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## "Abayomi, we are the revolution": Women's Rights and Samba at Rio de Janeiro

By Paula Dürks Cassol<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The advent of the feminist movement in the twentieth century made it possible for socially organized women to begin seeking for the recognition of their rights and the change of gender roles which were socially built. Women's rights started to be recognized as a human right. However, criteria of race and class have always been relevant, and have provided privileged positions for white women in the pursuit and attainment of rights, while black women continue to be stigmatized, remaining in the base of the social pyramid. In this regard, this paper questions: What is the relation between feminism and the cultural manifestation of samba in Rio de Janeiro in the conquering of women's emancipation these days? This study investigates the relationship between feminism and samba from the Discourse Analysis of the samba lyrics "Abayomi", composed by the women from the ÉPreta project, released in their album in 2017. It seeks to identify the knowledge about human rights produced from the emancipatory cultural processes led by black women samba singers, who use the samba sung and composed by them as a tool for emancipation in human rights and for democracy today. Monica Graciela Zoppi-Fontana's work was used as a theoretical reference. In her studies, the author analyzes the discourse from the categories of the French matrix Discourse Analysis, but she adds the categories of gender and race, especially when discussing the place from where these women speak and how these bodies' markers, gender and race, provide a determining context in their discourses.

*Keywords:* Feminism, Women's rights, Race, Culture, Samba, Discourse analysis, Rio de Janeiro

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## Initial Considerations

Feminism has changed the context of women's participation in society. Even so, feminism did not bring the same rights for all women at the same time. Black women, or colored women, stayed for much longer in subjugated roles, being oppressed even by white women. Nevertheless, black women have resisted and in Rio de Janeiro they have been using a cultural manifestation to fight for women's rights.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the relation between samba songs written and sung by black women in Rio de Janeiro today and their feminism as a fight for human rights. Using the French matrix of Discourse Analysis, and the categories of race and gender added by Zoppi-Fontana, the objective of this paper is to examine the lyrics of the song "Abayomi (it is black)" from the samba circle ÉPreta in order to answer the question: What is the relation between feminism and the cultural manifestation of samba in Rio de Janeiro in the conquer of women emancipation these days?

## Law and Social Control: Gender and Race

For decades, law has been used as a tool to restrain women's participation in public life, because it was necessary to keep them strictly connected to their homes, nurturing their children, taking care of their husbands and houses. The social control imposed on women, through the construction of *gender* roles – both masculine and feminine – and the division of power have always put women in an inferior position. The gender construction has been elaborated and perpetuated, intrinsically to the patriarchal and androcentric society. Therefore, the most significant behaviors in the constitution of *gender* roles were selected from the understanding that women must be controlled in their houses to keep producing workforce. Therefore, the most significant behaviors for the constitution of *gender* roles are selected following this understanding, and from this comes the understanding of the processes of selection of the most significant behaviors in the constitution of *gender* roles.

Women are expected to have a behavioral social pattern, based on idealized stereotypes of women in a patriarchal society, that is, mother, wife, caregiver. The manifesting of this behavioral pattern is restricted to the domestic environment and has been perpetuated as hegemonic (Mirales 2015, 196).

In order to keep women within these limits, there is an informal and also a formal developed social control. Social control refers to the ways in which society responds to behavior and people, both considered as deviant, problematic, threatening or undesirable. This response or reaction is a form of selecting, classifying, stigmatizing society's own deviation and criminality (Andrade 2012, 133). Formal social control is the one exercised by institutions such as the Judiciary, the Police, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, integrating to it, the processes of primary, secondary, and tertiary criminalization; informal social control is given by diffuse means such as the family, the church, and the school. However, regarding women, informal control is much more present and active, that is "the control system directed exclusively to women (in their gender role) is the informal one, that one which takes place in the family. This same system is exercised through patriarchal domination in the private sphere and sees its last guarantee in physical violence against women" (Baratta 1999, 46)<sup>2</sup>.

