

Vai-Vai: Carnival is fashion, history and resistance

Abstract

This article aims to problematize the social role of fashion through the Brazilian carnival with the theoretical support of Diana Crane, through the samba-enredo *Chapter 4, Verse 3 - Da Rua e do Povo, o Hip-Hop: Um Manifesto Paulistano* by the Vai-Vai samba school and to show the importance of cultural history from the perspective of Jim Sharp's history from below, as historical reparation for the Brazilian black population.

Keywords: vai-vai, hip-hop, carnival, fashion, blackness, cultural studies

Volume 10 Issue 2 - 2024

Sheila Aragão Caetano

Assistant Professor at Cruzeiro do Sul University, Brazil

Correspondence: Sheila Aragão Caetano, Assistant Professor at Cruzeiro do Sul University, Master's and soon to be Doctorate in Education, Art and History of Culture (August 2024), Mackenzie Presbyterian University. CAPES Fellow. Researcher and specialist in Afro-Brazilian culture, with a specialization in Fashion and Creation, Brazil, Email sheila.aragao@icloud.com

Received: February 26, 2024 | **Published:** April 18, 2024

Introduction

Diane Crane¹ argues that fashion plays a social role, as it is a decisive factor between class, gender and clothing identities, since clothing has led to processes of social class differentiation that continue to occur to this day, as well as between the way men and women dress, apart from the fact that it is possible for fashion to generate an identity. Bearing in mind that Brazil enslaved Africans and people of African descent for more than 300 years, and subsequently marginalized this group, it created a devaluation of their history and culture, along with oppression and social violence aimed at black people.

The Carnival festival itself, despite not having Brazilian origins, has for some years now become a trademark of Brazil, with a construction of black culture, on the part of the samba and the celebration itself, and reflecting for many years the structural racism surrounding its sambas enredos. Over the last two decades, Brazil has undergone changes in laws relating to the historical reparation of the black population, which is a reflection of almost a century of struggle. These measures, albeit in a slow process, have reflected in a social change that has been reflected especially in the younger generations, who are seen as empowered. That said, in the last five years the Brazilian media has been more open to showing this audience with more empathy, in other words, the humanity that was stripped from black people by the process of enslavement and its historical continuities.

In this way, the year 2024 brought mostly samba schools from the Rio-São Paulo axis, with samba songs focused on celebrating, valuing and reflecting on life in society for the black population. In the city of São Paulo, one of the oldest schools is Vai-Vai, whose musical theme is rap, which in Brazil was a manifestation of São Paulo and mentions the song *Chapter 4, Verse 3* by the band Racionais Mc's, released in 1997, which makes up the band's most prestigious album and continues to be a reference for national hip-hop. The storyline draws attention to this article because it portrays the violent treatment of the police and society itself, along with references to greetings from religions of African origin, which encourage the humanization of the black population.

Carnival and Brazil

Cunha² points out that carnival in Brazil was known from the outset for its inhabitants' original way of expressing themselves, being

peculiar in relation to other carnivals, and so this festival came to be associated with the Brazilian people. However, it is clear that Carnival is not originally a Brazilian festival; it has Greco-Roman origins and, as Burke³ points out, it spread across the European continent, being celebrated in different ways throughout the Middle Ages. During this same period, due to Catholicism and the fact that it was a celebration of meat, it was "liberated" to be celebrated 40 days before Easter.

This festival has been celebrated since around the 17th century in Brazil, and the cultural plurality here has brought its unique perspectives, with indigenous, African and Portuguese mixtures.² According to Lopes and Simas,⁴ Carnival,

O período de festivais ou festas profanas de origem religiosa, registrado em diversas culturais arcaicas, inclusive africanas. No Brasil originário do calendário católico, manifesta-se em duplo aspecto: dionisiaco (folia) e apolíneo (espetáculo). Externando essa duplicidade, o samba está presente no carnaval carioca desde antes a criação da primeira escola de samba, instituição que nascia dos seguimentos mais desfavorecidos, acabou por tornar-se, no contexto sócio-histórico da sociedade de consumo, o ponto mais artístico e espetacular da festa carnavalesca no Rio de Janeiro.

