s composers. Lopes presents the Ambundos (Mbundu) and the Jagas as two distinct people of the same Kimbundu language family, describing the former as excellent metal workers and the latter as fierce warriors. Mbundu is actually the term for all people from the region known as Angola in the seventeenth century, and they were largely an agrarian society, and the Jagas were Kongos and not Angolans. Although, the steel produced in Angola was highly regarded by Europeans, Thornton explains that it was the Yoruba of modern day northern Nigeria, who produced,

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111 Miller, “Nzinga of Matamba in a New Perspective.”
Good-quality steel – perhaps the best steel in the world of the time, and certainly equal to or even better than the steel produced in early modern Europe.\textsuperscript{112}

Here, Vila’s composers make a notable point that African society was highly developed when the Portuguese arrived. Unfortunately, the visual component of the Ambundus simply depicts a tribal and exotic motif with the dancers holding simple spears. Vila makes an enormous contribution to Afro-Brazilian folklore by recognizing the technological level of the Central Africans during the early modern period.

Jagas were mercenary Kongo soldiers who propelled the slave trade based on the capture of free Africans. These warriors pillaged the land and raided slave camps to gain slaves of their own to trade. Here is a description by a judicial official in Angola at the time, who described the jaga’s activity as devastating to the region,

\begin{quote}
[They] capture, eat, and kill thousands of souls, cutting down the palm trees from which these people collect wine and oil, in such a way that today there is a great lack of everything that they had before.
\end{quote}

From 1611 to 1618/1641, the Portuguese allied with the Jaga to fight within Ndongo and also to attack the southern region of Kongo. Linda Heywood describes the Jaga Invasion in 1568-70 of Kongo as the “first large-scale

\textsuperscript{112} Thornton, \textit{Africa and Africans}, 46.
enslavement of freeborn Kongos.”

Njinga allied with the jaga’s against the Portuguese in the 1620s and embraced their evil lifestyle of avid cannibalism and wanton pillaging of the countryside. It is unclear where Lopes gets his description of the Imbangalas as pious spiritual people; perhaps his work here resists citations because it is not founded on any reliable sources.

The lyrical component of the samba enredo gives Njinga an ambiguous religious identity that seems indigenous, calling her a “Negra de Zâmbi” in the sixth verse. This is taken from Karasch’s work; it is a section heading for the part of the chapter where she describes African healing practices using the misnomer feitico (witchcraft). Queen Njinga occupied a rare role as female monarch and actively reversed gender roles in order to navigate around a male dominated socio-political context. While the performance notes Njinga’s military strength against the Portuguese and her reversal of gender roles, it leaves out her Catholic identity and gives an ambiguous, non-Christian religious identity. Vila’s narrative about Njinga’s skills in political diplomacy aligns with Miller’s

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115 Ficha tecnica, lyrics. This appellation is inspired by Mary C. Karasch’s work, as will be explained in detail in Chapter three.
characterization of an Angolan narrative, and the composers do not depict her as a Catholic queen.

Vila’s depiction of Central African military strength is historical fact, albeit the groups on each side of the battle are unclear. It is not hard to confuse the situation of war and struggle that erupted into a full-scale civil war by the seventeenth century. Different Central African groups allied with the Portuguese (or the Dutch) at times and resisted them at others. Queen Njinga Mbande allied with the Jagas for a while in order to resist the Portuguese, but she relinquished that alliance in order to establish a treaty with the Portuguese that would allow her to keep sovereignty and reestablish trade agreements.

Slave Trade and Catholicism Among Central Africans

There are several paradigms for looking at the slave trade that characterize African’s agency in vastly different ways. The two main positions are that Africa was a passive victim to the trade, and that slaves lost much of their identity as a consequence of captivity, or that Africans played an active role in establishing the trade and that despite various circumstances of violence and social breakdown Africans maintained their skills and traditions in the Diaspora. Vila’s *samba enredo* favors the first line of argument, arguing that the European’s sole aim in contact with Africa was to capture slaves and African slaves
experienced a social death and were only able to transmit fragments of their culture to the Americas. To quote the enredo,

For the construction of Brazil, the Angolan people were pillaged, enslaved, deported and used for labor in all sectors of the economy.117

Social death stripped the slaves of their ancestors, their family, and their descendants. It removed them from their community and culture. The slave was reduced to perpetual exile.118

Given this rendering of the importation of Angolans, which strips them of their identity it is understandable why the samba enredo depicts them as lacking a religious worldview.

