

THE SAMBA SCHOOLS  
OF RIO DE JANEIRO  
OR THE DOMESTICATION  
OF AN URBAN MASS

Rio de Janeiro, the opening of the carnival. On the Friday evening preceding Mardi Gras, the mayor of Rio hands over the keys to the city to King Momo, sovereign of the carnival\*. Immediately the samba breaks out in the brightly lit streets of the city. Newspapers, magazines and television feature big headlines describing the event and glorifying the holiday kingdom. They all report that the city is being shaken by winds of madness, that licence and inversions of every variety are rampant, that the leveling of individuals and the abolition of social distances illustrate the resolutions of conflicts in a collective dream of joy and happiness...

In the streets, the festival reaches its peak on Sunday evening with the parade of the samba schools. Beginning at six in the evening, the parade continues until the following morning around eleven, under a broiling sun. Wild colors, flashing lights, pounding

Translated by R. Scott Walker.

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## *The Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro*

drums continue the night through as the super-show offered by the forty thousand dancers from the ten large *Escolas de Samba* is played out in front of grandstands filled to overflowing with more than one hundred thousand spectators who sing the samba melodies and shout out with the impassioned enthusiasm of real “fans” when “their” school goes by.

But the parade of the big *Escolas* is not just a super-spectacle. It is also, and above all, a contest, a competition, a veritable struggle which goes on until the following Thursday. At that time the boxes are opened which contain the ballots voted by the twenty-two members of the jury. The counting of the ballots is watched feverishly, for it will reveal the year’s big winner. And once again joy breaks out and echoes throughout the next twenty-four hours in the neighborhood from which the victorious school hails.

What exactly are these large samba schools?

### THE SAMBA SCHOOLS: THEIR COMPOSITION AND HIERARCHY

The picturesque name *Escola de Samba* is given in Brazil to “societies organized for cultural and recreational purposes, but which are not for profit”, whose principal end consists in organizing the sumptuous parades which each year mark the high point of carnival celebrations in the country. Born in Rio de Janeiro, they have now been imitated just about everywhere throughout the land. Their processions wind through the central avenues of cities and are hailed with applause by a wildly exuberant public. Their importance and their complexity require minute and efficient organization with nothing left to chance.

There are forty-four samba schools in Rio de Janeiro. Each one is made up of a core group of a thousand or twelve hundred members who pay their monthly dues regularly.<sup>1</sup> To these are added an additional one or two thousand members in the months before carnival, who will take part in the parade. To this central core group, and its ring of temporary members, must be added the

<sup>1</sup> The *componente* is one who actually pays his dues, literally a “component”. These *componentes* make up the electorate within the school. They alone have the right to vote in elections for selecting the directory.

mass of people, whose number is difficult to estimate, who assist in the preparations without actually taking part in the evening itself. And finally, the crowning element in the construction are the many “fans” and supporters that the school will have all over the city.<sup>2</sup>

The composition of the samba schools is just about the same throughout the country. In the large cities, the schools are organized into a larger association, called either a *Federação*, or *Associação das Escolas de Samba*. Only schools which are registered with the *Associação* can take part in the Mardi Gras parades, only those schools which have exact and detailed statutes and by-laws, officially registered with a notary's office, can be registered in an *Associação*. The *Associação*, together with the local tourist office, organizes the parades and the carnival competition.<sup>3</sup>

In Rio de Janeiro, the association headquarters is housed in an impressive building located in one of the typically bourgeois sectors of the city, the Meier neighborhood. The forty-four presidents of the samba schools, the forty-four “wise men of the carnival”, meet there every Wednesday to discuss the organization of the next festival and, in the words of a journalist, they make their decisions “with the coolness of professional politicians”. Everyone knows that there are other interests besides the Mardi Gras parade at stake and that they go well beyond the simple organization of a festive event, but such interests remain, obviously, unstated.

The power of the “wise men” is quite broad. On them falls the obligation to distinguish between “permitted” activities and “forbidden” activities during the carnival period, to select the competition jury, to sign contracts for decorating the city, to decide which companies will be authorized to record the songs and which television networks<sup>4</sup> and film producers will have the right to film the parades. They determine the cost of admission to the grandstands and also set the amount of the prizes which are awarded to the winning schools. And finally, they have the important, but oh

<sup>2</sup> The obligation to pay regular modest monthly dues no doubt explains in large part why the *componentes* are less numerous during the year than the number of persons participating in the parade.

<sup>3</sup> In smaller and medium-sized cities, the local municipal authority is directly responsible for the organization of the celebration. There is no official tourist office, as in the larger cities, which normally would be responsible for such organization.

<sup>4</sup> Television networks in Brazil are private commercial enterprises.

so delicate, task of distributing among the schools from the three categories funds which are allocated by the government. They are the complete directors of the festival, responsible for organizational, economic and political decisions.

In order to be able to register with the *Associação*, a school must provide proof that its organization conforms strictly with legal and administrative regulations applicable to non-profit-making organizations in the country, and also that its budget balances according to standard accounting procedures. As for its economic power, the school demonstrates this publicly with the size of its participation in the parade, by the number of its members who pay their dues regularly, and by the opulence of its costumes and its allegorical floats. These are the various criteria for classifying a school in one of the three categories defined by the *Associação*.

In Rio the public and the authorities are only interested in schools in the first category, the "large" *Escolas*. It is for their parade, which takes place on a key day, Sunday before Mardi Gras, that the stage and bleachers are erected. The media speak only of them; they alone are featured in the numerous illustrated articles appearing in the newspapers and magazines,<sup>5</sup> only their music is recorded and sold. The schools in the second category can only appear on the stage on Monday before Mardi Gras, a "slow" day; on the big days, they must limit themselves to parading in the central streets of "their" neighborhood. The media rarely mention them. The schools of the third category, the lowest, do not dance in the city center and do not appear on the stage. On the big days, which are the Sunday and Tuesday of carnival, they dance in the small streets of the surrounding area. On the slow days, they can appear in a few of the main avenues of the neighborhood.