The period of festivals or profane celebrations of religious origin, recorded in various archaic cultures, including Africa. In Brazil, which originated in the Catholic calendar, it has a dual aspect: Dionysian (revelry) and Apollonian (spectacle). Expressing this duplicity, samba has been present in Rio de Janeiro's carnival since before the creation of the first samba school, an institution that was born out of the most underprivileged groups and ended up becoming, in the socio-historical context of consumer society, the most artistic and spectacular point of the carnival festivities in Rio de Janeiro. Free translation

However, in the mid-19th century, what was then considered the Brazilian cultural elite, and from the perspective of this racist author, as an attempt to transform the narrative that was already being constructed - which had a jocular tone, of the masses, of the masks that disguised people's faces and aspects of black culture and presence - brought aspects of the Venice and Nice carnivals, in order to try to erase the history that had already been built and was disapproved of by this part of the population. What later became known as the samba school was born out of this organizational structure of carnival societies, which at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the

20th century, in addition to rules, allegorical cars¹ and evaluations, also brought the schools' supporters.²

To find out more about the evolution of the Brazilian carnival of cordões, cortejos, ranchos, fanianos, societies and cacumbis, see *Ecoss da folia: uma história social do carnaval carioca entre 1880 e 1920* by Maria Clementina Pereira Cunha.

DaMatta⁵ constructs a discourse that helps to understand the carnival festival in Brazil as synonymous with Brazilianness and the Brazilian people. To this end, there needs to be a dichotomy between public and private spaces, processions and military parades.

DaMatta⁵ points out that the formation of carnival in Brazil was a mixture of private and public spaces, religious processions and military parades. We can classify the home as a private place and the street as a public place, since the home is a controlled environment while the street is not, and because there are unconscious rules governing these spaces. Thus, some activities, postures and clothes are reserved for living in the home, while others are reserved for living in the street. However, during Carnival, these spaces are mixed.

For this mixture of carnival to be possible and the association between the meaning of public and private to make more sense, it is necessary to know that both the religious procession and the military parades had an influence, the reason: the way they occupy the space of the cities.⁵

The first doesn't circulate in the shopping center, a region with no rules and which therefore competes with the values of the Christian faith, as well as always featuring a saint who is being honored, and often passes through the homes of the faithful, proving to be a controlled environment just like homes, and bringing the public close to its rite, made up of all social strata without distinction. On the other hand, the military parade, which is related to an organized institution that refers to force, occupies the central spaces of the city in an organized and methodical way, while the public just watches from a distance. A priori, this central space, which has the rhythm of work and disorder, continues with a break from the accelerated rhythm of work and is organized according to the military parade, de-characterizing the classic norm.⁵

At carnival time, the central areas are occupied just like in military parades, but without order, in an unruly way as is the rhythm of the streets, but at this time it is not necessary to work, it is a time of celebration and leisure in which all the people are gathered as in religious processions without distinction of social classes, that is, there is a mixture even between black and non-black, white people.⁵

Carnival thus occupies the streets in a mixture of the rites of religious processions and military parades, and is also a mixture of public and private, since acts that would only be practiced within the home, such as sexual intimacies, certain clothes are worn on the streets, but without the frenetic pace of work in the central regions.⁵

History and resistance

Classical historiography, in general, tended to suppress more diverse narratives in favor of telling the side of the so-called "winners" through people who were authorized to tell the discourses of those who held power,⁶ thus shaping a Eurocentric perspective according

¹É uma "denominação de cada uma das figuras ou ornamentações que, movimentando-se mecanicamente ou por força humana, ilustram o enredo de uma escola de samba." (HOUAIS, VILAR, 2001 apud LOPES, SIMAS, 2023, p. 22). It is a "denomination of each of the figures or ornaments that, moving mechanically or by human force, illustrate the plot of a samba school." Free translation

to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam⁷ in *Critique of the Eurocentric Image: multiculturalism and representation*, in which it brings the European man and the European continent as the center and standard of excellence and quality, above all other peoples, especially black people around the globe, justifying that they could be submissive, objectified and suffer all sorts of disqualifications.