In this train of thought, the informal control inflicted on women materializes in the family, the first control that women receive, as well as in school, religion and morals (Andrade 2012, 145; Mirales 2015, 196). This control is most clearly perceived in childhood when girls are given pink toys linked to the housing and maternity, when sentences like "this is not a girl's thing", or "do something like a girl" are said. This informal control is perpetuated throughout a woman's life, in the work environment and in the job market itself, in marriage and affective relationships, in magazines dedicated to the female public. There is an invisible force – the patriarchy – that regulates the

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<sup>2</sup> Author translation. In the original manuscript: "O sistema de controle dirigido exclusivamente à mulher (no seu papel de gênero) é o informal, aquele que se realiza na família. Esse mesmo sistema vem exercitado através do domínio patriarcal na esfera privada e vê a sua última garantia na violência física contra as mulheres".

feminine place in the domestic environment, in the roles of caregiver, and deviations from this pattern are often wicked and punished.

Gender symbolism is rooted in the structures of society and its institutions, and it presents the polarity of cultural and historical values as if they were natural and biological differences. Modern hegemonic thinking, said to be neutral, is actually masculine. The binarity of this way of rationalizing actually opposes men's and women's behaviors, and selects the most significant one, the male one. This ends up creating female stereotypes of submission and subordination.

Thus, social control acts as a patriarchal cultural regulating process of women's restraint, presenting itself as if it were the only possible model, impeding the coexistence of differences and blocking other possibilities of reaction to reality. Therefore, conservative religious, political and moral discourses are nothing more than the imposition of a patriarchal model that curtails the different ways of being and existing in the world. They prevent multiple worldviews from being experienced, limiting the cultural reactions we have with ourselves, with others and with the world before a capitalist, European, white, cisgender, straight, traditional Jewish-Christian<sup>3</sup>, and non-disabled model.

Subsidiarity to this informal control, there is the formal control, carried out by the structures of the penal system, which acts both in an integrative way to the informal control of work, reinforcing the class capitalist control, as well as in a residual way, since it is directed primarily to men, constituting a male mechanism of control for the repression of male conducts, generally, practiced by men, and only secondarily by women (Andrade, 2012). That is, female conduct has no relevance to the criminal justice system, being criminalized only residually.

This is because informal social control has been working with enormous efficiency, making female crime clearly in lower numbers. In other words, "when the deviation is not absorbed by the other types of social control, prison will be the final limit for the woman's residue,"<sup>4</sup> functioning for the purposes of discipline, punishment, restraint and exclusion (Miraes 2015, 195).

However, the women described so far as to whom the law and social control acts is a nonexistent unified identity (Butler, 2000). In this regard, unlike white, middle/upper class, able bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered women – about whom the role of gender and social control has acted in the way described so far – black women do not belong to the domestic environment in the same way, and the State has always acted on their bodies, because for them, the stigma of race is as strong as the stigma of gender (Gonzalez 1984; Theodoro 1996).

Black women are denied humanity and the possibility of a dignified existence not only because of the sexual division of labor and gender roles, but also because they are racialized as inferior beings within the colonizing logic. For this reason, they are not only allowed to do domestic work, but also underpaid and, until recently, unrecognized work<sup>5</sup> as a white woman's domestic helper, maintaining clear similarities with their role during slavery.

Historically, the enslaved black women went through situations to which men were not subjected, since, as a woman, this other mechanism of domination, sexism, also affected her. They were sexually abused, and "rape was a weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose hidden objective was to annihilate the desire of the slaves to resist, and in the process, demoralize their companions" (Davis 1981, 25-26). Helena Theodoro corroborates, pointing out that:

The use of black women as sexual objects also cannot be understood as a result of the condition of slavery, since this fact would also imply the use of slaves as targets for the sexual advances of their masters. This fact will occur with the

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<sup>3</sup> Contemporary Reform and other forms of Judaism have developed gender inclusivity, non-binary and feminist dimensions. Moreover, Jews have always been multiracial. Christianity too is not exclusively "white" and has its roots in the Middle East; hence all of the items in the above list must also be taken within their specific contexts.

<sup>4</sup> Author translation. At the original: "quando o desvio não for absorvido pelos outros tipos de controle social, caberá a prisão, como limite final para o resíduo da mulher".