There is fierce competition among the various schools in the three categories to obtain the first prize, the supreme award of the parade and coronation of the festival. But the public is interested above all in the rivalry between the schools of the first category. The others only attract its attention when a school from a lower category wins a sufficient number of points to move up to a higher

<sup>5</sup> The media take an interest in preparations for the celebration well in advance of the Mardi Gras period, but only activities of the large schools are of interest to them. Newspapers, magazines, television networks, recording companies and documentary film studios totally ignore schools in the second and third categories.

category. The jury's verdict is announced two or three days after Mardi Gras. The envelopes are then opened and the points counted. The delighted winners are revealed. "Fans" take part in the vote counting, first of all to oversee the counting operation, and then, depending on the results, to celebrate victory. The atmosphere at the vote counting is so tense that for several years now it has taken place in a military police building, sealed off by a security ring.

Decisions of the juries are based on specific criteria.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, everyone knows that the aesthetic, musical, poetic and choreographic aspects of a parade, in other words the purely artistic features, are not the only criteria and that certain other elements, most often unknown to the public, carry a much greater weight. Decision making is preceded by meetings, generally held in secret, where economic and political considerations are far from absent. Allusion is sometimes made to this, at the announcement of the winners, when losing teams express their indignation by making all sorts of accusations against the jury. But the hour of truth does not last long.

In general the sumptuousness of the costumes, the magnificence of the allegorical floats and the number of dancers who parade across the stage—a tangible demonstration of the vitality and power of the *Escola*—influence a jury strongly. However, the jury is even more sensitive to another component of the spectacle, namely the discipline exhibited by the mass of dancers during its gyrating actions. Since the time allotted to each parade's passing is strictly measured, the movements of the dancing group must in turn be carefully controlled. Any error, no matter how small, means a loss of time, and thus a loss of points, which can cause a school to lose its classification. It is not a rare thing to see directors leading the movements of an entire group by counting out loud or using a whistle to mark the beat that the dancers must follow.

The monthly dues paid by members and the meager grants from the government are not enough to finance the luxurious costumes

<sup>6</sup> Official criteria are as follows: elegance of the *Comissão de Frente* (Opening commission); overall harmony of the procession; samba performance by drummers; *pas de deux* by woman standard bearer and master of ceremonies; theme of the procession; songs, costumes and allegorical floats; performance by a variety of groups.

and floats, pay the *carnavalesco*<sup>7</sup> who organizes the procession, the various technicians responsible for realizing it (sometimes graduates from schools of higher education) and musicians. Other resources are required to cover all these expenses.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, weekly rehearsals of the group have been gradually converted into shows with paid admission throughout the year, and the schools have become a kind of night club affair.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes a school will also appear, for a fee, at public or private ceremonies.

This is true, however, only for the large *Escolas*; the poor little *Escola* does not have such possibilities and must truly struggle to maintain its position in the third category, the last place in the ranking. It can only move up to the next level if it can prove its organizational capacities: by increasing its economic potential, by the discipline of its participants, by the beauty and harmony of its parade. The parades are consequently highly contested occasions for the schools, even though the prize money awarded is not much. There is a sort of silent and permanent war between schools in the same category, and also between one category and another. This war may remain hidden, even though its presence is affirmed by a thousand little facts, but it can also explode suddenly into real conflict, particularly at the moment when the prizes are awarded.

Each school is headed by a directory, elected by all the dues-paying members of the association. The directory is fully responsible for all decisions involving the school, a centralization of power which is justified in the name of "higher interests"; it also controls the sub-groups (*alas*)<sup>10</sup> and has the final word with regard to the choice of their leaders. It sees that information is well distributed throughout the *Escola*. It represents its *Escola* to the metropolitan government and to federal authorities. The president of the directory is a member of the commission of the "forty-four wise men"

<sup>7</sup> The *carnavalesco* is the big organizer of the procession. The schools vie with one another to assure themselves the services of the best *carnavalesci*, who are paid very high fees.

<sup>8</sup> Persons who take part in the parade as simple participants pay for their own costumes.

<sup>9</sup> The "real" rehearsals take place in remote side streets where participants can work on their numbers in undistracted calm. Goldwasser, 1975; Leopoldi, 1978; Ribeiro, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> *Ala*: literally a "wing". This is the name given to the groups which march on both sides of the central procession.

who manage the *Associação das Escolas de Samba* in Rio de Janeiro. Most of the directory's meetings, at which are discussed relations between the school and the government and the organization of the carnival games, are strictly closed to the public and even to *componentes*. The sub-groups also have their directories and their statutes; their relations with the central directory are the source of numerous reports and circulars.<sup>11</sup>

The ever-growing number of samba school members and the problems raised by their integration into a society as complex as that of Rio explains the importance ascribed to the bureaucratic administrative structure described above. The old *foliões*<sup>12</sup> are nostalgic for the old days when their *Escola* was made up essentially of neighborhood families and directed by a leader chosen for his unquestioned personal prestige. Nevertheless, they recognize that external pressure arising from transformations in the metropolitan region and the expansion of the suburbs, combined with internal pressures, have made these evolutions inevitable. The *Escola*, they say, sought to organize itself around the model of large commercial firms, banks and factories.

#### THE SAMBA SCHOOLS AS EMANATIONS OF SUBURBAN ZONES

The suburban zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro is the matrix in which the present samba schools developed. Some no doubt were born in the *favelas* which look down over the wealthy neighborhoods of the southern part of the city, but this was in a far-distant past. Their extraordinary expansion is a relatively recent phenomenon, closely associated with the rapid expansion of the northern suburbs, that is, the areas which extend toward the end of the Rio bay<sup>13</sup> and which developed as a result of the industrial development

<sup>11</sup> Directory meetings follow a very rigid protocol. The president opens the meeting, the secretary reads the minutes of the previous meeting which must then be approved by those present. Next is discussed any mail received and mail to be sent, information to be announced and circulated among the sub-groups. Only then is the agenda discussed.

<sup>12</sup> *Foliões*: those who frolic and skip around during the carnival.

<sup>13</sup> Between 1950 and 1970, the growth rate in these neighborhoods reached a figure of 340%, which represented almost 33% of the overall demographic increase

of the city during World War II.

