

Maracatu is a “folkloric” tradition from the city of Recife and its surrounding areas. In much the same way as samba is revered in the city of Rio de Janeiro, maracatu holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the people who live in Pernambuco. While the word maracatu may be famous all across Brazil, the majority of people are not very well acquainted with the ritual or the rhythm, even in Recife.

Recife, a city of canals and rivers and built on a mangrove swamp, is the gateway to the sertão or the dry interior of the North East of Brazil. The images along the coast are of enormous sugar cane plantations and straw hats to keep the sun off. This area has the full spectrum of ethnic mix in the Brazilian story: Portuguese colonists and other European immigrants, African slaves from Angola, Mozambique and West Africa, and the many indigenous peoples of the region. The Dutch had dominion over Pernambuco for a time and the first synagogue in the New World was built here. More than anything however, Recife is renowned in Brazil and the world for its famous Carnival.

The popular image of Carnival in Recife is of fast paced frevo music and young men and women dancing with multi-colored umbrellas. Then there is maracatu. There are two distinguished types of maracatu in the city: Maracatu Nação, also known as Maracatu de Baque Virado, and Maracatu Rural, or Maracatu de Baque Solto. The second is said to be a more recent phenomenon and comes from the sugar cane growing rural areas outside the city limits of Recife. It is a fast paced musical procession with a horn section and many quick stops and starts. Maracatu Nação on the other hand, is an older tradition, some say older than samba, and it is rooted in the heritage of the African slaves that were brought to Brazil. Maracatu Nação, or Maracatu Nation, is the focus of our study.

Maracatu is a traditional *folgado*. “Folgado” in Brazil is a term used to describe a popular cultural manifestation. A *folgado* can be a traditional piece of theater, as in a passion play, a festive or carnivalesque activity like samba or forró (encompassing the dance, the music and the party), or a game, like capoeira. In his book Folguedos Tradicionais, Edison Carneiro (1974) lists traditional catholic festivals, traditional dances, processions and parades, cultural games, and popular theatrical acts as *folguedos*. Whether the origin of these folguedos is indigenous, Portuguese, African, or a mixture, they are all described using this word.

While very difficult to pinpoint the exact origins of maracatu nação, most

scholars, folklorists, and participants of the Maracatu seem to agree that the ritual is the descendent of an institution called the "Act of the Congos" (Guerra-Peixe 1980, Katarina Real 1967, Dantas 1988/2001). The Act of the Congos was a theatrical/ritual enactment of the crowning of African Kings in the colonial period. The ceremony included theater, dance, and music for the coronation of the Reis de Congo, or the Kings of Congo (Dantas 1988:34). The Reis do Congo was instituted by the Portuguese colonial administration as a bureaucratic means of better controlling the territories' black subjects, whether slaves or freemen. Under the auspices of the order of Nossa Senhora do Rosario (Our lady of the Rosary), an African King would be either elected or appointed, depending on the historical context and circumstance, to represent their "African nation." The "royalty" had an administrative role in their respective districts, what Guerra Peixe describes as "hierarchical administrative" (1980:20). Little mention is made of what the role of the court was, only that there were a number of positions included like governor, colonel, and ambassador. While the institution is known as the Kings of Congos, documents list kings of and queens of Angola, Creoles, and Congos (1980:18, Dantas 1988:23). The King would act as an intermediary with the colonial administration and the slaves. Every parochial district in Recife had a King and Queen representing African nations. The King would call for different groups to take part in the festivities, and travelers describe "classic *batuques* by different African tribes" (Guerra Peixe 1980:17). With the abolition of slavery the institution was discontinued. However the "Act" remained as a *folgado* among the African and Creole communities¹. The ceremony became more of a procession. There was a "natural shift" in authority from these Kings and Queens to religious leaders and prominent figures in the African communities (Real 1967:71). These leaders maintained the procession as a devotional *folgado* in order to *sair* or 'go out' at carnival (Dantas 2001). This is the setting from which the maracatu nations come about.

There is a tremendous amount of speculation about the origins of the word

¹ This institution remained as a *folgado* among many African communities throughout Brazil. In Minas Gerais and parts of São Paulo it exists today as Congada. A ritual among African descendants very similar to maracatu, but directly linked to Catholic Festivals. There is a King and Queen and a procession of drummers.

maracatu. Some authors mention that it is Tupi-Guarani in origin, like the word "maracá," and others say it is African in origin. Dantas (1988:32) indicates that the word was first used in the 19th century press in Recife to refer to the gathering of slaves for a party in the street where they would sing and dance to the sound of drums. The maracatu was where the Africans would play their drums. The press gave these processions the name maracatu (Dantas 2001).

Essentially the maracatu is a procession of an "African Nation" in imitation of a Royal Portuguese Court. The drummers in the maracatu, collectively called a 'baque', play the rhythm 'baque virado' and accompany the maracatu procession. Carried in the procession are the calungas or sacred dolls that represent the ancestors. Traditional maracatus are called "nations" because they represent the African nations brought to Recife during the period of slavery; ethnic groups of the slave populations. While today there are many maracatu performance groups throughout Brazil and the western world, they are not considered "nations." A traditional Maracatu Nação is somewhere in between a *folgado*, and an affirmation of identity and faith.

Maracatu is a world unto itself with countless stories, myths, prominent figures, and enduring conflicts among the groups. According to tradition and the Act of the Congos, the church Nossa Senhora do Rosario in Santo Antonio crowned the Black Kings and Queens. Many of the *toadas* or songs refer to the 'crowning' of the Queen and the mass of the church of the Rosario.