<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, for example, domestic workers had their worker's rights acknowledged by law only in 2015.

slave as a result of the patriarchal society that legitimizes the domination of the man over the woman, and the sexuality of the slave will be seen by the master as outside the family circle, without limits, moral or religious norms, since the black woman is a *thing*, a *sexual object*. To justify such acts, they created a cult to the sensuality of the mulatto, taking away the responsibility of patriarchal society for the sexual abuse of the slave and placing such fact in physical attributes that make the desire of the white lord uncontrollable (Theodoro 1996 35, emphasis in the original)<sup>6</sup>.

Helena Theodoro refers to the slave society, but the behaviors to which she makes reference to are perpetuated to this day. For this reason, during carnival, e.g., the exposure of the black woman's body is "permitted" and exalted, because not only is her body not considered as her own, but it is also seen as a thing, a sexual object. There is, however, a distinction, according to the ideal of *mestizaje*<sup>7</sup>, between the black woman and the mulatto woman:

A popular Brazilian saying summarizes this situation by stating: 'white to marry, mulatto to fornicate, black to work'. The roles attributed to the Amefricans<sup>8</sup> (black and mulatto) should be taken into account; when their humanity is abolished, they are seen as animalized bodies: on the one hand, they are the "donkeys of burden" (of which the Brazilian mulattoes are a model). In this way, one can see how the socioeconomic is allied to the sexual overexploitation of Amefrican women (Gonzalez 1988, 19)<sup>9</sup>.

Reflecting about the role of black women in the sexual division of labor in Brazil since slavery explains, in parts, their subjugation that remains to this day: black women are the most underpaid, they are the biggest victims of femicide in the country, and the most incarcerated. It is clear, then, how the cultural regulatory processes that act on black women are different of those that act on white women, because they are rooted in the racism that structured colonialism. Therefore, thinking about emancipation is only possible from the antiracial, anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist struggle. On the contrary, the structures of exploitation will be maintained, and the current methodology of social action will not be modified.

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<sup>6</sup>Author translation. In the original: "A utilização da mulher negra como objeto sexual também não pode ser entendida como resultado da condição da escravidão, já que tal fato implicaria também o uso do escravo como alvo das investidas sexuais dos senhores. Tal fato irá ocorrer com a escrava como decorrência da sociedade patriarcal que legitima a dominação do homem sobre a mulher, sendo que a sexualidade da escrava vai ser vista pelo senhor como fora do círculo familiar, sem limites, normas morais ou religiosas, já que a mulher negra é *coisa*, um *objeto sexual*. Para justificar tais atos criam o culto à sensualidade da mulata, tirando a responsabilidade da sociedade patriarcal pelo abuso sexual da escrava e colocando tal fato em atributos físicos que tornam incontrollável o desejo do senhor branco".

<sup>7</sup>Mestizaje can be understood as the mixing of different races. In Brazil, it was implemented in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a public policy in order to make Brazilian population whiter, and it can be read as a mark of Brazilian racism. About this topic: Freyre, G. (1994). *Casa grande & senzala: formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. 34; Munanga, K. (2008). *Rediscutindo a mestiçagem no Brasil: identidade nacional versus identidade negra*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica; Nascimento, A. (1978). *Genocídio do Negro no Brasil: Um Processo de Racismo Mascarado*. São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra.

<sup>8</sup>The expression "Amefrican" was created by Lelia Gonzalez (1988), by the combination of the words Americans and Africans to describe more accurately Black Latin Americans with African legacies.

<sup>9</sup>Author translation. In the original: "Um dito popular brasileiro sintetiza essa situação ao afirmar: 'branca para casar, mulata para fornicar, negra para trabalhar'. Que se atenda aos papéis atribuídos as amefricanas (preta e mulata); abolida sua humanidade, elas são vistas como corpos animalizados: por um lado são os 'burros de carga' (do qual as mulatas brasileiras são um modelo). Desse modo, se constata como a socioeconômica se faz aliada a superexploração sexual das mulheres amefricanas".