In the case of Central Africa, primary documents indicate a prolonged bilateral relationship between European and African monarchs, including many negotiations over the terms of the slave trade. Heywood’s research indicates that there was a transformation in the slave trade during the late sixteenth century that expanded the market beyond its original terms of trading in foreigners and domestic slaves. However, over time slaves came to replace all other means of international exchange, so that Kongo kings used “slaves to cover imports and to pay for the political and cultural relations they maintained with Europeans.”119

As international trade in the seventeenth century burgeoned during the early

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118 Ibid., 356.
decades of the seventeenth century, “Kongo elites increasingly looked to freeborn Kongos to cover their foreign imports and meet international obligations.”

Thornton’s research on the demographic impact of the slave trade confirms that during the first half of the seventeenth century,

The vast majority of the Africans crossing to the Americas to Spanish and Portuguese colonies came from West Central Africa, and of that group most spoke Kimbundu, although a significant minority also spoke the closely related Kikongo.

The European encounter with Central Africa is very well-documented, as are the various connections between Angola and Brazil. Heywood and Thornton explain that, by 1607, Kongo and Angola were the main producers of Atlantic Creole culture and that most slaves brought to the Americas came from that region:

Kongo, which had chosen to mix various European cultural norms into their culture over more than a century, and Portuguese Angola, where European settlers had established an outpost that in turn had been influenced by the African culture of the local population...All these regions supplied slaves to the Atlantic trade.

Prolonged presence of Europeans in the kingdoms of Angola and Kongo established the region as a constant source of slaves for the Americas and

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120 Ibid.
121 Thornton, Cultural History.
involved the encounter of various elements of culture: technology, textiles, music, language, and religion, to name a few.

Scholarly studies on the impact that Atlantic Creole culture had on Brazilian colonialist society are few, so it is not surprising the Vila composers missed opportunities to fully present Bantu culture as part of Afro-Brazil. The bibliographic sources that Vila’s composers relied on do not work with the concept of creolization and therefore do not portray the cultural exchange that happens between Bantu and European cultures. The scholarly discussion regarding the history of European encounters in Africa and the Americas, and the slave trade, impact the portrayal of Afro-Brazilian heritage we see in the Carnaval *samba enredo*. Manolo Florentino confirms the demographic significance of Angolans to Rio de Janeiro,

From 1790 to the end of the legal Atlantic slave trade in 1830, Rio de Janeiro saw nearly 700,000 Africans offloaded at its port. This number represents two-thirds of all imports into Brazil during the same time period, with 80 percent arriving from West Central Africa alone.¹²³

Heywood and Thornton in particular argue that Kongo and Angolan elites had a substantial hand in establishing the slave trade. Furthermore, they do not find substantiation in favor of a social death theory. Even in situations where Africans

were separated from their own cultural groups, they still managed to establish their religious identity in the Americas.

In the allegorical rendition of slavery, the *samba enredo* set the African location of the trade at the port of Luanda, Angola. This was depicted though a massive allegorical float in the shape of a slave ship, with vicars baptizing slaves on the helm. Vila’s composers thereby place Catholicism in the context of slavery. The description of en masse baptisms at the port of Luanda is based on the work of Luis Felipe Alencastro’s account, which includes the original phrase used by priests,

*You are a child of God, on your way to Portuguese lands, forget everything related to the place from which you came, now go and be happy.*

This baptismal statement is presented in the *enredo* as a superficially administered sacrament and the cause of social death. However, based on the documentation of conversion in Central Africa at the time of the trade, it is unlikely that many slaves were not much more familiar with Catholic teachings. In fact, many of the Angolans and Kongos brought to Brazil would have at the very least already received the sacrament of baptism, and likely have received catechetical teaching in their native tongue. In their groundbreaking study on the