Maracatus are based in different neighbourhoods, mostly in the poorer suburbs of the city, and have names like Estrela Brilhante (Shinning Star), Leão Coroado (Crowned Lion), Elefante (Elephant), Porto Rico (Rich Port), and Sol Nascente (Rising Sun). Elefante was for the longest time the most renowned Maracatu, immortalized in Guerra Peixe's (1980) study of the group in the early fifties. This text is still relevant today as there are few publications that deal with this cultural phenomenon and I have used it and a subsequent study by Katarina Real (1967) extensively. I myself spent three seasons as a drummer in Maracatu Estrela Brilhante in 2002, 2003, and 2005. I have drawn extensively from my experience with this particular maracatu and the time I spent in Recife.

The maracatu procession is composed of three fundamental aspects:

- The Queen and King and the royal court
- The presence of a calunga doll made of black wood
- A percussive orchestra, called a 'baque' who play the 'baque virado'

The court

The basic make up of a royal court would be the King and Queen, the Standard Bearer, the "Damas de Paço" or Ladies of the Palace who carry the calungas, a slave who carries the Royal Parasol, male characters of importance such as a Minister or Ambassador, their Ladies, the Baianas and the Caboclos. Guerra Peixe (1980) describes the elaborate court of Maracatu Elefante in its heyday in the 1928 (1980:35), where he notes over 60 characters. In 2003, Estrela Brilhante was by far the biggest maracatu with over 120 people in the court. Materials for the costumes gathered may include fine fabrics and lots of sequins but many items are recycled materials like the tabs and bottoms of beer cans, and broken compact disks used to make tiny mirrors. The more resourceful and wealthy the maracatu, the more elaborate its court is.

In most maracatu nações in Recife today, it is the Queen who is the leader and head of the nation. She is usually a prominent figure in Candomblé, and if not a *Yalorixá*, (high priestess), usually a senior initiate in the religion, usually the of the Nagô line. It is essential that she be of full African descent (Real 1967). Beyond simply being a matriarchal figurehead, she is the real leader of the whole group and is a "mother" to the nação. During the *desfile*, the official procession, she dresses in royal attire with a crown and a long cape, and carries in her left hand a scepter and in her right hand a sword.

Dona Santa, the Queen of Elefante during Guerra-Peixe's study, took over full leadership of the nation after her husband, the King, died in 1928. She held the mantle until her death in 1962. She was only officially crowned in 1942. Before becoming Queen of Elefante, and while still quite young she served as Queen of Leão Coroadado, but when her husband went on to become King of Elefante, she followed (1980:35). Dona Santa is a very powerful figure in the modern folklore of maracatu nação. She led Elefante in its glory days and was immortalized in Guerra Peixe's book and Katarina

Real's study. Upon her death there were no rules set out for succession and so the entire maracatu, drums, costumes, calungas, and totems were retired to a museum. Today, the expression used to indicate a break in the lineage of a Maracatu Nação, even when referring to before Dona Santa's time, is "went to the museum."

The Queen of Estrela Brilhante, Dona Marivalda, is a strong and proud leader. Before becoming Queen and taking on the charge that is Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante she was a baiana in, and sometimes acted as Queen of, Leão Coroado. She also was a big fan of samba and reportedly used to participate in the bloco Gigantes do Samba. According to one informant, Marivalda decided to take on Estrela Brilhante after its president decided to retire. When Marivalda left Leão Coroado much of the court and many drummers followed her. She became Queen and moved the group from the neighbourhood Casa Amarela to Alto José do Pino. Marivalda was only crowned in 2003, by Dona Elba of Porto Rico, Estrela Brilhante biggest rival at carnival.

Being Queen is no easy task. A tremendous amount of organization goes into a maracatu. Beyond her home being the headquarters of the nation, the Queen has to organize the entire court and make all executive decisions with relation to the group. She will decide on the characters that will take part in the procession, and in what order. She has the final say on the costumes, on the clothes for the drummers and the decisions as to what shows the nação will play at Carnival time. All executive power rests with her, even among the drummers who normally take their directions from the master of the music, the old mestre Walter. During an occasion when several members of the baque were to give drum workshops in the south of Brazil, Marivalda overruled Walter on his choices of who went and who stayed. I have seen Dona Marivalda accept responsibility for a huge number of children in the baque and more than once I saw her exert authority among the kids when they were becoming a 'nuisance' during rehearsals. She is a great figure of authority for all who are involved with the maracatu either directly or indirectly.

When the Queen cannot make an appearance, usually because she is very busy sewing and organizing in the precious weeks before carnival, one of her two daughters usually takes her place in the procession. While the King and Queen are a royal couple in the procession, they do not have to have any obligation together beyond the maracatu.

There is very little mention of the King in the available literature. It would seem

that in the past he played a much more prominent role in the maracatus. Guerra Peixe, Perreira da Costa and the liner notes on Porto Rico's CD all mention great kings of the past. In 1967 Porto Rico was re-established, after many years of being in the museum, by King Eudes Chagas. Guerra Peixe mentions that Elefante's greatest years were when the late King João Vittorino was at the helm. However, it seems that by and large in the maracatus of today the King is a largely symbolic figure who accompanies the Queen and is not very involved in the administration of the nation. He's costumed in regal clothes, with a crown and a sword in his hand. He is also usually involved in candomblé. While the Queen must be a black African, the King can be of a paler complexion and "generally is" (Real 1967:75).

In Estrela Brilhante, when the year's chosen King is not available for a parade I have seen a few different people act as 'stand-ins', including the Queen's husband and other male acquaintances. When I first went to Estrela Brilhante in 2002, the King was a kind gentle man named Jorge, who had introduced himself as a *Pai de Santo* (a priest in candomblé). The following year he was no longer King. Internal politics seemed to be the reason for the change (the Queen's son told me that Jorge was a fraud!). The new King, also named Jorge, was a more prominent *Pai de Santo* and the spiritual guide to Dona Marivalda. He performed the ceremonies of the ritual blessing of the calungas and the instruments before the official procession.