Each suburb constitutes an independent *município*<sup>14</sup> made up of two distinct parts. There is a residential and commercial core where the dominant local class lives, which occupies the higher posts in government, in business and industry, and in the professions. Moving away from the center toward the peripheral areas, the neighborhoods become increasingly poor, contrasting with the comfortable living conditions of the central zone. In contrast to the modern houses surrounded by yards and gardens in the center—clearly in the minority—there are the multitude of makeshift dwellings in which the low-income population lives, in poor hygiene conditions, persons with a very low level of education.<sup>15</sup> Suburban is the word which best characterizes the general conditions of this zone, most of whose residents work in trade or in the service sector<sup>16</sup> in the center of the city. But there are also a large number of unemployed, vagabonds, and so on, in a proportion which is difficult to estimate.

In these suburbs, all races are mixed together. There are many Blacks, but also a predominance of mulattoes. In varying proportions there can be found descendents of European emigrants, Asians and Near Eastern immigrants. Customs and habits of this population are directly attached to Western civilization, but they include certain cultural traits of African origin, although in a low proportion. The African traits are particularly visible in the religious domain, but also in dance and music. The way of life of this poor population does not differ culturally from the well-off inhabi-

in the Rio metropolitan region. New building techniques made it possible to urbanize the hillsides near the residential neighborhoods in the southern area, until then occupied by *favelas*. Under pretext of improving living conditions in these *favelas*, their residents were forced to relocate to the back of Guanabara bay. In 1974 forty-one *favelas* were eliminated in this way. However, in 1978 it was recognized that this policy had been a failure and the government then decided to “urbanize” the *favelas*. See Céline Sachs, 1981; and Didier Drummond, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Brazilian states are divided up into *municípios*.

<sup>15</sup> Residents are often owners of their parcel of land; they build their own houses. Three fourths of the families have revenues less than five times the minimum wage; 40% of the inhabitants are semi-illiterate; 75% of the dwellings are in a precarious condition; infant mortality is greater than ninety per thousand. Cf. Celine Sachs, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Distances to cover to reach the center vary from 5 to 25 kilometers, and the means of transportation are very unreliable.

tants of the center or the consumer system. They have access to the same sources of information, for radio, primarily, and television are widely available. Essentially the difference between the poor population and the wealthy population is a matter of purchasing power and not of cultural disparity.

There is no doubt that there is no reason to equate suburban residents and evil-doers; but it is true that alongside the honest workers in the northern zone there are many persons without jobs or avowed professions who live as best they can, thieves and various kinds of criminals. Exact proportions are difficult to establish. Violence and criminality reach record-breaking heights. In certain *municípios*, the situation is so bad that the police itself hardly dares go into the outer areas.<sup>17</sup> This condition of insecurity reinforces the cleavage existing between the center of the suburb, where living conditions are better, and where the better-off live, and the peripheral zone where delinquency thrives. It is not astonishing, then, that the suburbs have earned a detestable reputation and that they are seen as the ash-heap of metropolitan society where the social climate is extremely tense.

Emanations of the suburbs whose expansion they followed, the samba schools bear the name of the suburbs: Estação Primeira de Mangueira, Acadêmicos de Salgueiro, Unidos de Vila Isabel, Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel, Imperio de Tijuca, etc.<sup>18</sup> Some developed slowly, like, for example, the dean of them all, the Mangueira which was founded in 1928 and which took thirty years to establish itself. Others, on the other hand, took on their importance quite quickly, like the *Escola Beija-Flor* of Nilópolis, which needed only five years to reach the top ranks. The slowness or speed of their ascent is directly proportional to the demographic and economic growth rate of their suburb.

Born in the urban zones where the most unrestrained types of violence reign, the samba schools make it a point of honor to demonstrate that they are not the shady organizations with which it might be tempting to compare them at first glance. The moraliz-

<sup>17</sup> The famous Death Squad, a clandestine organization which is parallel to the Rio military police, is powerful in the suburbs.

<sup>18</sup> Of the forty-four samba schools, only six do not bear the name of their suburb.

ing rigor of their statutes is striking in this respect.<sup>19</sup> The schools are invariably presented as honorable family clubs with a purely recreational purpose, and the directorial regulations multiply the guarantees of morality to be required of every new adherent. The youngest participants of the *alas* for children are obliged to attend primary school, and in certain *Escolas* they are required to show their monthly school reports or be expelled.

No less remarkable is the structured and rational operation of the directory and of the *alas*, of which the members are fully aware and even quite proud. For they see in this the very opposite of disorder and adventure. They interpret this formalism as a guarantee of organization and efficiency. They realize also that a school which becomes important as a result of an increase in the number of its members and its financial resources is obliged to choose as leaders persons who are sufficiently well instructed to manage the newly complex structure. It is, in fact, essential to know well the various local, regional and federal legislations and to be capable of understanding the subtle distinctions of financial management. Diplomacy and tact are needed also to produce harmonious solutions to the rivalries, disputes and conflicts which can arise between the directory, the *alas* and individuals. The moment always arrives when the leadership slips out of the hands of the founders and their families and falls into the hands of the “doctors”<sup>20</sup> and “businessmen”.

Within the *Escola* a white minority, belonging to the lower middle and middle class, can be distinguished from the mass of *componentes* with darker skin, modest resources and a lower level of education.<sup>21</sup> The pre-eminence of these lower middle and middle class figures in the *Escolas* is undeniable. They occupy the highest

<sup>19</sup> Various researchers have pointed out this fact: Goldwasser, 1975; Leopoldi, 1978; Ribeiro, 1981.

<sup>20</sup> In Brazil any graduate of an institution of higher learning is called «doctor».

<sup>21</sup> A comparison of figures showing ethnic participation percentages, level of education and salary levels in the large *Escolas* is interesting. There is a similarity to be noted in the major *Escolas*, which seem to involve the same socio-economic layers, even when looking at such an atypical suburb as the one where the Escola de Samba União de Ilha was born. Leopoldi (1978) has analyzed these factors using a sampling representing 10% of the *componentes* of the Escola Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel. Ribeiro (1981) analyzed a similar sampling in the Escolas Mangueira, Beijo-Flor of Nilópolis, and União da Ilha, which emanates from a suburb inhabited by a population belonging to lower middle and middle classes.

positions, both in the central directory and in the *alas*.<sup>22</sup> In short, the ethnic and socio-economic divisions within the *Escola* reflect the structure of the suburb with its core of better-off white-skinned residents, surrounded by a poorer, and dark-skinned, population.