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extent of creolization in Central Africa, entitled *Central African, Atlantic Creoles and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660*, Heywood and Thornton provide a series of maps that display the level of creolization and the areas of war where slaves were captured. These maps indicate that the vast majority of Central Africans enslaved during civil and colonial wars in the first half of the seventeenth century were from zones that were at least moderately creolized, “fully creolized central Africans or those partially familiar with Atlantic Creole culture.”125 Their research uses Christianization, which was locally instituted in Kongo and colonially instituted in Luanda, as the main marker of Atlantic Creole culture. In Kongo, African and Christian religious tradition syncretism “continued in spite of the efforts of the missionaries, because the secular clergy and the lay [Kongo] teachers maintained a well-established approach that was tolerant of more ancient religious tradition.”126 Luanda itself was a center of Catholicism in Angola, and Angolan Catholics had a comprehensive religious praxis including a culture of saints, which they appropriated to their history and culture.127 Vila’s portrayal of the use of Catholicism to legitimate European

expansion and colonialism is therefore limited because historically, the growth of the religion within a local context in Kongo and Angola was quite extensive.

Angolan Festivities in Colonial Brazil

After the fifth allegory, which depicts the arrival of Portuguese monarchs in Rio de Janeiro, there are several components in the samba enredo that depict “Black Festivities in Portuguese America.” Atop a small allegorical float rides the King of Kongo and Queen Njinga, representing the coronation festivities known as congadas which Afro-Brazilian Catholics instituted as part of their confraternities in colonial Brazil. The ficha técnica makes no reference to the Afro-Catholic roots of this tradition, describing it simply in terms of musical traditions and particularly the playing of percussion instruments. Again, here is a missed opportunity where Vila’s samba enredo could have shown a religious dimension of Central African origins in Brazil, but chose a reductionist motif. The composer’s based their understanding of congadas on Karasch, who argued that Africans first encounter with Catholicism was in colonial Brazil and that such festivities were merely a means to build community and celebrate in a legitimate public space. Again, the portrayal of Central Africans is that of people being coerced into new spaces of religious expression.

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128 See Appendix II.
129 Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 360.
More engaged studies of popular street festivities such as those by Elizabeth Kiddy and Marina de Mello e Souza evidence that coronation ceremonies reach back to African Catholic street processions, and carry over the symbol of African monarchy through the figures of Kongo and Angola, the King of Kongo and Queen Njinga, in the *congadas*. Kiddy explains that there are two levels of encounter between European and Central African cultures that inform the tradition of *congadas*, whereby traditions were maintained rather than destroyed,

When Central Africans arrived in Brazil as slaves, the process of mixing continued. Cultural mixing itself, in the Central African communities of Brazil, points to the retention of tradition, the tradition of adaptation. . . The adaptation did not destroy African culture. On the contrary, adaptation enabled Central African culture to thrive—it indicated a vital, dynamic culture, not the remnants of a rapidly disappearing culture.¹³⁰

European popular Catholic festivities blended with Central African tradition into a “creole” cultural form in Kongo and Angola that then reencountered Europe in the colonial context in Brazil. Thus, if Vila had drawn the connection they would have added a new dimension to the context of black Catholicism in Brazil. This would have grounded the *samba enredo* more fully in the historical reality of

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many Central Africans brought to Brazil and demonstrated how traditions were maintained despite the harsh realities of the slave trade.

An alternative to the nagô-centric narrative is strongest in regards to the Brazilian tradition of street festivities. Angolan Catholic street processions bear striking resemblance to the Rio Carnaval of today. Religious ceremonies practiced by black Catholic organizations in early modern Brazil represent an encounter between African indigenous religion, Afro-Catholicism, and colonial European Catholicism. Historian David Birmingham explains that Angolan festivities in the early seventeenth century were influenced by the spectacle elements of colonial and imperial Catholic processions. Birmingham notes the contemporary similarities of Carnaval here,

The significance of carnival in Catholic parts of the Americas has far exceeded its development in Latin Africa, and the . . . link is mirrored in the past by ties between Luanda festivals and Brazilian ones. The old triangular trade had a cultural dimension which flowed both ways.131

The earliest document Birmingham located in primary documentation was a feast day for Saint Francis Xavier celebrated in in 1620. This procession bears striking resemblance to the modern-day Carnaval, as it featured processional floats, "moral sketches" and praise songs. These "moral sketches" are similar to

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the visual allegories in the Rio Carnaval today; they use aesthetics to convey a message to the audience. The street festivity Birmingham describes was not aligned with Lent, but it included a key component found in Rio Carnaval in the procession of theme-based floats.