The Damas de Paço walk in the front of the court, carrying the calungas. They have dresses specifically for them, predominantly white but with some colour on the trim. They carry the dolls in one hand up at shoulder level. Their function is to take care of the calungas and present them in a noble fashion to onlookers. They are normally *filhas de santo*, initiates in candomblé.

The Standard-Bearer has a very crucial role. He presents the whole of the maracatu to onlookers. The beauty of the standard is as important as the court's costumes and the quality of the *bateria* (drummers). During the procession he half dances half walks up and down through the parade. Every carnival group has a standard, and all the maracatus compare their standards to see whose is the most beautiful.

The other characters are mostly characters from a Royal European court and their Ladies. There is the Ambassador, his Lady, the Minister and his Lady, the Duke and

Duchess, the Count and Countess, the Treasurer, various Princes, mostly children but some in their teens, Princesses, also mostly children but also young women into their twenties. These characters have the most elaborate dress. The Ladies' and Princesses' large round dresses have a light steel frame on the hem to keep their shape.

Also in elaborate dresses are the Baianas. Baianas are a popular figure in Brazilian folklore. They are women of African descent, traditionally dressed in white flowing dresses. "Baiana" is a lady from Bahia, where the greatest concentration of African peoples in Brazil is from. However the Baiana character is the imitation of this image. While traditionally the Baianas in the procession were dressed more simply with cotton dresses and simple turbans and earrings, today their costumes are much more elaborate (Araujo 1989). Their dresses are heavy, often sequenced. They wear big earrings and use ornate turbans. In Estrela Brilhante many of the Baianas are gay men strong enough to carry the heavy dresses and dance well.

The Caboclo is another folkloric figure. Caboclo is a term often used to indicate the mixture of an indigenous person with an African. Caboclos dress as romanticized Native Indians with a skirt of long green feathers and a huge elaborate headpiece also made with colourful feathers. They carry a life size "toy" bow and arrow in their hands and pretend to shoot randomly as they dance around in the procession and 'playing' with onlookers.

There are also the slaves. The slaves are dressed in grass skirts or simple cotton cloth, bead necklaces and turbans. The most important one is the slave that carries the Royal Parasol. As the Royals pass, the slave rotates the parasol creating a beautiful visual effect. On either side of the parasol there is also a slave holding a long fan of peacock feathers. Recently, some Maracatu Nações have been adding characters that were not seen before. This year Estrela Brilhante and Porto Rico had different Orixás. The Orixás are dressed as the orixás in candomblé, each one in their elaborate dress, face covered in a veil of beads, and using their respective colours. Guerra Peixe and Katerina Real make no mention of these characters in their studies.

Beyond these characters there are many others. Many male teens and boys in their first year become soldiers or *lanceiros*. They imitate the Roman soldier with helmets of painted cardboard and simply sewn costumes. New girls who join the court usually go

out as *Catirinas*. They are the maidens and servants of the court dressed in yellow and orange cotton dresses, with no frame around the hem, and form two lines on either side of the procession, dancing as the maracatu moves forward. The catirinas have replaced the baianas of old who have become more and more elaborate with their dresses.

Participants in the maracatu can switch roles and functions from year to year. For example one informant mentioned to me that his first year he was not allowed to play the alfaia (bass drum) because, even though he had been at the rehearsals, he was too new and not experienced enough. Instead he became a *lanceiro*. The following year he was a drummer. Some dancers start as a *catirinas*, and then move on to become a princess, or another lady of the court.

Totems also play a part in the procession. Ahead of the baque as they enter on the *avenida* is the totem, usually a visual representation of the name of the maracatu. Leão Coroado has a lion, Elefante an elephant, Porto Rico a sea-ship and Estrela Brilhante a big shining star made out of compact disks. The totem is carried on a cart and pushed in the procession. In 2003 on the *avenida*, two Germans, who had come from Europe to play drums, were chosen to push the cart for Estrela Brilhante, much to their disappointment.

The Calungas

The most revered part of the maracatu is the calungas. They are the objects of spiritual attention in the procession. A calunga is a fetish doll made of black hard wood and represents the ancestors. They also represent the orixás. They protect the nation and have power over its fortunes.

In his book, Enxada e a Lança, A Africa antes dos Portugueses, Alberto da Costa Silva writes about the *Ambundo* tribe in Angola and the cult of the Calungas. He describes them as sacred statues guarded the heads of certain lineages. Every Calunga was linked to a certain body of water, a lake, river or stream (Dantas 2000). This devotion to the Calunga crossed the Atlantic and survived among the Angolan peoples in Brasil. This reverence was a part of the “Act of the Congos” and today survives in the Maracatus (2000:49) Luiz de França bluntly puts it to Dantas “the calungas are from the African cults” and states that the dolls hold the *axés* of the former members of the nation

(1988:44).

The first and last toadas are sung in honour of the Calunga and in the *sede* the Queen takes her from her sacred spot on the mantel, the *peji*, and passes her amongst the baianas and damas de paço, each one dancing a moment with her before passing her on (1988:44). Guerra-Peixe also describes the ritual where the doll is taken out at the sede, by the Dama de Paço, given to the Rainha, who then passes her on to a Baiana, and so on until she returns to her place on the alter (1980:42). He notes that the ritual is for the appeasement of Nossa Senhora do Rosario, São Benedito and the Orixà protectors. Before certain auspicious days, such as the day of Our Lady of the Rosary in late October and the *desfile* of carnival, the calungas will go on a retreat to the *terreiro*, place of worship in candomblé, and complete a ritual cleansing. The Damas de Paço also have to fulfill certain religious obligations and take certain ritual baths in accordance to candomblé practice (Dantas 1988:44, Guerra Peixe 1980:42).