The means of administration adopted by the *Escolas* and the periodic election of their directory show that the samba schools have chosen to organize themselves along the lines of legal models which exist in Brazil. They intend themselves to be disciplined and

*Rates of ethnic participation*

<i>Races</i>	Mangureira (Ribeiro, p. 42)	Pe Miguel (Leopoldi, p. 89)
Blacks .....	43%	25.3%
Mulattoes .....	38%	46.1%
Whites .....	19%	28.6%
Totals .....	100%	100%

In both cases participation by colored persons is higher than that of the whites. The definition of "mulatto" varies in Brazil depending on the author. Leopoldi seems to be closer to the definition generally used in the country.

*Education levels*

<i>Degree of instruction</i>	Beija-Flor	União da Ilha	Pe. Miguel
Illiterate .....	4	0	0
Primary .....	66	42	28
Secondary - 1st cycle .....	59	39	23
Secondary - 2nd cycle .....	29	23	4
Higher education .....	13	10	2
Totalt .....	171	114	57

*Salary levels*

<i>Wages</i>	Beija-Flor	União da Ilha	Pe. Miguel
Minimum wage .....	11	6	6
2-3 times min .....	82	73	40
4-5 min. wage .....	54	24	13
5 times min .....	21	21	8
Totalt .....	168	124	67

Leopoldi's research was done in 1973, when the minimum wage was Cr. \$ 312. Ribeiro completed research in 1977, and at that time the minimum wage was Cr. \$ 1,106.40. It should be noted that most *Escolas* participants earn between 2 to 5 times the minimum wage and that consequently the very poorest can only with great difficulty take part in an *Escola*. For such persons the expense is too great, for in addition to their monthly dues they must also pay for their costumes.

<sup>22</sup> Ana Maria Ribeiro (1981, p. 11) points out "the concentration of power and socio-economic control in the hands of the Whites" in the samba schools; this "reproduces the type of power which exists in the dominant society. The Blacks are allowed to handle the technical aspects, the singing and dancing, but it is the Whites who really control the power".

wish to conform to the principles which control the internal organization of companies. Through the *Associação das Escolas de Samba*, they cooperate with the regional government. The head-quarters with which they have endowed themselves are the tangible proof of their prosperity and their respectability. All these characteristics make it possible for them to set themselves off from the climate of violence which characterizes the outlying areas and to demonstrate at the same time that they remain apart from the misery, chaos and crime of these zones.

However, peace does not necessarily reign within the *Escola*. The tendency of the “founders” to want to retain directorial functions for themselves and for their families by restricting from the direction persons who were not “born” in the *Escola*, the constant competition between the *alas*, the personal ambitions of some participants who hope to pull themselves up to the higher positions: these are all latent sources of conflicts, which are constantly in danger of exploding, particularly at the time of elections, when the various parties are unable to reach an agreement. But the existence of an unbridled rivalry between the *Escolas* and the frenetic desire of everyone to see “his” school triumph at Carnival time are important factors of cohesion which help palliate the internal differences of the group. The “older” ones accept the fact that they must give way to the “doctors” as long as victory is guaranteed at the time of the competition.

In general a single candidate is presented to voters, and successive re-elections of a prestigious president are also the rule. The president can even be elected for life. These bendings of electoral democracy are deemed necessary in the eyes of the large majority of the members who want above all to preserve the unity of the *Escola*. The directory in turn constantly affirms its authority. The directory resolves all differences and never misses an occasion to demonstrate that it is essential for the proper functioning of the group. It stimulates the “*esprit de corps*” of members constantly in order to ensure that harmony for the ensemble without which its success in the parade would be placed in danger.

The efficiency of the directory and the talent of the *carnavalesco*<sup>23</sup> who is hired to prepare the parade constitute the essential

<sup>23</sup> The appearance of the *carnavalesco*, the expert responsible for the organiza-

factors for the success of a large *Escola*. The competition rules, determined by the *Associação das Escolas de Samba*, are strict. The slightest delay by the school when it is time for it to perform on the stage or the least extension beyond the time allotted to it to complete its passage, the slightest mistake in the rhythm of the tam-tams and the drums, the tiniest hesitation in the movements of the *alas*, the most unnoticed lack of balance in the ensemble are all part of the final classification and mean that the group risks finding itself downgraded. As the date of the festival draws near, the rehearsals of the *alas* and the *passistas*,<sup>24</sup> under the careful supervision of their respective directories, become more and more frequent. Rigorous fidelity is required of participants, and three consecutive absences often mean the expulsion of such wrongdoers. Participants are perfectly conscious of the necessity of having severe discipline and rigorous organization if the desired result is to be achieved. Obtaining the prize depends on them.

#### AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SAMBA SCHOOLS

The origin of the so-called “traditional” samba schools (Mangueira, Portela, Salgueiro, etc.) goes back to the late Twenties, a time when open-air carnival activities, in the streets of the center of the city, were still the almost exclusive possession of Rio’s bourgeoisie. Strongly backed by commerce and by the press, this bourgeoisie held exclusive rights to the privilege of “entertaining itself” during carnival. It organized balls in clubs and theaters, held confetti battles in certain public squares, promenaded in dazzling processions down the central avenues of the city, processions which were financed by important merchants and large property owners. It was assisted in this activity by carnival societies.<sup>25</sup> Newspapers

tion of the parade, goes back to 1960. Salgueiro at that time hired a professor from the School of Fine Arts for this function. In 1980 a *carnavalesco* earned from 100,000 to one million cruzeiros per parade organized. Ribeiro, 1981, p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Passistas*: soloists and dancers who perform special attractions during the parade.

<sup>25</sup> There were two distinct parades, one organized by the carnival societies, and the *corso*. The societies performed in the streets on Mardi Gras. The *corso* took place during the afternoons of the four days of carnival. At first in their carriages and afterward in their automobiles, wealthy families paraded in their rich costumes down avenues patrolled by police who maintained order.

offered prizes to reward the most beautiful parades, which encouraged competition and rivalry. The police watched over the festivities closely and guaranteed that “order” was preserved.