## Women and Samba

Samba is most known as a Brazilian music style, famous in the carnival and sung at the samba school parades. More than that, samba can be understood in 35 different music styles, as samba enredo, samba-de-roda, samba de partido alto, samba de coco (Werneck 2007), and it is a cultural representation of diasporic culture that reunites music, parties, food, family and community. Women have always been present in the history of samba. As pastors, "aunts", carnival dancers, composers, performers and instrumentalists, they have always participated in the production processes that involve samba. However, the visibility of women in the processes of building samba, and what roles they play in these processes, depended and depend on the prevailing ideas in that context, the hegemonic social methodology. This means, for example, that the role of the "aunts" as cooks was of great importance, since within a diaspora context, from a black cultural perspective, women and food supported the community. However, that differs from the role of women cooks and caregivers in patriarchy, since they are considered submissive and subjugated to men, delimiting a clear sexual division of labor.

All cultures should be presented as a movement of antagonism, of dispute (Hall 2019). The cultures brought to America, specifically to Brazil, by black people in diaspora highlights for its permanence of orality and resistance, and "in all these manifestations, the outstanding presence is that of black women, who fight for their freedom and for the community" (Theodoro 1996, 40)<sup>10</sup>. In addition, "if we stop looking at certain aspects of the so-called Brazilian culture, we see that in its more or less conscious manifestations it conceals, revealing, the symbols of Africinity that constitute it" (Gonzalez 1984, 226)<sup>11</sup>. Samba, as a cultural process that characterizes Brazilian culture, is therefore also demarcated by the strong presence of Black women, being able, in this perspective, "(...) to point to the place of Black women in this process of cultural formation, as well as the different modes of rejection/integration of their role" (Gonzalez 1984, 226)<sup>12</sup>.

Black culture should be read here not as an ethnic uniqueness, but as all the different forms of resistance to the imposition of whiteness of which the samba is an example. From this perspective, women in samba have always had a role of power, wisdom and leadership in their communities, even if these roles were disputed also by men.

Even though there are many attempts to make Brazil a whiter country, with a whiter culture, black cultures are the mark of Brazilian culture. The attempts to hide the symbols of blackness in the Brazilian social composition have not been successful, since the Amefrican identity, as Gonzalez affirms, composes Brazil as a society. Black women, in this perspective, have always been part of the production processes that have involved Black cultures (Theodoro 1996, 100).

We realize that there is another understanding of the role of women in the sexual division of labor in black cultures, which starts from a place of power that is occupied by black women. They do occupy a role of care, for example, but this role is taken under other meanings that do not subjugate or inferiorize black women. What happens is that, within the different African traditions that came to Brazil, the patriarchal model still demonstrated a dispute between human beings equal in capacity and power. "That is, attempts to subjugate women were developed from patterns that recognized their power and capacity as subjects in the dispute" (Werneck 2007, 124-125)<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, black women played an essential role in the permanence of the figure of families,

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<sup>10</sup> Author translation. In the original: "em todas essas manifestações, a presença marcante é a da mulher negra, que luta por sua liberdade e pela comunidade".

<sup>11</sup> Author translation. In the original: "se a gente detém o olhar em determinados aspectos da chamada cultura brasileira a gente saca que em suas manifestações mais ou menos conscientes ela oculta, revelando, as marcas da africanidade que a constituem".

<sup>12</sup> Author translation. In the original: "(...) apontar pro lugar da mulher negra nesse processo de formação cultural, assim como os diferentes modos de rejeição/integração de seu papel".

<sup>13</sup> Author translation. In the original: "Ou seja, as tentativas de subjugação das mulheres eram desenvolvidas a partir dos padrões que reconheciam seu poder e capacidade como sujeitos na disputa".

as social nuclei, in the post-slavery society. "Black women were, in slavery<sup>14</sup> and in the early days of freedom, the guiding beams of the family and the black community" (Theodoro 1996, 34)<sup>15</sup>. There was no relationship between father and son, because "the slaves were denied their subjectivity, which was always violated, denied and ignored, with regard to the relationships between mother-slave and father-slave" (Theodoro 1996, 34)<sup>16</sup>. Black women sustained most of their families after abolition, working as cleaners, cooks and ironers, for example, since it was difficult for black men to find jobs. In this sense:

(...) accentuation of the female leadership of the black family was perceived in the work of Fernandes (1978) as a characteristic trait of the black family arrangement and consisted of the pair, consisting of the single mother or her occasional substitute, almost always the grandmother, and her child or children. This seems to be the accentuated role in the microcosm of samba, represented by the figure of the great "aunts" who will emerge as mediators of the relations conformed by and in the celebration of carnival (Moreira 2013, 72)<sup>17</sup>.