The calunga is dressed in royal attire and has a crown. Guerra Peixe's description of the calungas of Elefante has them in white dresses (1980:42). Photos of the calungas of Leão Coroado show them in simple dresses while at home in the sede, and in an elaborate ornate dress during the *desfile*. (Araujo 1989)

The calungas of Elefante are Dona Emilia, Dona Leopoldina, and Dom Luiz. Guerra Peixe notes that Dona Emilia is the most adored. When only one doll can be brought out on procession she is chosen. She is taken to the doors of the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosario and to the *terreiros* of Xangó (1980:38).

In Estrela Brilhante the calungas are Dona Joventina and Dona Erundina. The most often mentioned in the *toadas* is Dona Joventina. Carnival 2003, the evening of the *desfile*, before we loaded up on buses, the entire baque and their instruments were taken to a *terreiro* close to the seat of the nation. A brief ceremony took place. Three ilus (hand drums), a small steel bell and an abê (gourd shaker) were played. The dolls were brought out from a small alter-chamber. They were carried across the room by the Damas de Paço for all to see. Incense was taken around to everyone, there were *toadas* sung, and

sacramental water was thrown on all present as well as the drums². An informant mentioned that there are other ceremonies that were “not for everyone.” Another occasion during a performance in a smaller city near Recife, Walter positioned the baque directly in front of the calungas and left an open area in between for the court to pass through. At one point a princess paused in front of the baque enjoying her dance in front of the drums. Walter jumped around and violently pushed her out of the way, presumably for being selfish in front of the dolls. Besides highlighting Walter’s utter lack of manners, it shows how seriously some in the maracatu take the dolls. The old master Luiz de França, of Leão Coroado, a *babalorixá* (senior *pai de santo*) apparently used to sleep embracing the dolls (Dantas 1988:44).

Sede

The headquarters of a particular maracatu is usually in the home of the senior figure in the maracatu, the president. The president is the de facto ‘owner’ and the person who has taken on the task of running and administrating the nation. In most nations this is the Queen, like in Estrela Brilhante and Elefante, but for Leão Coroado the sede was in the home of the old master and president, Luiz de França.

In Estrela Brilhante, Marivalda's home functions as the "*sede*" or seat of the maracatu in the poor suburb of *Alto José do Pino*. "*Alto*" means high, and the neighbourhood is built up on an enormous hill. Most houses are made of brick and mortar with corrugated steel roofs and running water every other day of the week. The "*Alto*" as it is called, is crisscrossed with pathways between the streets and homes with open gutters on the sides. There is a main road that cuts across the alto as well as two other roads that go up the hill and offer motor vehicle access. The *sede* is down the street off the main road with a turn to your right and then a turn at your second left. You go down a cement staircase until you arrive at a white stucco wall with pieces of broken bottle cemented to the top in order to keep out intruders. Beyond the entrance is a small courtyard in front of the house. This is where everyone gathers before an event and where

² This was for many of the drummers the first time they were included in the event. My sense was that this inclusion of the whole baque in the ceremony came at the insistence of Mestre Walter who did not want to

rehearsals start. To the right is a flag pole with the flag of the nation hoisted up top against the backdrop of a blue sky on a clear day. Dona Marivalda lives in this house with her two daughters, her son and her husband. To the left of her house at the back, there is a large room, similar to a garage. Inside are two large tables with costume materials laid across them; sequence trim, bright fabrics, measuring tape etc. Immediately to the right you notice all the alfaia drums. They are stacked on their sides against the wall and reach right to the ceiling, their heads facing out, creating a wall of circles. Further into the room you have three sewing machine stations. Indeed in the months leading to carnival, you are unlikely to see this room without some work being done on the costumes or the totems. Hung up on the other walls are more elaborate costumes and their components: steel frames for the heavy dresses and sparkling crowns and swords.

The Baque and the Music

The music in maracatu is derived from the music of the *terreiros* and Xangô cults of Recife (Guerra Peixe 1980:106, Rocha 2000). It used to be that the Queen would lead the *toada*, or song, and the Baianas and Catirinas would respond to the chorus, as the *Mai de Santo* would sing and the *filhas de Santo* would respond in the *terreiro*. The drummers would traditionally be *ogãs*, or initiated drummers. While many people who play in the maracatu are *ogãs*, this tradition has disappeared from the maracatus today (Rocha 2000).

The master usually leads the nation in song. The master's role is to arrange the baque, make sure they are in shape and to direct the drummers when they are marching. The particular flow or feel of every baque is related to the style of the master. In Estrela Brilhante, the mestre, or master, is Walter de França. Walter grew up across the street from the *sede* of Leão Coroado and learnt from Luiz de França. Walter spent many years playing samba before assuming the mantle as a master in maracatu.

The songs share the themes of maracatu lore and the aesthetic and symbolic associations of the nations: the nations and their respective neighbourhoods, the Nagô nation, the Calunga dolls, the Lady of the Rosary, the Angolan city of Luanda, the orixás (either directly referenced or through their Christian saint counterparts), and the Court,

risk losing carnival this year because of a lack of blessing of the drummers and the instruments!

especially the Queen. Of the twenty-four songs documented by Guerra-Peixe in 1952, fifteen I recognized as still being sung today with a few differences (1980:119-141). Each nation uses their name and the name of their calunga in the traditional songs, sometimes changing some words in order to fit into the established melody. Almost all the *toadas* exult the virtues of the particular nation and praise the calunga, often referred to as the princess. Another old *toada*, “Nossa Rainha já se Coroô is in reverence to the Queen. The lead sings “Nagô, Nagô” and the chorus responds “A nossa rainha já se coroô” or “Our Queen has already been crowned!” Maracatu Nações also compose their own songs and in recent years this seems to be more common. On Estrela Brilhante’s cd, almost all the songs are compositions of mestre Walter. This way a nation can emphasize certain themes. Walter’s songs have a melodic flow influenced by other Afro-Brazilian musical styles like boi and samba. Similarly, the new *toadas* of Porto Rico use melodies and direct references from candomblé.