Burke⁸ theorizes about the construction of Cultural History, which combines knowledge perspectives from different areas in order to create the possibility of a more comprehensive history. In this sense, new ways of doing and thinking about history are created, including history from below, which according to Jim Sharp⁹ highlights historical narratives that have been hidden from traditional history through the use of more diverse documents that shed light on these other perspectives.

In this case, the document is the celebration of carnival through the historicization of the samba-enredo *Chapter 4, Verse 3 - Da Rua e do Povo, o Hip-Hop: Um Manifesto Paulistano* by the Vai-Vai samba school. The musical rhythm used by Carnival is samba, which originated in the backyard of Tia Ciata (Hilária Batista Barbosa) at the beginning of the 20th century¹⁰ in Rio de Janeiro, in the region nicknamed by musician and artist Heitor dos Prazeres as Pequena África (Little Africa), which continues today as a territory of black resistance. Tia Ciata had a profession characteristic of black women at the time: a baker. In addition, according to the exhibition *Pequenas Áfricas: o samba que o Rio inventou*, at the Moreira Salles Institute in the city of São Paulo, 2024, her house was a meeting point for people who composed and played samba, practiced capoeira and also Candomblé, to which she was a saint's mother and thus had male protection and could somehow try to omit the practice of the religion of African origin, which was prohibited by law just like capoeira. However, because of Tia Ciata's popularity and social respect, she ended up being indirectly authorized to practice it, and as Leonardo¹⁰ mentions, she was the author of the first samba, *Pelo Telefone*.

Returning to the carnival of 2024, the style of hip-hop was created in the United States and arrived as a movement in the city of São Paulo in the late 1970s through Nelson Triunfo, who was a fan of soul music and in subsequent years created the Black Soul Brothers group, which came together with break dancing, bringing a movement to the old center of the city of São Paulo, in the São Bento region, with various groups dancing in the street in the early 1980s. Along with this, hip-hop rhymes began in the voices of Thaíde, Jr. Blow and Marrom, and traces of some artists who came to be known as graffiti artists.¹¹

In 1986 the first record label for this style of music was created, Kaskatas Records, and the following year the duo Thaíde & Dj Hum appeared, thus expanding the hip-hop movement in the city of São Paulo. In 1988, the Workers' Party (PT) began to support the movement and there were more and more dances at Chic Show, for example. During this period, Mano Brown's name began to stand out and a few years later the band Racionais Mc's was created.¹¹

The track that appears in the excerpt from this homage to hip-hop in the samba enredo² da vai-vai belongs to the album *Sobrevivendo ao Inferno*, and both this album and the rap/hip-hop movement itself talk about the problems of the peripheral people, the black people, who, due to the dehumanization of the black population, made up of

²Modalidade de samba que consiste em letra e melodia criadas a partir do resumo do tema escolhido como enredo de uma escola de samba. (LOPES, SIMAS, 2023) p.257. A type of samba consisting of lyrics and melody created from a summary of the theme chosen as the plot of a samba school. Free translation.

black and brown people, in the process of more than 300 years of the Brazilian slave social structure, followed by the importation of white European labor to replace slave labor with free labor,¹² followed by processes of eugenics, which aimed to eradicate the black population, suggesting a ban on the formation of mixed-race pairs for reproductive purposes and social, educational, cultural and economic exclusions, which was reinforced by the historical permanence of the period of enslavement.

This context has led to the practice of structural racism, which according to Silvio de Almeida,¹³ is when racism is impregnated at the base of society and is replicated not only individually, but also collectively and institutionally, and thus, even though there are laws that criminalize the practice of racism, that is, the exclusion, persecution, death and other factors of the black population group; it ends up not being criminalized by the restrictive mentality of racism of the people in power.

A recurring fact is the persecution and killing of young black people by the police or even their criminal indictment, which often occurs without evidence, apart from the lack of opportunities for this population to achieve social, cultural and economic change.

Below is the samba-enredo of the vai-vai samba school, which is translated into English in the footnote.