This type of eminently bourgeois carnival had originated around 1856 in Rio, and for a century only the rich had the right to parade in the streets during the Mardi Gras festivities.<sup>26</sup> They “entertained the people”, who were relegated to the role of simple spectators and were forbidden the possibility of gathering in the street. Ordinarily these people were limited to dancing clandestinely in closed-off courtyards, but they eventually turned to revolt and, defying the police, groups of tradesmen, laborers and dockworkers, to which were added fringe elements made up of the unemployed and hoodlums, began to enjoy themselves and to sing near the major thoroughfares of the city center. This inevitably ended up in a general round of fighting and with the trouble-makers being “put away”.

But eventually the talent of these marginal people, and the originality of their musical instruments, their songs and their dances, began to attract the public’s attention. And so another carnival began to compete with the bourgeois carnival, one which adopted the dates of the European carnival period, but whose forms and whose participants were African in origin.<sup>27</sup> The “samba”—the music and dance—which was the very incarnation of the phenomenon, penetrated little by little into the upper spheres of the *carioca* society.<sup>28</sup> In the early Thirties, the newly created recording and radio industry widely broadcast the popular music, and gradually the samba was raised to the rank of national musical symbol.<sup>29</sup> The

<sup>26</sup> Masked balls began in Rio in 1840. The parades of the carnival societies were inaugurated in 1856. Von Simson, 1978, p. 332.

<sup>27</sup> Carnival music at the end of the 19th century was essentially European. The opening of the festivities was announced by the *Ze Pereira*, the huge drum characteristic of Portuguese peasant festivals. At the balls, the orchestras played mazurkas, schottisches and waltzes. The processions generally paraded to the sounds of music from operas with the most popular air being the triumphal march from *Aida*. Von Simson, 1978. In the Brazilian carnival of the second half of the 20th century, African music completely replaced European music. The only remaining vestige is the *Ze Pereira*, musical symbol of the carnival. Von Simson, 1981.

<sup>28</sup> *Cariocas*: inhabitants of Rio.

<sup>29</sup> The huge development of photography, records and radios in the country has coincided with the birth of the samba schools and has worked its certain influence on their being accepted, as well as on the spread of popular music. Borges Pereira, 1967, p. 197; Goldwasser, p. 20, note 2; Ribeiro, 1981, p. 101.

reasons for the paternalistic tolerance on the part of the upper social strata toward the music and the dances of the lower classes in Brazil are still to be analyzed.

The first samba school organized as a permanent group was born on April 28, 1928, from the merger of several small groups of neighbors from the same area. It included craftsmen, vegetable and fruit vendors, shoe shiners, hawkers and casual laborers of all kinds, generally dark-skinned; but whites were not excluded from the group. Other similar groups were quick to follow. Newspapers from the period contributed in large part to achieving acceptance of these groups as legitimate participants in the carnival festivities. The prizes which the papers offered to the best group<sup>30</sup> gave the parade of the *Escolas* from the outset its characteristic quality of fierce and unbridled competition.<sup>31</sup> But from the outset also the parades took their inspiration from those which were organized by the bourgeois carnival societies.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, in this period the samba schools were not yet fully accepted, and they were required to hold their parade in the famous *Praça Onze*, a square which was located in a marginal area in a rundown part of the city, known in particular for prostitution.

Despite this fact, by 1935 the events featuring the samba schools were already considered one of the primary attractions of carnival in Rio. This is when they decided to group themselves in a "federation" in order to decide their activities in common. From the beginning, as we have seen, this federation stressed rational

<sup>30</sup> Goldwasser, 1975, p. 19-20, 24; Ribeiro, 1981, p. 36 sq.

<sup>31</sup> Still today competition goes on all year long. Spying on other schools is a favorite means of attempting to obtain information on the organization of rival processions. The more carnival dates draw near, the more control the *Escola* places on its *componentes*, and especially on "strangers", becoming quite rigorous.

<sup>32</sup> In the processions of the carnival societies, the "directory commission" opened the parade, with members of the directory, elegantly dressed, riding on special mounts, to the sound of fanfares, as they greeted the public with top hats in hand. Next came the magnificently costumed participants, then the floats, with dazzling lights and colors, carrying beautiful and smiling girls, richly dressed. This schema is still followed roughly in the parades of today. As in the past, the *Comissão de frente*, made up of the directory and founders, opens the parade. The richly dressed participants, also with top hats in hand, greet the public and, according to the consecrated expression, "request the right of passage". These parades were also highly influenced by Brazilian religious processions of the 17th and 18th centuries and by the parades which commemorated the anniversaries of kings and princes during the colonial period.

organization, making it the criterion for admission into the federation and consequently to the parade.

One year later, in 1936, the Rio municipal authorities “legalized” the participation of the samba schools in the carnival and granted them a small financial aid, under the condition that they conform to applicable regulations, which reflected those drawn up by the *Associação (Federação)*. Thus two organizations which were as diverse as the *Associação*, representing the lower classes of Rio’s population out of which the *Associação* was formed, and the municipal government of Rio, elected by the upper classes, came together in the identical desire for establishing legality.

But the municipal authorities required much more than simply that the *Escolas* be well organized. Civic regulations touched directly on the formation of the parades, demanding that they be based on themes taken from Brazilian history. The civil authorities forbade any overtly political manifestation or one which might take on a protesting note, any allusion to or criticism of current events or any commercial trade propaganda. The same authorities also determined the route to be taken by the parades. The slightest violation of these rules brought on the automatic declassification of the offending school, meaning that from that time on it would be impossible for it to appear before the public.

The activity of the *Escolas de samba* very quickly went beyond the confines of the carnival period and was extended to festivals and commemorations throughout the year: Saturday night dances, fairs, picnics, legal holidays and so on. Becoming in this way the first official form of organization of residents of the *favelas* and suburbs, the samba schools represented for these social classes the equivalent of the athletic and recreational clubs of the middle and upper classes.

The birth and development of the samba schools between 1930 and 1950 coincided with an era of important economic changes in the country: three constitutions (1933, 1937, 1947), an increase in the number of eligible voters by lowering the legal voting age to 18 years and by granting women the right to vote (1933); the development of industrialization, which occurred during World War II, and which primarily touched the two large southern cities of São Paulo and Rio and resulted in an expansion of the *favelas* and suburbs. It was for the benefit of the literate residents of these

neighborhoods, potential voters, a veritable gold mine of potential voters for politicians, that these politicians inaugurated their populist policy.