The *congadas* in particular are Central African Catholic processions in colonial Brazil that do not center on a patron saint, but rather on the coronation of two members of the religious confraternity as King of Kongo and Queen Njinga. The confraternities who instituted the *congadas* are known as *irmãndades*, or black Catholic confraternities. Throughout the colonial period beginning in the early sixteenth century, African slaves and Brazilian-born blacks in Brazil established lay Catholic organizations known as *irmãndades* within urban churches. Primary sources indicate that these types of lay Catholic institutions existed in Africa at concurrent periods and that part of the demographic brought from Kongo and Angola converted to Catholicism with minimal missionary influence before arriving in Brazil. Note that *irmãndades* were also found in Kongo and Angola, and as early as the late sixteenth century. More salient connections need to be drawn between Catholic practices in Central Africa and the emergence of black Catholicism in Brazil. According to historical reference, black Catholic festivities would have included influences from Kongo and
Angola as well as from Europe and present a unique encounter of two Catholic cultures as well as a variety of non-Christian religions from different cultural groups.

The link between Africa and Brazil in these black Catholic organizations was not fully explored within the *samba enredo*, which relied on the work of Mary Karasch and Mary Abreu on black culture in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro.\(^{132}\) The general understanding in this literature is that Africans took on the guise of Catholicism to continue non-Christian religious activities, and began doing so in the context of colonial slavery in Brazil.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

In Rio Carnaval, discourses of racial identity in Brazil often intertwine historical events and religious discourse. Almost every year there is at least one Carnaval *samba enredo* that utilizes religious discourse in its performance, which either reiterates the existing cultural imaginary or offers a new perspective on common themes. Performances regarding the African Diaspora in Brazil often harken back to African “roots” and place heritage in certain symbolic locations, particularly Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, and sometimes Minas Gerais. These performances about Afro-Brazilian culture sometimes make a statement about contact, i.e. how African roots interact with colonial Portugal, and often reproduce the dominant discourse or play off of it with humor.

Vila’s 2012 *samba enredo* intended to portrayed Angolan heritage and yet it omitted the transmission of Catholicism despite its centrality in the formation of Atlantic creole culture in Central Africa and colonial Brazil. An opportunity to discursively challenge the dominant narrative that Afro-Brazilian roots are predominately West African was missed and the composers portrayed Angolans without a rich religious identity, whether Catholic or indigenous. Choosing the folkloric narrative of the development of samba music in Rio, a storyline that implicitly cedes all African heritage to Bahia, created a gap between the
intentions laid out in the samba enredo documentation and lyrics, and the visual portrayal of allegories. In order to communicate this intention, the allegories would have needed to portray the link between Angolan semba dance and Brazilian samba.

Among the African cultural groups in contact with Portugal during the early modern period, Kongo was unique in that it embraced Christianity and Western culture, thereby creating a creole culture in Africa that formed a cultural link between Europe and Africa before reaching the Americas. Although King Njinga a Nkuwu and his royal court were baptized in 1491, according an inquest Rui de Pina conducted among the members of the 1491 expedition to Kongo, the king cooled in his faith later in his life. One of his two sons, Afonso I (r.1509-43) officially established Catholicism in the kingdom and “the Christian religion never faced another serious challenge from within Kongo society after Afonso’s accession to the throne.” Diogo I (r.1545-61) faced some negative appraisals from Jesuits because he favored local Portuguese settlers, or lançados, over elite Portuguese from Europe and São Tomé. Nevertheless, Afonso and Diogo

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134 Ibid., 149.
135 Antonio Brásio, Monumenta Missionara, II, 330. According to Thornton, lançados, were unofficial settlers who “operated in league with the African authorities” and often married local women and were allowed self-governance. Many lançados were New Christians from
sponsored the building of churches, sent chapel boys out to rural villages to missionize, and explicitly declared themselves faithful and obedient to the Church.