The participation of women in the production processes of samba as a cultural product was and is crossed by the different methodologies of social action that overlap, depending on the historical and social context in which we live. The valorization, or devaluation, of this participation and the roles occupied by them, as well as their (in)visibility, is crossed/pierced by the sexual division of labor and racism that structure the patriarchy and colonial model of Brazilian society.

This model is based on modern thinking, in which purified and disembodied Cartesian reason is guided by a neutral and genuine knowledge, which is believed that can be achieved freely and clear of external influences (Longino 2008). This detachment of the subject from the body and the belief in pure reason are present in all forms of knowledge and all knowledge of the Western world. But, in fact, there is an unconscious male ideology that epistemologically legitimizes knowledge, disguises subjectivity as objectivity, and leads to the belief that neutrality is possible. Feminism, then, proposes to question how knowledge has acquired gender and how it can be devoid of gender, and how the concepts of truth, rationality, objectivity, certainty, among others, must be rethought free of sexism, since that "purified subject which emerges from the negation of the body is a European, masculine and white subject" (Longino 2008, 515)<sup>18</sup>. Sambista women have then proposed another model of being and existing in this world, a model based on feminism and the fight for human rights through samba as a cultural process.

### Samba and Human Rights

The Discourse Analyses is a theory with more than 57 varieties (Gill 2002). They all argue that the language present in discourse is not considered a neutral way to reflect or describe the world and they understand that all language is inserted in an ideological discourse, historically

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<sup>14</sup> The relationship between a slaved woman and her children as family was recognized in the project of the Law of the Free Belly: *Art. 7 - ... Provisions to maintain the integrity of the family, establishing that in the case of liberation of slaves, children under eight years of age will accompany their mothers...* (Theodoro 1996, 34).

<sup>15</sup> Author translation. In the original: "A mulher negra foi, na escravidão e nos primeiros tempos de liberdade, a viga mestra da família e da comunidade negra"

<sup>16</sup> Author translation. In the original: "se negava aos escravos sua subjetividade, sempre violada, negada e ignorada, no que tange às relações entre mãe-escrava e pai-escravo"

<sup>17</sup> Author translation. In the original: "(...) acentuação da chefia feminina da família negra foi percebida na obra de Fernandes (1978) como um traço característico do arranjo familiar negro e consistia no par, constituído pela mãe solteira ou sua substituta eventual, quase sempre a avó, e seu filho ou filhos. Esse parece ser o papel acentuado no microcosmo samba, representado pela figura das grandes "tias" que vão surgir como mediadoras das relações conformadas pelo e no festejo do carnaval".

<sup>18</sup> Author translation. In the original: "sujeito purificado que emerge da negação do corpo é um sujeito europeu, masculino e branco"

contextualized. Monica Graciela Zoppi-Fontana joins the Discourse Analysis of French tradition, making use of the concepts of subject, history, ideology, meaning and the discourse itself, and its interrelationships, in language analysis, but she works also with the “registration method of gender identifications in the process of discursive constitution of the subject” (Zoppi-Fontana 2017, 02)<sup>19</sup>, comprehension useful to understand the place of women's speech in the lyrics of songs that will be analyzed.

The song that will be analyzed, *Abayomi (É Preta)*<sup>20</sup>, is composed by all the singers and sung by all of them:

ABAYOMI (IT IS BLACK) (Marcelle Motta, Maria Menezes, Marina Iris, Nina Rosa, Simone Costa)	ABAYOMI (É PRETA) (Marcelle Motta, Maria Menezes, Marina Iris, Nina Rosa, Simone Costa)
1 Abayomi, girl	1 Abayomi, menina
2 Between mother's and grandmother's legs	2 Entre pernas de mãe e de vó
3 The braid that brings us closer	3 A trança que nos aproxima
4 Teaches in life, unties knots	4 Ensina na vida, desata nó
5 Releases the voice of the memory	5 Solto a voz da memória
6 I am an all-black woman	6 Sou toda negra mulher
7 Sound of reciprocity	7 Som da reciprocidade
8 Sorority it is	8 Sororidade é
9 Tread heavily, black woman / Give someone a hand (tread heavily, black woman)	9 Firma o passo, nega / Estende a mão (firma o passo, nega)
10 Tread heavily, black woman / Give someone a hand	10 Firma o passo, nega / Estende a mão
11 We are not enemies	11 Não somos inimigas
12 We are the revolution	12 Somos a revolução
13 And our fight is on this ground	13 E nossa luta é nesse chão
14 The night odara	14 A noite odara
15 It is black	15 É preta
16 The rarest tulip	16 Tulipa mais rara
17 It is black	17 É preta
18 It is life that blossoms	18 É vida que desabrocha
19 In colors and facets	19 Em cores e facetas
20 Our union	20 Nossa união
21 Is black	21 É preta

"Between grandmother's legs" (line 2) and releasing "the voice of the memory" (line 5), the lyrics demonstrate the attempt to seek in ancestry the strength and knowledge necessary for the revolution, for the struggle (lines 12 and 13). In this sense, Helena Theodoro emphasizes:

Through their faith, their axé, black women from different religious communities have managed to bring to our days sacralized images of their past, which turns to African mythology, insistently pointing, through oral tradition, to the most diverse strategies of symbolic insubordination, which enables them

<sup>19</sup> Author translation. In the original: “modo de inscrição das identificações de gênero no processo de constituição discursiva do sujeito”.

<sup>20</sup> I chose to present the lyrics of the songs in verse forms, with the shape of the phrases as they are sung, in order to preserve the identity of the speech.



to create defense mechanisms for the survival and maintenance of their cultural traits of origin (Theodoro 1996, 114)<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, by using the term *sorority* (line 8), which is feminist solidarity, feminist sisterhood, one understands that the revolution will be organized by women. Feminist sisterhood can become a powerful tool in women's struggle, according to bell hooks, but "we could only become sisters in struggle by confronting the ways women—through sex, class, and race—dominated and exploited other women, and created a political platform that would address these differences" (hooks 2018, 03). Vilma Piedade, complementing bell hooks, says that there must be *dororidade* (*dor* meaning pain, in English, something like *painhood or the condition of being in pain*):

*Dororidade*, because it contains the shadows, the emptiness, the absence, the silenced speech, the pain caused by Racism. And this Pain is black. (...) *Dororidade* carries in its meaning, the pain caused in all Women by sexism. However, when it comes to Us, Black Women, there is an aggravation in this pain. Black Skin marks us on the lower scale of society. And Black Meat is still the cheapest on the market. Just check the data... (Piedade 2017, 16-17)<sup>22</sup>

The concept presented by Piedade mobilizes politically the pain suffered by black women. In this sense, one can affirm that *sorority*, the feminist sisterhood, referred to in the song is, in fact, a *dororidade*, because the meaning of the struggle is found in the union of black women. In the reference to "abayomi" (title of the song and line 1) and in the phrase "Our union/It is Black" (lines 20 and 21), the composers bring references to black cultures as representations of union and resistance, since *abayomi* were the name of some dolls made by African mothers with flaps of dress in braids or moorings to cherish their children during trips on slave ships, and the term "means 'precious meeting' in Yoruba, one of the largest ethnic groups of the African continent whose population inhabits part of Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast"<sup>23</sup>. The dolls became known as a symbol of resistance and strength of black women.

This is also affirmed when we analyze lines 6, 9 and 10. Women's union, strength and resistance are visible in the phrases "I'm an all-black woman", "Tread heavily, black woman / Give someone a hand" and they demonstrate the conviction of the composers that the revolution, the change of the state of things as they are – sexism, racism, inequality, poverty – all these aspects are possible because of the union led by black women. The union that comes from the collective can also be understood in the composition and collective interpretation of the song analyzed.