The music aspect of maracatu is called *baque*. The rhythms are called *baques*, and when referring to the drummers collectively, you refer to the *baque*. There are many *baques* (rhythms in maracatu) and the song or *toada* is what determines which *baque* will be played. While the differences are subtle for those who are unfamiliar, every nation and group has their own interpretations and distinct accent. Some groups like Estrela Brilhante, have introduced new *baques* of their own (Rocha 2000).

The instrumentation of the *baque* is adapted for a street procession. The instruments are:

- tarol, or snare drum, a high-pitched dry drum that sets the meter for the arrangements.
- gonguê, a cast iron steel bell that sets the “feel” for the rhythms, usually there is only one or two in a maracatu
- alfaia, barrel-shaped bass drum of which there are three types:
 - the marcante, or the “base,” the largest drum that plays the straight pattern with no variations
 - the meio, the middle alfaia that sometimes plays variations and fills the space left by the marcante

- the repique, the smallest and most trebly alfaia, plays variations and cuts across the rhythm and is responsible for “turning” the baque near the end of the songs.
- Ganzà, a cylindrical shaker, playing a straight pattern
- Abê, or shekere, A gourd with a net of beads surrounding it, an instrument from the *terreiros* and only recently incorporated in just two maracatus, Estrela Brilhante and Port Rico

Guerra-Peixe describes only alfaias, tarols and gonguês in his study, with only Estrela Brilhante using a ganzà (1980:64). He notes that Estrela Brilhante is the maracatu with the fastest pace baque, and hence the flow and feel of the ganzà made sense.

The introduction of the abê in Estrela Brilhante may be because there is an Afoxê, Ilê de Egba, based right down the main road from the seat of the maracatu. Many of the participants in Estrela Brilhante have also been part of the Afoxê³. During rehearsals many of the kids would simply play along, as they would using a ganzà, but instead with an abê (Rocha 2000). During an interview I conducted with Walter, he mentioned that he had introduced the abê as a means to add more swing to the rhythm⁴. Anyways, according to rumors circulating in Estrela Brilhante it would seem that many in the *Associação Carnavalesca*, carnival’s governing body in Recife, have taken the view that the instrument is not traditional to the *folgado*, and for this reason, apparently, the instrument was left out of the official parade in 2003 and 2004, but included in the following evenings for *Noite dos Tambores Silenciosos*, or the evening of the silent drums. In 2005 in the official parade, the abês were once again included.

The ensemble of three tones of alfaias is similar to the three hand-drums (*atabaques or ilus*) used in candomblé all over Brazil. Guerra Peixe describes hearing the “maracatu beat” played using *ilus* at the Xangô ceremonies in Recife (1980:106) The highest pitch one plays the most notes and maintains a constant feel, while the middle one

³ An Afoxê in Recife is a group that uses instruments of the *terreiro*, and has as a base the rhythm Ijexá. Afoxê is commonly defined as “street candomblé.” And while of “the same house” as maracatu, this folgado maintains its own aesthetic parameters.

⁴ Interesting to note that most of the attention he devoted to this section was his screaming for them to stop playing.

holds the main pattern and the bass drum plays longer phrases with fewer, yet well placed, notes.

The *marcante* or *mestre alfaia* is the most important because, besides being the loudest, it secures the rhythm and gives it the most “feel.” Guerra Peixe mentions that this is a “hereditary” post and that the players besides being adept percussionists also have to fulfill certain “obligations” within the *terreiros* (1980:60). The oldest members (those who are able to carry the heavy drum) usually play the *marcante*. While the *repiques* go off *repique-ing*, the *marcante* keeps them from speeding up the rhythm not allowing it to crash (ideally at least). The basic line in a maracatu is called *marcação* or *Luanda*. This pattern is especially important when one maracatu crosses paths with another. Each group has to hold down their baque as they pass each other; exchanging smiles and dirty looks. Walter, in command of the huge baque of Estrela, would love to keep his *marcação* very tight and solid, “*pisado*”, until another maracatu was at the closest possible point to Estrela. At which point he would unleash his *repiques* creating a polyrhythmic barrage that would drown out the other group, causing many to lose their place in the rhythm to their mestre’s embarrassment.

There is a traditional call on the tarol, answered by the alfaias and then the rhythm commences, slow to start and steadily picking up speed, like a train out of the station. Guerra Peixe notes that in Elefante in 1952 the snare drum starts, followed by the gonguê, and then by the *marcante*, the *meião* and the *repique*, in that order. Traditionally this was the scheme even when there were *toadas* being sung, but today in Estrela Brilhante, after a few verses, the master gives a signal and the whole baque enters together after the end of the chorus.

Estrela Rehearsal

The front courtyard of the *sede* is where the rehearsals for the baque take place. Starting in early August, the drummers for the maracatu meet every Sunday at the *sede* to rehearse. Attendance varies from week to week but as Carnival approaches after the New Year more and more drummers appear. Often there is hardly any room in the small courtyard and the last drummers in the rows are pushed around the corner, forcing them

to depend on whoever is ahead of them to pass on the master's signals. Estrela Brilhante is most probably the biggest maracatu nação in Recife, followed closely by Porto Rico. In the last ten years their ranks have been swelled by a new resurgence in interest by the city's middle class as well as among many artists in the rest of Brazil and even "gringos" from Europe and Canada. This in turn has spurred interest among many of the people who have always lived near the seat of maracatu but who never took part.