The rich and well-documented historical situation of prolonged bilateral cultural exchange between Central Africa and Portugal is complex, but it is a worthwhile endeavor to thoughtfully consider it when communicating a narrative through a platform as powerful as the Carnaval. Creolization in an African context represents part of the culture slaves brought to colonial Brazil. Vila’s *samba enredo* was clearly intended to provide a new folklore based on Central African roots and recognizing the religious formation of Angolans would not have detracted from the main theme of resistance and persistence. In the *samba enredo* we see the attempt to connect samba music and dance to Angolan *samba*.

The portrayal of the Angolan dance form, *semba*, to present the transmission of culture from West Central Africa to Brazil also tied in the trajectory from Angolan resistance to Portuguese colonization to the slave trade, Portugal, and those from São Tomé “rapidly became a favored community in Kongo, and then in Ndongo as well, whose rulers were willing to support them against claims made by the Portuguese government against them.” Thornton, Africa and Africans, 60. See also John Thornton, “Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation,” *History in Africa* 8 (1981): 193–4.
which brought so many Angolans and Kongos to Brazil. Angolan *semba* dance took on an individualized form in Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s, where it became *samba*. However, the cultural imaginary of *samba* music and dance is anachronistic because it is traced through a Yorùbá priestess, Tia Ciata, who moved from Bahia to Brazil and hosted local musicians in her home.

The display of oriṣas reflects this academic tradition and on race and religion in Brazil—in both the North American and the Brazilian traditions—which tends to favor the cultural link from West Africa and Candomblé religion descended from the Yorùbá people of modern day Nigeria. One religion is usually used as the symbolic complex to define the Afro-Brazilian perspective, namely Candomblé. Candomblé is an aesthetically rich religion, with its use of color and a whole corpus of sacred objects. Catholicism is still understood as a European and colonial religion imposed upon Africans during the Atlantic slave trade. Afro-Brazilian discourse has not yet defined the Central African tradition of Catholicism or the agentive role that blacks in Africa and in Brazil played in establishing the tradition among their cultural group.

While focusing only on the religiosity that historically originated in Africa, this perspective leaves out an aspect of African participation in Brazilian culture that is significant. Only one of a total of seven allegories the composers portray in
the *samba enredo* deals with Nagô culture and (anachronistically) credits it with the birth of samba music, but the rest of the parade and its message is about Bantu culture. Afro-Brazilian folkloric narratives currently portray West African culture in Brazil in terms of resistance and survival and Central Africans in terms of cultural death, assimilation, and cultural decline. Examining frameworks that expand our understanding of the ways that African and European cultures formed a creole context would provide more historically accurate reading of black culture in Brazil.
Appendix I: Vila Isabel 2012 Samba Enredo Lyrics\textsuperscript{136}

1. Vibra, oh minha Vila
   A sua alma tem negra vocação
1. Pulsate, oh my Vila
   Your soul has a black vocation

2. Somos a pura raiz do samba
   Bate meu peito à sua pulsação
2. We are the pure root of samba
   Your pulse beats in my chest

3. Incorpora outra vez Kizomba e segue na missão
3. Incorporate Kizomba\textsuperscript{137} again and continue the mission

4. Tambor africano ecoando,
   solo feiticeiro
   Na cor da pele, o negro
4. African drum echoing,
   sorcerer soil
   In the color of the skin, the negro

5. Fogo aos olhos que invadem,
   Pra quem é de lá
   Forja o orgulho, chama pra lutar
5. Fire in the eyes of those who invade,
   For who is from there
   Pride is forged, calls to fight

6. Rainha Ginga, ê matamba
   Vem ver a lua de Luanda nos guiar
   Rainha Ginga, ê matamba
   Negra de Zâmbi, sua terra é seu altar
6. Queen Ginga, is matamba\textsuperscript{138}
   Come see the moon from Luanda
   guide us
   Queen Ginga, is matamba
   \textit{Negra of Zambi,\textsuperscript{139} her land is her altar}

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\textsuperscript{136} This is my translation of the original Portuguese text found in Livro “Abre-Alas” 2012, 382.