Besides, when we look at the verb *to be* it appears repeatedly: "I'm an all-black woman" (line 6), "We are not enemies" (line 11), "We are the revolution" (line 12), "And our fight is on this ground" (line 13), "It is black" (lines 15, 17 and 21). This produces modes of subjectivation, both by placing

<sup>21</sup>Author translation. In the original: "Através de sua fé, de seu axé, as mulheres negras de diferentes comunidades religiosas conseguiram trazer até nossos dias imagens sacralizadas de seu passado, que se volta para a mitologia africana, apontando, insistentemente, por meio da tradição oral, para as estratégias mais diversas de insubordinação simbólica, que lhes possibilita criar mecanismos de defesa para a sobrevivência e a manutenção de seus traços culturais de origem".

<sup>22</sup>Author translation. In the original: "Dororidade, pois contém as sombras, o vazio, a ausência, a fala silenciada, dor causada pelo Racismo. E essa Dor é preta. (...) Dororidade carrega no seu significado a dor provocada em todas as Mulheres pelo Machismo. Contudo, quando se trata de Nós, Mulheres Pretas, tem um agravamento nessa dor. A Pele Preta nos marca na escala inferior da sociedade. E a Carne Preta ainda continua sendo a mais barata do mercado. É só verificar os dados...".

<sup>23</sup>Geledés blog published a text telling the story of the Abayomi, entitled "Abayomi Dolls: symbol of resistance, tradition and feminine power". Available on: <<https://www.geledes.org.br/bonecas-abayomi-simbolo-de-resistencia-tradicao-e-poder-feminino/>>. Access on 15 Dec. 2018.

themselves as a speaking and existing person, and by placing the existence of others just like them. These verbs bring existence (we are, I am) and characterize it (What are we? The revolution).

However, this does not want to determine or plaster the place of black women in a specific musical genre, but to think of samba as one of the possible antagonistic narratives. In fact, what is sought when analyzing the discourse of the samba women of the ÉPreta project is an anti-essentialism, as well as the reaffirmation of constant and provisional creative processes, as Paul Gilroy also states:

Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language games. Black identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimizes it is persuasive or institutionally powerful. Whatever the radical constructionists may say, it is experienced as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gestures, bodily significations, desires (Gilroy 1993, 102).

By these means, the author seeks to emphasize that identity is experienced, independently, of interests that may use it or abandon it in his speech. What occurs is that it is not fixed, or permanent, or constant. Therefore, the struggle for identity is not a problem itself, but it is the essentialism of ethnicity or difference, since there are no pure forms.

The contradictions that samba brings, as a cultural product, are present and samba remains in constant dispute. However, it is worth using these contradictions to create dialogues and spaces for human rights struggles. The samba produced by black women is another way of understanding reality, based on antiracist and anti-capitalist feminism, inspired by their discourse. As Helena Theodoro demonstrates:

In Brazil, black culture uses its own strategies of resistance from a part of the population that has no other weapons than its own belief in life, in the power of fulfillment, in its axé, creating with its imaginary fundamental roles for women, presented in myths and rituals, but lived in the community (Theodoro 1996, 64)<sup>24</sup>.

Black women, then, seek in their ancestry and forms of resistance built since the imposition of whiteness, other signs, meanings, symbols and representations to intervene in their relationships with themselves, with others and with nature. They present different ways of relating to states of fact, since the current hegemonic methodology of social action seeks to oppress and subdue them, placing them at the base of the social pyramid.

Reflecting on the relationships we have with ourselves, with others and with the environment in which we are inserted is also necessary within the cultural reaction circuit proposed by Joaquin Herrera Flores. It is the reactions to these relationships that provide the cultural processes, which produce symbols, signs, representations and meanings that seek to intervene, explain and interpret the surroundings of these same relationships, making the return in the circuit, but keeping it open because "the cultural process always supposes this way of going and returning between cultural

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<sup>24</sup>Author translation: In the original: "No Brasil, a cultura negra usa estratégias próprias de resistência de uma parte da população que não tem outras armas a não ser sua própria crença na vida, no poder de realização, no seu axé, criando com o seu imaginário papéis fundamentais para as mulheres, apresentados em mitos e rituais, mas vividos na comunidade".

relationships—individual and collective—and the networks of relationships that provoke them" (Herrera Flores 2005, 132)<sup>25</sup>. From this, we can understand that samba as an emancipating cultural process, since it opens the circuits of cultural reaction, enabling the understanding of other methodologies of social action and denying the existence of a single way of perceiving and acting in the world.