No doubt it is not necessary to look any further than that for the reason for the tolerance and even the good will which the Rio municipal authorities manifested toward the samba schools in these circumstances. Several documents and reports describe veritable transactions between founders of samba schools and political chiefs, with certain candidates attempting to guarantee their election, or certain high officials looking after their own advancement. In exchange for votes in upcoming elections, an *Escola* was promised various kinds of privileges or advantages.<sup>33</sup>

Around 1960, when the samba schools were already well structured, they attained the summit of their socio-economic rise by obtaining the right to parade in the central avenues of the city which had now been abandoned by the bourgeois *corso* but where the large carnival societies continued to appear. The Rio authorities even took a further step by assigning their parade to one of the "big days" of carnival, the Sunday before Mardi Gras. As the *Escolas* participation grew, that of the upper and middle social classes of Rio in the "street carnival" diminished. The automobile *corso* had already disappeared. And the parade of the large carnival societies each year lost more of its glitter and its importance.

This growth of the samba schools coincides with another event which we have not yet examined: the outlawing in 1946 of games of chance, including the famous *bicho*, a sort of lottery which was extremely wide-spread in Brazil.<sup>34</sup> The large carnival societies were in fact gambling clubs, open all year long and frequented by merchants. When gambling was forbidden, they suffered a mortal blow which was the origin of their slow disintegration and consequently of the decline of the carnival parades which they financed.

<sup>33</sup> Goldwasser, 1975, p. 14, note 14, p. 48; Leopoldi, 1978, p. 81, note 56; Ribeiro, 1981, p. 101-104.

<sup>34</sup> In the game of *bicho*, the one hundred finalists in the national lottery are represented by 25 animals, and betting is very cheap. Instituted in 1889, the *bicho* (animal) brought the lottery down to a level accessible to a poor and illiterate population. *Bicho* bankers and agents were necessarily persons who knew how to read and write and consequently they achieved a certain influence, and even a strong influence, on their customers. Although outlawed in 1946, the *bicho* still exists, clandestinely.

Their impoverished parades still exist, but they have been assigned to the “lesser days” and take place in avenues of less importance.

The *bicho*, the traditional game of the poor, benefited from the demographic explosion associated with the industrialization process and also from the expansion of the *favelas* and suburbs. After being outlawed, it continued to flourish clandestinely in the suburbs and *favelas* at the same time as the samba schools, also benefitting from the demographic factors, experienced a veritable explosion. Each suburb soon had “its” samba school and “its” *bicho* banker or “its” group of associated bankers. The samba school provided the *bicho* with a sure territory to develop in; on the other hand the *bicho* guaranteed the *Escola* the financial aid that it needed.<sup>35</sup> Each profited from this underground relationship. The *bicheiro* had the support of a large group of the electorate which meant that he could negotiate with the police, politicians and even the government, thereby resting his traffic on solid foundations.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the money the *bicheiros* donated to the samba schools allowed them to finance their bureaucratic organization and their sumptuous parades.

Rio’s suburbs and *favelas* were divided up among very rich “violators”, each of whom dominated a carefully-delimited urban or suburban area. A *bicheiro*’s fief generally coincided with the territorial limits of one of the major *Escolas*. Very quickly the *bicho* bankers became “honorary presidents” of “their” samba school and in fact controlled the productions and activities of their school.<sup>37</sup> There exists a visible relationship between the density of the population of a suburb, the wealth of the *bicho* banker established therein and the success of the samba school in the neighborhood in question.

<sup>35</sup> The association between the *bicho* and the samba schools does not seem to be a general phenomenon in the country, but would seem to be a phenomenon particular to the city of Rio, flowing from the specific development of that city.

<sup>36</sup> The “interests” of a major *bicheiro* largely exceed the narrow area of the *bicho* game itself. The *bicheiro* is also director of clandestine casinos in various regions of the country; he also has an involvement in smuggling and drugs. But the *bicho* game guarantees him the necessary support of a large share of the population.

<sup>37</sup> Only one of the major *Escolas* presently escapes this domination by the “evil-doers”, Uniao da Ilha; but it must be pointed out that it belongs to an atypical suburb, situated near the Galeao International Airport and inhabited by a population made up essentially of lower and middle classes, from which its *componentes* are drawn.

The rise of the *Escola* Beija-Flor from Nilópolis, the big winner in competitions of recent years, is a good illustration of the effects of this type of arrangement.

Nilópolis was but a modest settlement of small farmers when, in the early Seventies, the residents of the *favelas* of Rio, driven from their hillsides, came to settle there in great numbers. After ten years the population had reached 200,000 inhabitants (more than 20,000 persons per square kilometer) and, naturally, the farmers had disappeared. The *bicho* network developed quite rapidly under the leadership of a new banker who had come from the upper levels of the profession. This banker maneuvered with skill and quickly won over his clientele, made up of this displaced population group which, because of its having been transplanted, had lost its connections with the *bicheiros* of its old neighborhood. Having succeeded in becoming one of the most powerful of his peers, he took an interest in the modest samba school which paraded in the streets of Nilópolis during Carnival time and performed so well that it was suddenly elevated to a position among the great *Escolas*. After 1976, the year of its first victory, the large number of Beija-Flor participants, the dazzling wealth of their costumes, the effervescent imagination of the great *carnavalesco*, hired at major cost to organize the parade, have all made it possible for this school to retain in an almost uninterrupted manner the first place position before its rivals.<sup>38</sup>

Each banker or group of bankers watches over his territory jealously, fearing the incursion of an enemy. Fierce rivalry exists between the various bankers, a rivalry which sometimes degenerates into bloody conflicts, gangland-type settling of accounts and even crimes. This bitter and permanent competition adds to and enhances the natural violence of the suburb, creating an extremely weighted atmosphere which makes life dangerous for its inhabitants. But the impoverished population, crowded into these slums, often finds in the *bicho* networks and the samba schools the means enabling it to exist and to survive, the hope of achieving social

<sup>38</sup> Beija-Flor of Nilópolis thus breached the veritable wall which the “very large” and “traditional” *Escolas* had managed to erect around the prizes, which for a long time they alone had won. The four “very large” schools are Mangueira, Portela, Imperio Serrano, Salgueiro. Ribeiro, 1981, p. 16.

advancement or finding an instant fortune. It is not surprising, then, that the slum-dwellers become a powerful ally of the *bicheiros* and the samba schools.