\textsuperscript{137} Here, Kizomba has multiple meanings. First, there is the literal meaning in Kimbundu, meaning “festivity; party” See Steven Byrd, Calunga and the Legacy of an African Language in Brazil (UNM Press, 2012). Second, Kizomba is a contemporary popular dance genre in Angola, a mix of Angolan semba dance with Caribbean zouk and Latino merengue dance styles. According to Adebayo Oyebade, “kizomba is known throughout Lusophone Africa and in Portugal . . . usually sung in Portuguese with African rhythms.” See Adebayo Oyebade, Culture and Customs of Angola (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 156. Third, it is an allusion to the Vila Isabel’s championship Carnaval parade entitled “Kizomba, Festa da Raça” which was composed by Martinho da Vila who is given homage in this samba enredo. Fourth, it refers to the Kizomba black art exchange that Martinho da Vila organized in 1984.

\textsuperscript{138} This refers to the Kingdom of Matamba of modern day Angola, which Queen Njinga (here called Ginga) ruled over from 1624 until her death in 1663.
7. Somos cultura que embarca
Navio negreiro, correntes da escravidão
8. Temos o sangue de Angola
Correndo na veia,
luta e libertação
A saga de ancestrais
Que por aqui perpetuou
9. A fé, os rituais, um elo de amor
Pelos terreiros (dança, jongo,
capoeira)
10. Nasce o samba (ao sabor de um
chorinho)
11. Tia Ciata embalou
Com braços de violões e cavaquinhos a
tocar

7. We are a culture that embarks
Slave ship, currents of slavery
8. We have the blood of Angola
Running in our veins,
struggle and liberation
The saga of ancestors
That persisted here
9. The faith, the rituals, a bond of love
In the terreiros\textsuperscript{140} (dancing, jongo, \textit{capoeira})\textsuperscript{141}
10. Samba is born (to the tune of a
\textit{chorinho})\textsuperscript{142}
11. Tia Ciata bundled it
With arms of guitars and ukuleles set
to play

\textsuperscript{139} Zambi is the Kimbundu term for the divine. See Thornton, “African Catholic Church”; Thornton, “Afro-Christian Syncretism.”

\textsuperscript{140} Terreiro is a Portuguese word for a Candomblé temple-house.

\textsuperscript{141} Jongo is a music and dance genre from southeastern Brazil said to originate in Central Africa, and characterized as umbigada, or belly strike, by classical scholars of Afro-Brazilian culture such as Edison Carneiro. See Edison Carneiro, Samba de Umbigada (Ministério da Educação e Cultura, Campanha de Defesa do Folklore Brasileiro, 1961); Gustavo Pacheco, “Jongos,” Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History: The Black Experience in the Americas, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006).

\textsuperscript{142} Chorinho or choro is a Brazilian musical genre that originated in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro that “came to represent social and racial diversity in Brazil and was integrated into mainstream film, radio, and recordings throughout Latin America and Europe. It formed the basis for Brazilian jazz . . .” See Tamara Elena Livingston and Thomas George Caracas Garcia, Choro: A Social History of a Brazilian Popular Music (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2005). Also see Tadeu Coelho and Julie Koidin, “Brazilian Choro: Historical Perspectives and Performance Practices,” The Flutist Quarterly (Fall 2005): 36–39.
12. Nesse cortejo (a herança verdadeira)
A nossa Vila (agradece com carinho)

13. Viva o povo de Angola e o negro
Rei Martinho

(Coro)
Samba de lá, que eu sambo de cá
Já clareou o dia de paz
Vai ressoar o canto livre
Nos meus tambores, o sonho vive