“Olha nós aí de novo, coroa de rei
Capítulo 4, Versículo 3
Vai-Vai manifesta o povo da rua
É tradição e o samba continua
Olha nós aí de novo, coroa de rei
Capítulo 4, Versículo 3
Vai-Vai manifesta o povo da rua
É tradição e o samba continua
Laroyê, axé
Me dê licença, saravá, seu Tranca-Rua
Eu não ando só
O papo é reto e a ideia não faz curva
Renegados da moderna arte
Não faço parte da elite que insiste em boicotar
Acharam que eu estava derrotado
Quem achou estava errado
Corpo fechado, sou cultura popular
Meu verso é a arma que dispara
E a palavra é a bala pra salvar
Balançou, balançou o Largo São Bento
Moinho de vento, a ginga na dança
Grande triunfo do movimento
No breaking o corpo balança
Balançou, balançou o Largo São Bento
Moinho de vento, a ginga na dança
Grande triunfo do movimento

No breaking o corpo balança
Solta o som, alô, DJ
Que eu mando a rima pra embalar manos e minas
Na batida perfeita, meu rap é a voz
As cores da minha aquarela
No muro, a tela que o tempo desfaz
Mas apagar jamais (Vai-Vai, Vai-Vai)
A força do conhecimento
No gueto, procedimento
Atitude de gente bamba
Tem hip-hop no meu samba
É preto no branco, no tom do meu canto
Preconceito nunca mais
Fogo na estrutura
Justiça, igualdade e paz
Olha nós aí de novo, coroa de rei
Capítulo 4, Versículo 3
Vai-Vai manifesta o povo da rua
É tradição e o samba continua
Olha nós aí de novo, coroa de rei
Capítulo 4, Versículo 3
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É tradição e o samba continua
Laroyê, axé
Me dê licença, saravá, seu Tranca-Rua
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 Atitude de gente bamba
 Tem hip-hop no meu samba
 É preto no branco, no tom do meu canto
 Preconceito nunca mais
 Fogo na estrutura
 Justiça, igualdade e paz
 Olha nós aí de novo, coroa de rei
 Capítulo 4, Versículo 3
 Vai-Vai manifesta o povo da rua
 É tradição e o samba continua³

³Here we are again, a king's crown

Chapter 4, Verse 3

Vai-Vai manifests the people of the street

It's tradition and the samba continues

Look at us again, a king's crown

Chapter 4, Verse 3

Vai-Vai manifests the people of the street

It's tradition and the samba continues

Laroyê, axé

Excuse me, saravá, your Tranca-Rua

I don't walk alone

The talk is straight and the idea doesn't bend

Renegades of modern art

I'm not part of the elite that insists on boycotting

They thought I was defeated

Whoever thought so was wrong

Body closed, I'm popular culture

My verse is the gun that fires

And the word is the bullet to save

Largo São Bento swayed, swayed

Windmill, the ginga in the dance

Great triumph of the movement

In the breaking the body swings

Sway, sway Largo São Bento

Windmill, the ginga in dance

Great triumph of the movement

In breaking the body swings

Release the sound, hello, DJ

I'll send you a rhyme to rock your boys and girls

In the perfect beat, my rap is the voice

The colors of my watercolor

On the wall, the canvas that time undoes

But never erase (Vai-Vai, Vai-Vai)

The power of knowledge

In the ghetto, procedure

The attitude of bamba people

There's hip-hop in my samba

It's black and white, in the tone of my song

Prejudice never again

Fire in the structure

Justice, equality and peace

Look at us again, king's crown

Chapter 4, Verse 3

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Windmill, the ginga in dance

Great triumph of the movement

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Release the sound, hello, DJ

The social role of fashion

Crane¹ builds a theory based on sociologists and other professionals that fashion plays a social role through clothing, since it ends up discriminating between those who have money and those who don't, i.e. social classes. In the past, clothing was very expensive, so only the nobility/royalty could afford clothes. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and mass production, production became cheaper and clothing became "more" accessible. However, there was still a social stigma that people with lower financial conditions dressed badly, and that it was the wealthier classes who dictated fashion.

Even among the lower classes, there were distinctions in dress, making it possible to identify groups. And there were peculiarities between women's and men's clothing, for example, black slaves (various ethnic groups from the African continent and their descendants) didn't wear shoes, while their "masters" did. In this way, it is possible to make social reflections through fashion, and from the moment that the Vai-Vai Samba School brings to the Anhembi catwalk a parade that discusses rap culture, which is born on the outskirts of São Paulo and amplifies the voices of these countless communities; it values peripheral ways of living and thinking through culture and fashion, through clothing - an important item in the composition of parades along with floats and drums.