It is a fact that the *bicho* is a source of employment, both for the relatively peaceful jobs that it can offer to the simple agents who sell the tickets, and for the recruiting of body-guards and the groups of thugs responsible for the personal protection of the banker and his family, from their rivals and from the police. Because of the extraordinary impulse they have given to the samba schools and to the carnival festivities, the *bicheiros* have made an undeniable contribution to the development of the labor market in the suburbs. Having become powerful business operations owning huge, sumptuous headquarters, with bars and restaurants and a complex internal administration requiring a large staff to guarantee proper functioning of day-to-day operations and to handle recreational activities, the samba schools provide suburban residents with honest and stable jobs. Moreover, they open the door to possible socio-economic advancement for persons with artistic talents—musicians, dancers, choreographers, plastic artists and others—who, without the schools, would have remained unnoticed, unable to find the means for developing their talent.<sup>39</sup> Sovereign over his fiefdom and patron of a large samba school, the *bicheiro* has become the major distributor of favors in the suburb, and his sway over the population has been tremendously strengthened by this fact.<sup>40</sup>

The *Escola* represents for the *bicheiro* the very means of his integration into suburban and metropolitan society. The performances of “his” magnificent parade on the stage during carnival are the tangible proof of his power over people and of the size of his fortune.<sup>41</sup> The samba school is thus a powerful weapon in his

<sup>39</sup> The transfer of the capital from Rio to Brasilia in 1960 deprived inhabitants of the suburbs of an important part of the job market located in Rio. The effects of this transfer on the suburban masses has not yet been studied.

<sup>40</sup> The *bicheiro* also has his private police force which guarantees order in the neighborhood where he lives. This protection—which no one attempts to hide—is welcomed by the little people who want to live their lives honestly and peacefully, and who consequently are quite happy to support the *bicheiros*.

<sup>41</sup> The enormous sums spent by the bankers for the samba schools are tax deductible since the *Escolas* are legally defined as “non-profit organizations, intended for the development of culture and recreation”. According to Brazilian law, donations made to these types of institutions are deducted directly from tax liabilities.

hands. It masks, or causes to be accepted, his illicit activities.<sup>42</sup> But in order to counterbalance the underground activities upon which his generosity is based, the school must provide an absolutely impeccable façade of respectability.

The decade of the Seventies witnessed the definitive victory of the samba schools which became the principal attraction, the veritable “hit” of the Rio carnival season and the model for carnival activities in other Brazilian cities and even the very symbol of carnival throughout the land. While officially retaining the upper hand over the carnival celebrations, the Rio municipal authorities, first, followed by Riotur, the government institution specially created to handle tourism in the city, increasingly delegated their powers to the *Associação das Escolas de Samba*. This was in recognition of the fact that the *Associação* as an institution merited the respect and the confidence of the State with which it had thereby become allied, despite the dominant role played by the *bicheiros*.

Two other interesting facts should be noted. On the one hand there was the division of Rio into two quite distinct sectors carved out in relation to the location of samba schools and the *bicho*'s territory, with a northern zone, headquarters of the samba schools, where residents are strongly involved in the celebrations, and also in the agencies of the *bicho*, which are quite numerous there; and a southern zone where there are no samba schools and whose residents take part in the Carnival only as simple spectators—if they do not leave town entirely for the occasion—and where the *bicho*'s activities are very, very limited.

Secondly, the reversal of roles played by the various social classes in the celebrations, brought on by the rise of the *Escolas de Samba*, must be analyzed. The lower classes, formerly kept at a distance during the four days of the Mardi Gras festivities, have now become the leading figures of the celebration, while persons in the upper and middle social classes, who used to be the stars of the event, either flee the city during this period or are reduced to being simple spectators from the distant heights of their expensive grandstands. This role reversal does not prevent the parade of the samba

<sup>42</sup> The *bicheiros* also protect the football clubs in the suburbs, and for the same reasons.

schools from exciting enthusiasm and “collective madness” in both participants and spectators; but the socio-economic differences are no less significant.

#### NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN ZONES: DIVISION AND INTEGRATION

Analyzing the development of the carnival of Rio over recent years, it is possible to note not only the reversal of roles and functions of the different social components of the celebration, but also that these components were never involved in the carnival in the same way.<sup>43</sup> From 1850 to 1950 approximately, the “street carnival” was dominated by the upper and middle social classes.

During the four days of Carnival, each afternoon the wealthy families paraded costumed in their automobiles. In the evening they went to the balls. On the night of Mardi Gras itself, the dazzling parade of the large carnival societies took place, featuring beautiful young ladies expensively dressed, who greeted the public with their smiles. The audience was crowded along the sidewalks and was made up of the “little people”. By 1950 the streets were reserved for the parades, that is the city’s lower classes, and grandstands were being constructed along the sidewalks for the upper classes of the population, thereby shielding them from any contact with the crowds. During these two periods of the Rio carnival, the distinct roles of actors and spectators accentuated for the period of the festivities the divisions separating the two kinds of participation. A large contingent of police maintained “order” during the celebration to prevent role reversals or undue intrusions into one or the other of the carefully delimited areas.

This observable division in the celebration corresponds to a division in the city itself. The actors of today, that is the persons who participate in the parades, are the poor inhabitants of the city who live in the northern sector. Spectators, on the other hand, come for the most part from the wealthier areas of the southern zone. The quite clear separation which can be noted during the

<sup>43</sup> The first carnival parade in Rio, copied after Italian parades, took place in 1856 and was presented as a sign that European refinement and elegance was beginning to take root in Brazil and would take the place of the old Portuguese carnival, thought crude and vulgar. See Von Simson, 1978.

celebration prolongs an already existing division in the standard urban organization.