12. In this procession (the true heritage)
Our Vila (thanks you with affection)

13. Long live the people of Angola and the black King Martinho

(Chorus)
Semba over there, I’ll samba over here
The day of peace is already brightened
The free song will resonate
In my drums, the dream lives
Appendix II: Vila Isabel 2012 Samba Enredo Components

Sector 1: On Nature
Front Commission: The African Savannah
First Master of Ceremony and Flag-Bearer, Julio César and Rute Alves: The Strength of the Angolan Race/People
Wing 1, Community: The Strength of Angolan Nature
Floor Highlight: Natural Riches of Angola
Allegory 1: The Wild Fauna of Angola
Wing 2, Community: Zebras
Wing 3, Community: Giraffes
Wing 4, Community: Black Antelopes
Wing 5, Community: Birds
Floor Highlight: The Sacred Strength of Nature
Allegory 2: Imbondeiro, the Tree of Life
Sector 2: Of Peoples, Ambundos and Jagas
Wing 6, Community: Ambundo Warriors
Wing 7, Community: Ambundo Dancers
Floor Highlight: Origins of the Angolan Race
Wing 8, Community: Jaga Warriors
Wing 9, Community: Jaga Counselors
Sector 3: Queen Njinga
Wing 10, Community: Njinga’s Guardians/Guards
Floor Highlight: Lady of Njinga’s (Royal) Court
Allegory 3: At Njinga’s Court
Wing 11, Community: Njinga’s Subjects
Wing 12, Community: Njinga’s Harem
Wing 13, Dancers: Dancers of Njinga’s Court
Queen of Drums, Sabrina Sato: Allegory of African Nature
Wing 14, Percussionists: The Drums of Queen Njinga
Sector 4: The Slave Trade
Wing 15, Community: Portuguese Merchants of Slaves
Wing 16, Community: Captured Slaves “Merchandise”
Wing 17, Baianas: African Memory
Floor Highlight: The Pains of Captivity

Allegory 4: From the Port of Luanda to Rio de Janeiro: The Path of the Slave Ship
Sector 5: At Valongo Wharf
Wing 18, Community: Male Slaves for Hire/Gain
Wing 19, Community: Female Slaves for Hire/Gain
Second Master of Ceremony and Flag-Bearer, Diego Machado and Natália Pereira: Nobility Hails the Arrival of Princess Tereza Cristina
Wing 20, Community: Brazilian Nobility at the Valongo Quay/Wharf
Wing 21, Community: The People of Brazil at the Valongo Quay/Wharf
Floor Highlight: Allegory of the Imperial Crown
Allegory 5: The Arrival of Tereza Cristina at the Valongo Quay/Wharf
Sector 6: Black Festivities in Portuguese America
Wing 22, Community: Congadas
Wing 23, Community: Caboclinho
Floor Highlight: Folguedos
Choreographed Group: Capoeiras
Wing 24, Community: Coronation of the King of Kongo
Tripod Highlight: Black Kings in Slaveholding Rio: The Coronation of the King of Kongo and of Queen Njinga
Wing 25, Community: Guitarist of the Festivity of the Divine (Festa do Divino)
Wing 26, Community: Revelers of the Festivity of the Divine
Floor Highlight: The Festivity of the Divine
Allegory 6: Festas de Largo
Sector 7: Samba is Born … Angolan Origens –Semba
Wing 27, Community: Tia Ciata
Wing 28, Community: Orixás
Wing 29, Composers: Rogue Samba Dancers
Wing 30, Community: Morena144 d’Angola
Wing 31, Community: Friends of the Black King Martinho da Vila
Allegory 7: The Black King Martinho and his royal court

144 Morena is a term in Portuguese that refers to a brunette woman with brown skin. Morena d’Angola in particular refers to a song written by Chico Buarque da Hollanda and first released by singer Clara Nunes in 1980 in her album “Brasil Mestiço.” Nunes treated her hair so that it would appear more Afro-Brazilian and performed this song in Luanda as part of an Afro-Brazilian relief concert called called Projecto Kalunga which Martinho da Vila coordinated. See Wagner Homem, Histórias de canções: Chico Buarque (Leya, 2012).
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