Figure 1 is emblematic for highlighting a reproduction of the Borba Gato statue in the city of São Paulo, in the Santo Amaro region. This historical monument is a representation of the oppressor, of power, of a personality who is notoriously known for clearing land, hunting down indigenous people to be enslaved and enslaving fugitives. According to classical historiography, it makes sense to have this kind of narrative, but it omits other narratives that have been explored by Cultural History, and as the samba enredo chosen gave vent to the rhythm of rap, especially being inspired by lyrics by Racionais Mc's, the song prioritizes equality, justice, valuing the voices of the periphery who are mostly black and therefore descendants of enslaved people who were hunted by the *bandeirantes*. Thus, having a *bandeirante* in the spotlight covered in various graffiti with peripheral empowerment is a form of liberation and historical reparation.



Figure 1 Vai-Vai 2024 parade. Credits:Woody Henrique.

Another highlight is the use of a mix of jeans to make up the look of the *mestre sala and porta bandeira*⁴ (Figure 2), a garment that is key to everyday life and has a low cost, and is widely used both by rap singers and by the community that listens to them or even "just" lives in the peripheries.



Figure 2 Vai-Vai 2024 parade. Credits:Woody Henrique.

I'll send you a rhyme to rock your boys and girls
 In the perfect beat, my rap is the voice
 The colors of my watercolor
 On the wall, the canvas that time undoes
 But never erase (Vai-Vai, Vai-Vai)
 The power of knowledge
 In the ghetto, procedure
 The attitude of bamba people
 There's hip-hop in my samba
 It's black and white, in the tone of my song
 Prejudice never again
 Fire in the structure
 Justice, equality and peace
 Look at us again, king's crown
 Chapter 4, Verse 3
 Vai-Vai manifests the people of the street
 It's tradition and the samba continues

⁴"Casal de dançarinos que na escola de samba é encarregado de conduzir o pavilhão que a simboliza. A instituição tem origem nos antigos ranchos carnavalescos" (LOPES, SIMAS, 2023, p. 185) "Couple of dancers who in the samba school are in charge of leading the pavilion that symbolizes it. The institution has its origins in the old carnival ranches". Free translation.

Figure 3 shows another float⁵ a *diskey jockey*, better known as a DJ, who commands the raps alongside the masters of ceremonies, commonly known as MC's. The costumes that make up the float have golden tones that may refer to the gold necklaces that are used as accessories by both MC's and DJ's. An important detail on the side of the car is the writing rap is conscience, highlighting an important saying of this musical style that gives voice to the peripheries of cities.



Figure 3 Vai-Vai 2024 parade. Credits:Woody Henrique.

Final considerations

Bearing in mind the countless difficulties faced by Brazil's black population, it is an act of resistance that carnival parades still exist, and despite the whitening of part of the community, at least blackness is being highlighted more. In this way, it is possible to historicize black cultural narratives from the perspective of history from below with the 2024 samba-enredo of the vai-vai samba school.

And from the social role that fashion plays, which ends up excluding and stereotyping social classes, suffering those who have less access, which is where black people are, it is an act of resistance and inspiration for carnival costumes, which also inspire the clothing of this public.

Racism in Brazil and around the world is far from over, but cultural expressions and activists from different social strata are essential if this scenario is to be alleviated over the centuries, by seeking to humanize this part of the population.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the experience I had at the University of Leeds in the Miscellaneous Postgraduate Research Program, in the Languages,

Cultures and Societies department under the guidance of Professor Stephanie Dennison in 2022 with a CAPES PRINT scholarship grant, the Mackenzie Presbyterian University which welcomed me during my postgraduate studies, my advisor Professor Rosana M. P. B. Swartz and CAPES for the research grant.

Funding

CAPES Fellow - I can send a paper showing that I receive grant from them, but they do not give a grant number in Brazil.

Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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⁵Figure 01 is also a representation of a allegorical car