The rehearsals were always scheduled for 6 pm but many times they didn't start until about 8 pm. Usually people were waiting for the master to arrive, but moments before his appearance, an elder drummer would start up the music to get warmed up. When Walter would arrive the drums would stop while he gave a short speech about some aspect of the drumming or the nation, such as a recent performance, rumors he heard about himself or the poor attendance by some of the drummers. Then he would start the baque, instrumental only. This would usually go on for an hour. The sound is incredibly loud and the rhythm can be heard for several blocks. People in the neighbourhood and many visitors come by and stand in the surrounding houses and the staircases, to listen, watch and dance. There are several local houses that sell beer to anybody who wishes. After the long instrumental, with many changes in the patterns of the drums, Walter stops the baque. He then sings a *toada*.

The first *toada* sung is usually traditional, in honour of the calunga, and everyone knows the response. Mestre Walter may go on with another before signaling for people to start exiting through the gate. There may be up to 40-50 drummers, so the exit is awkward, with people maneuvering drums up and down and between each other while playing. Often in the initial exit on to the narrow cement staircase, the rhythm falls apart, to the dismay of Walter. When the group reaches the main road, Walter signals how many rows he wants. A formation is created. Usually a row of caixas is in front of the alfaias. The first alfaias are the big *marcantes* that hold down the basic pattern. Traditionally senior members of the baque play these. Behind them is a row of *repique* alfaias. They play variations and cut over the basic pattern. Behind them are the rest of the alfaias. Many simply play the basic line and others play both the basic part and the *repique* part. Interspersed among the alfaias may be several other caixas. The gonguê can be played at the back, or in the front, as is usually the case with Estrela Brilhante. In

Estrela, a boy, age around 13 with the nickname "Pelado" or "naked," plays the gonguê in the front near the caixas. The abês are usually in the front ahead of Walter, who has his back turned to them, facing the caixas and alfaias. Because during the rehearsals the abê players are usually novices, Walter gets extremely frustrated with them during the march and often yells at them to move on ahead so that he can concentrate on the rehearsal. Once, during a walk through the alto, he gathered the abês, and said: "When we start the baque we are going to turn left at the corner. As soon as we start you guys run up ahead around the corner." When Walter did start the baque he turned right at the corner in order to lose the abês, who had been duped by his instructions!

The next two hours are a grueling march through the adjoining neighbourhoods, up and down hills and staircases, with stops at different points to sing *toadas* and drink water before continuing on with the march. Revelers follow the drummers through the streets dancing, singing and just having a good time. As the 'monster' of the group approaches many mothers run out onto the streets to grab their children before they get trampled under the baque. The march goes on until returning to the *sede* or close-by where usually the new songs composed for the season are sung, before stopping for the evening.

The rehearsal was always an exhausting and often emotional event. Depending on Mestre Walter's mood it could be a joyous affair or a stressful experience. In the days before Carnival, after returning to the *sede* he had every one continue playing for another hour in the heavy summer rain until he was satisfied. He too, an old skinny man, stood in front of the drums, whistle in hand, his whites cotton clothes sopping wet and stuck to his body, the rain dripping off the sides of his straw hat.

The Procession

The maracatu will go out on procession at several different occasions throughout the year, mostly at carnival time and other important occasions, such as important religious dates like Christmas, the day of Nossa Senhora do Rosario, or the other days of the saints and their associated Orixás (Real 1967:81). It is rare however for the whole nation to go out and this really only happens twice in the year.

The two most important days for a maracatu are the Sunday and Monday of Carnival. The Sunday is the official parade, or *desfile*, in front of the *Federação Carnavalesca* and a general audience seated in a grand-stand. This is the body that judges the different groups in each category and proclaims the “champion” of carnival. Each genre makes up a grouping and there can be two categories per grouping, similar to the organization of sports leagues around the world (first and second league soccer and double and triple A hockey). For a maracatu nação this is the official *saida* at carnival and the culmination of the whole year’s work.

The parade takes place in the evening and the day before last minute touch ups are done on the costumes and the instruments. Then entire nation is packed on a bus or buses and taken to the center of the city on Nossa Senhora do Carmo avenue. The baque gets into formation and begins to play while the court readies itself. A peek into the nearby alleys shows people adjusting dresses and costumes. At the appointed time the maracatu enters the avenue.

The baque starts their marking beat and marches in. In the lead is the totem. When the baque reaches midway on the avenue, they turn and face right, towards the judges, and move back against the stands. The court now passes by as the baque plays. The Damas de Paço and the calungas are first, then the standard. The catirinas form two lines on the outside as dancing and singing the chorus. At the end are the King and Queen under the giant royal parasol. After the Royals pass, the baque returns to their original formation and brings up the rear, closing the procession until exiting the avenue.

The Monday of carnival is known as *Noite dos Tambores Silenciosos* (Night of the Silent Drums), and takes place on a narrow street in front of the church Nossa Senhora do Terço, called *Patio do Terço*. While the Sunday is an evening of anxiety and worry ahead of a nation’s appearance in front of the federation, the Monday is a more mystical affair and when all groups gather to play in front of the church for each other and the general public. At midnight there is a ceremony by a Babalorixá followed by moments of silence. In 2003 the ceremony was performed by Babalorixá Raminho de Oxossi (Prefeitura de Recife 2003).⁵

⁵ While several authors have mentioned the Patio do Terço as a location where maracatus used to gather, the origins of this occasion are unknown to us.

The whole neighbourhood surrounding the Patio de Terço is taken over by all the maracatus in the city. One by one they enter the street and parade up to the church, where they play for short while, and then parade down the street to exit. Usually when one is coming down the street another is going up, and it is not uncommon for there to be three or four nations on the narrow street at the same time all following their separate beat as they cross paths and literally squeeze by each other and the mass of spectators. Because this is the day after the official judgment there is a more relaxed air among the groups and a greater sense of revelry and less rigorous attention to form. In the case of Estrela Brilhante in 2003, this was the occasion for Mestre Walter to play his new arrangements for the baque, arrangements that were considered by the Queen to be either too “risky” or “non-traditional” for the Sunday procession.