Women in samba define the occupation of a public space that has always been denied to them within a logic of patriarchal public-private capitalism. Although black women were always in this public space as objectified bodies and cheap labor, with samba, they began to occupy this space as subjects producing knowledge. This is because their discourses, their samba lyrics, their narratives, traditionally considered as alien to politics, must be considered an expertise necessary for transforming the reality.

Within a decolonial logic, these women have always produced knowledge, because they are the fundamental basis of black culture. The samba produced by these women, then, presents itself as an emancipatory cultural process of reaction to the hegemonic thinking of what is art and what is culture and makes it possible to think of other methodologies of social action that can be more inclusive and respect differences (Herrera Flores 2005).

We need to recognize other categories that can build a social reality of equality and respect for differences, a society of affection and care. We need to think of law as "(...) the fantasy of hope: a knowledge that stimulates the creation of new bonds and values"<sup>26</sup> (Warat 1994, 89), using the antiracist feminist perspective to rethink what we understand as law.

Samba can be considered a feminist cultural process, because the essence of the cultural process is to react in a creative way to the set of social, psychic and natural relationships in which the subjects are inserted (Herrera Flores 2005, 32). It is the reconstruction of realities from creativity, thinking in different ways of relating, creating spaces of visibility of differences. Women in samba demonstrate the close relationship between theory and practice, presenting from their narration these other possible realities.

The emancipatory feminist cultural process – which women in Rio de Janeiro are leading today – makes it possible to build this other understanding of human rights. Taking responsibility for situations of oppression and subjugation, as well as the empowerment of marginalized groups, allows us to think of another method of social action that makes reality less unequal and unfair to most people. And samba presents itself as a tool that makes this change possible.

## Final Considerations

Although feminism has shown itself for many years as being a political movement led by white women, black Brazilian feminists present a gigantic production of knowledge. Using cultural elements, such as the samba analyzed in this work, for decades, they have sought to build other ways of being and existing in the world, presenting other possibilities.

Thinking of samba as a feminist cultural process makes it possible to create other signs, meanings, symbols and representations in order to intervene, explain and interpret the relationships we have with ourselves, with others and with nature, different from the capitalist model in which we live. From the samba of ÉPreta, a dynamic vision of reality is presented, in which we analyze the power relations that condition the access to cultural products, understanding the different and plural forms of reactions in front of the world.

Today, samba women in Rio de Janeiro, specifically ÉPreta singers and composers, have been using samba as a discourse in favor of human rights, understood as the processes of struggle for the

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<sup>25</sup>Author translation. In the original: "El *proceso* cultural supone siempre ese camino de ida y vuelta entre las reacciones culturales –individuales y colectivas– y las redes de relaciones que las provocan".

<sup>26</sup>Author translation. In the original: "(...) fantasía de la esperanza: un saber que estimule la creación de nuevos vínculos y valores".

material and immaterial goods necessary for a dignified life, making antagonism to the dominant methodology of social action. The discourse of the song "Abayomi" from the ÉPreta project presents a feminist samba discourse that questions the gender role of women. Criticizing the social control imposed on women, the song reports violence and objectification, but also expresses values of freedom. With a national and international reach, also because of the direct and clear language, that can be understood by anyone, this samba can be a tool in the fight for women's rights.

In this sense, samba is a possibility of public existence of invisible subjects, and it constitutes a means of circulation of the values and culture of subjects always held on the periphery of knowledge. We all have the same authority to speak, narrate, and intervene ideologically in reality. Samba as a feminist cultural process, thus, emerges as a new medium, a new tool of democracy capable of propitiating the dialogue of law with reality. It is essential to build a new social consciousness about human rights, going through instances that go far beyond the Legislative and Judiciary branches, since the justice system does not have the capacity to alter social and political structures in a positive way. In this meaning, samba presents another way of building knowledge, creating another methodology of social action.

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