The Nation

In her 1967 publication O Folclore no Carnaval de Recife, ethnographer Katarina Real, entitles her chapter dealing with the maracatus as “the African Nations” (1967:67). She approaches the subject of nation quite carefully, noting that it is at the same time the “purist form of folklore” in Recife’s carnival as well as “the most complex.” What are known nations in her study are groups with heritage from African organizations from the last century. She prefers to use the term “nation” as opposed to “maracatu” because of the widespread use of the word by rural maracatu groups.

So what exactly are these nations?

Real lists two sociological characteristics that are of “fundamental importance for the Maracatus-Nações” (1967:75):

- One, there is a preference for people who are black in complexion. If this cannot happen with all the figures, it is essential that the Queen be black African.
- Two, the nations have a “more or less direct connection with the Xangô terreiros of the city, especially of Nagô influence.” (1967:75)

These two aspects, invariably connected, are two defining features in the construction of the idea of ‘nation.’ Another feature would be the ‘sense of solidarity’ and ‘sense of community’ present among the participants.

Maracatu is an expression of African identity and the African experience in Brazil, hence the “preference” for people of African descent. A children’s book about the first *terreiro* in Recife states that maracatu was created as a means to “fool” the master while the slaves practiced their religion, affirming their identity (Pinheiro 1989). The nation invokes the history of slavery, the African peoples brought to Brazil, and the pride in their leaders and religion.

The maracatu is an African nation in Brazil, and the *toadas* make continuous reference to this. One song, “Toque o Gonguê” makes reference to a young slave who hears the maracatu passing and runs towards it proclaiming “I am also Nagô.” Countless *toadas* make reference to the “journey to Luanda,” a reference to the port city of Luanda in Angola but symbolically representing African homeland in Afro-Brazilian lore. A metaphor used by various authors, including Roger Bastide in 1945 and more recently the *toadas* of Nação Porto Rico, is of the maracatu as a ship; a royal vessel that will carry the nation back to Africa (Bastide 1945:112, Porto Rico CD 2003).

“Xangô cults” is used in the older literature to refer to candomblé in Recife where reverence for the orixá Xangô is very strong. When Dona Marivalda took over the mantle of Nação Estrela Brilhante in 1993, she underwent three months of purification rituals (www.entrecantos.com/mestrelabrilhante.htm). There is a “core” of insider participants of the nation who fulfill the religious obligations of the group.

As the maracatu nations are mostly based in poorer suburbs of Recife where the residents are of mixed heritage, and the composition of the maracatu reflects this mix. However, whether the participants be black, white or mixed, the maracatu nação remains an ‘authentic’ link to Africa and African heritage, both historical, the “Act of the Congos,” and religious, through candomblé.⁶ This is what is meant by “nation.”

⁶ When asked why he and Estrela Brilhante had opened the door for so many “whites” to participate, Mestre Walter replied, “Our country has a lot of history, and our maracatu has to account for all those who make up this history, they are white but they are whites who love [the maracatu].”⁶

The nations however, are not exclusive or separate from the Brazilian ‘nation.’ The *nação* is not a closed entity inside the greater state of Brazil. For the participants of the nation there are many different levels of associations made; the specific maracatu *nação*, the city of Recife, the carnival of Recife, and the country of Brazil. An equal amount of pride is expressed with whichever association one makes. The *toada* “A Bandeira é Brasileira” or “The Flag is Brazilian” goes:

A bandeira é brasileira	The flag is Brazilian
Nossos reis veio de Luanda	Our kings come from Luanda
Oi, viva Dona Emilia	Hey, long live Dona Emilia
Princesa pernambucana	Pernambucan Princess

(As noted in Guerra-Peixe 1980:136)

This is a very old *toada*, documented by Guerra-Peixe in 1952 with Elefante. It is also used in Leão Coroado and Estrela Brilhante, with each group substituting the name of their *calunga* in place of Dona Emilia. This song specifically seems to be clear; the kings or forefathers are from Africa, the princess (the *calunga* in this case) is in Pernambuco, the home of maracatu, and the whole is wrapped in the flag and story that is Brazil.

These are also voluntary nations, and while based in a community, anyone can participate. One need not be born into the heritage, although many are, in order to participate. Simply being there, interacting and participating makes you part of the nation. ‘Sense of community’ is paramount in the nation.

As a community activity the maracatu involves a large number of people in various age groups. Old ladies sew costumes alongside young ladies, often their daughters. Their husbands and boyfriends are often involved, either as a male character in the court or a drummer. Many families design and make their costumes at home, fine tuning their creations as carnival approaches. The children often are involved as different characters in the parade, whether princes or princesses, vassals or soldiers. They grow up frequenting the rehearsals, joining the maracatu as young members of the court, or as novice drummers. Most often drummers are male teens but there are many older men and some children as well. Many women have begun to play in the *baques* in the last ten years and in some nations like Estrela Brilhante and Porto Rico, women drummers form a

significant number of the participants. Today at least, the nations seem to include people from many different neighbourhoods in the city and all walks of life.

Performance

I have used Edward Schieffelin's (1998) article "Problematizing Performance" as a guide for a theoretical look at the maracatu *folgado*. Current debates in the study of performance seem to look at ritual not as systems of representations as much as processes of practice and performance. Performance is loosely defined as "actions more than text" and "habits of the body more than symbols" (1998:195).

The nation is involved in the social construction of their reality rather than a representation of it. The nation is creating its space within the context of maracatu and Recife's carnival. This "creation of presence" is hard to characterize theoretically.

As a symbolic and aesthetic activity, the *desfile* of the maracatu is an intentionally produced enactment. The royal court and the baque parade in the center of the city showing off their "stuff." This is a performance set apart from the daily lives of the participants. It is a display of the competence and virtuosity of the nação within the aesthetic parameters of the *folgado*. They display their costumes, their songs and their heritage to the audience, the city of Recife. This "intentionally produced" enactment or thought out piece was evident in carnival 2003 when Estrela Brilhante purposely left out the abês from the *desfile* because it was not seen as 'traditional' to the maracatu yet at every rehearsal there were abês present!

Perhaps a better way to understand the *folgado* is to look at the performativity of the ritual; the action of the performance. This is the expressive process through which the participants articulate purpose for themselves within the greater idea (or aesthetic parameters) of the nation. The 'sense of elation,' the 'liberty of spirit,' and the 'sense of solidarity' that one feels as a participant in the maracatu is a consequence of the extra energy put into the act. Every performance has something practical at stake; the drums could make mistakes, the court may dance horribly, the costumes may be lackluster or dirty, yet the performance is always an achievement and a mission accomplished. One

could explain it as “it’s the game that counts.” The maracatu affirms its identity and purpose every time they go out.

Every time a traditional *toada* is sung, all of the baggage that that particular *toada* carries is affirmed. In “Vou Para Luanda,” the idea of a regal return to Africa and a eulogy of this heritage are created and recreated when this song is sung. In the same way, the new songs of the season are important not when they are written but when they are used by the *nação*. Porto Rico’s *toadas* seem to emphasize the connection of *candomblé* to maracatu and their execution fundamentally involves the creation of their identity on the Recife carnival scene and amongst maracatus.

A particular style is given life by the participants not through discourse, but through “subtle and expressive maneuvers” and an atmosphere of mutual understanding (1998:198). This leaves room for structured improvisations within the greater ‘style’ and gives rise to a particular style, whether it be of the particular maracatu or the individual drummer or character in the court.

The phrases of the *repique* *alfaias* for example are constantly changing, yet they maintain a certain ‘feel.’ The individual drummer may use certain musical cells that he has an affinity to, and these cells become part of his style. The distinct accent of each group’s *marcação* beat establishes every maracatu. Estrela’s is fast has a swing likened to samba.

The different maracatus are more than ever involved in the creation of their specific maracatu identities and the social construction of reality. This includes debates and theories of tradition and modernity and is an open avenue for further study not in the scope of this paper.

As ritual, as performance, maracatu *nação*, or maracatu de baque virado, is a *folgado*, a traditional cultural manifestation, a game to be played with your community, your *nação*, or nation. It is a way to bring your nation to the street, eulogize your heritage and have a good time while affirming your faith. The maracatu is a cadenced royal vessel set to take the whole nation to Luanda.

Last Thoughts

It is interesting to note that Katarina Real predicted in her book that “the day of the last ‘*saida*’ of maracatu was approaching” (1967:81). She gave two reasons for the imminent demise of the tradition: 1- the lack of pride in a *folgado* seen primarily as a black African ritual and 2- the demise of the Afro-Brazilian matriarchy. It is amazing at how wrong she was. Today the Maracatu Nations are stronger than ever, and there is a tremendous amount of pride among Afro-Pernambucans with regard to their heritage.⁷ Never have there been so many ‘Afro’ manifestations in Recife. I would say, that while the ritual may have experienced a decline in the late seventies and early eighties, the Afro-Brazilian matriarchy did not, and today more than ever, the Queens of Maracatu Nações are respected as leaders of the people in the impoverished suburbs of Recife where most maracatus are based, as well as inheritors of the candomblé religious tradition.

Maracatu Nação is the living heritage of the African nations brought to Brazil and the vessel which allows cultural traditions and consciousness to flourish among the traditionally marginalized communities. A world in itself, it is easy for participants to become lost within the *folgado* and live completely within its own realities and diversions.

⁷ This is largely thanks to the popularity of pop phenomenon Chico Science and other prominent musicians in Recife’s music scene, who use the influence of maracatu music in their work.

The Calungas of some Maracatu Nações

Maracatu de Nação Elefante (founded 1800)

- Dona Emilia
- Dona Leopoldina
- Dom Luiz

Maracatu Nação Leão Coroado (founded 1863)

- Dona Clara
- Dona Isabel

Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante (founded 1910)

- Dona Joventina
- Dona Erundina

Maracatu Nação Porto Rico (founded 1916)

- Dona Bela

Note:

The dates of founding are a constant source of debate among scholars and participants. I have chosen the dates as seen on the Standards of the respective nations in 2002.

Selected Toadas

Toque o gonguê

Toque o gonguê, balance o ganzá, é no baque virado que o estrela vai passar
Toque o gonguê, balance o ganzá, é no baque virado que o estrela vai passar (coro)

Cante sinhá, toque senhor, também sou afro-africano e também nação Nagô
Cante sinhá, toque senhor, também sou afro-africano e também nação Nagô (coro)

Nagô Nagô (Domínio publico)

Nagô, Nagô,
A nossa rainha já se coroou (coro)
Nagô, Nagô,
A nossa rainha já se coroou (coro)
Nagô Nagô Nagô
A nossa rainha já se coroou (coro)

Vou para Luanda

Princesa Joventina onde vai ? Vou passear
Eu vou para Luanda vou quebrar saramuná (coro) Bis

Eu vou eu vou, eu vou para Machado
Eu vou para Luanda, vou quebrar saramuná (coro)

Casa Diamante

Nessa casa diamante aonde o Estrela chegou
Nessa casa diamante aonde o Estrela chegou (coro)

Palavra de rei, medalha pro governador
Palavra de rei, medalha pro governador (coro)

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