Inhabitants of the northern zone, directly involved in the celebration (whether they perform in it or whether they contribute their work to help make it possible, as seamstresses, embroiderers, carpenters, painters, etc.), do not have the possibility of becoming spectators. For one thing the cost of the tickets greatly exceeds their financial means; and the high grandstands erected along both sides of the avenue completely block the stage, which they would be unable to see. On the other hand, residents of the southern part of the city, who pay for their seats, enjoy the beauty of the "super-spectacle" in comfort. The same north-south division can also be felt when analyzing the *bicho* phenomenon. The *bicho* agencies thrive in the northern zone, stronghold of the "violators", but they are much rarer and less seen in the southern area.

The lower social classes in Rio, and in Brazil in general, are made up primarily of dark-skinned persons, indicating an African origin. They are considered part of a vulgar civilization, one still close to barbarism, the opposite of the refined and cultivated European practices of the upper social classes in the southern zone.

The differences, then, are quite clear between the southern sector, seat of economic progress, of political life, of cultural activities, of comfortable living, of family security, well protected by the police. In other words, this is a "society of order". On the other side of the divide is the northern zone, the refuge of clandestine gambling and of crime, the realm of the lazy, thugs and riff-raff; in other words the field of action for "the dangerous society".<sup>44</sup> Rejection and distance seem to dominate relations between the two parts of the city. It seems that an underground struggle has existed between the two forever.

The *bicheiros*, who have their hands on the reins controlling the perfectly legitimate activities of the samba schools and, at the same time, on clandestine gambling activities, contraband and drugs, are, so to speak, "generals" in a sort of urban guerrilla warfare waged by the lower classes against the upper classes. It is a two-sided guerrilla war, a hidden side of break-ins, robbery, murder and violence in general, and a visible side made up of the richly

<sup>44</sup> This terminology is based on that of Louis Chevalier, 1958.

extravagant carnival parades. Each of these facets is an expression of popular strength.

In this respect, the rise of the samba schools within the context of the carnival festivities, in which they have become the leading element, can be considered a victory of the oppressed inhabitants of the suburbs and *favelas*, an initial victory which can only be but a prelude to the future reversal of socio-economic and political hierarchies. The production of the “greatest show in the world” is only possible through the discipline which the participants are able to impose upon themselves and by the strict control which the directory exercises upon them. The dazzling carnival spectacle provides a formal rebuttal of accusations of disorder and illegality which are often brought against the population of the suburbs.

By demonstrating that they are capable of creating and presenting a top quality show, the residents of the northern zone also provide proof that they are just as “civilized” as inhabitants of the southern zone, and that imagination, intelligence, opulence and even erudition are in no way the exclusive property of the Whites in the upper layers of society.<sup>45</sup> All these things would tend to prove that an eventual rise to power of the masses would not lead necessarily to degradation and diminishing of the quality of life and of its values, but, on the contrary, to their enhancement.

However, an opposite interpretation could be equally valid. It must not be forgotten that during the carnival, from up in their reserved seats where they applaud the parades with enthusiasm, the upper layers of society continue to affirm their dominant socio-economic position. Conscious of their power, they know that they have made realization of the festivities possible and that through the authorities and the police they control the action. The very discipline of the parade would in this case be additional proof of their hegemony and of the submission of the lower classes to them.

This submission would be confirmed by the reproduction of dominant political-economic models during the parades, by the bureaucratic structuring of the schools and by their attachment to

<sup>45</sup> The choice of erudite themes for the parades, of historical characters portrayed by participants and costumes inspired from those of 18th-century European nobility or taken from Antiquity were all meant to represent proof of the erudition and refinement of the lower classes.

traditional morality, exemplified in the formulation of their statutes and declarations.

Originating in the disadvantaged sectors of Rio, the samba schools manifest bourgeois values (reasonableness, discipline, erudition, morality). They flaunt their respectability eminently, and by their fierce competition, their pugnaciousness, their unlimited consumer appetites and the reasoned structure of their organization, they prove their indisputable adaptation to the ruling capitalist society.<sup>46</sup>

The appearance of the samba schools in the late Twenties was born of an attempt made by the least favored classes of urban Rio society to find a way out of their traditional social pattern and to create a new form of society, going beyond the narrow framework limited solely to family and neighborhood ties and responding to needs created by the demographic and industrial expansion of the city. But this effort at making a rational organization of their activities constituted a direct threat to the privileged position of the upper class, confronted with an adversary whose numbers were far greater. Initially the development of the samba schools took on a sense of an uprising of the oppressed classes against the oppressing classes. Aware of the danger, the latter group quickly applied itself to regaining control of these popular activities for its own benefit.

The forbidding of any form of political or socio-economic criticism or protest during the parades was one of the means conceived in order to prevent any possible collective arousal of consciousness in the suburbs. Moreover, by entrusting the *Associação das Escolas de Samba* with the task of distributing grant funds and by allowing the Association the privilege of selecting competition juries, the State made of the federation its associate and, above all, the official means of monitoring the proper conduct of the *Escolas*. Only those

<sup>46</sup> Present discussions of a possible payment to be made to participants in the carnival parades are additional proof of this adaptation. Those in favor of this measure rise up against the exploitation represented by the "superspectacle". In fact even the most modest participants are required to draw upon their meager resources to contribute to a realization of the carnival show since they must pay their monthly dues and especially must buy their own personal costume. However, beneficiaries of the event are the State and the *bicheiros*. Such a payment to participants, it is said, would be a just remuneration. On the other hand the "traditionalists" oppose what they call the "outrageous commercialization" of a "formerly spontaneous festival".

schools which had earned the right to do so by their obedience would be authorized to receive grants, be permitted to organize a procession or be eligible for winning a prize.

When seen from this point of view, the legalization of the samba school and the granting of financial aid are no longer seen as a victory for the masses, but as instruments used by the State, as representative of the upper classes, to reinforce their predominance over the suburban populace. From then on the parades down the central avenues of the city cease to represent an affirmation of rights acquired through noble struggle and instead become a reward for "good behavior". As legal representative of the upper classes, the State has attempted through this means to "domesticate" the masses by taking control of the "recreational societies" which had been "invented" by the residents of the suburbs.<sup>47</sup>

And so there was a coincidence in time of efforts by an unorganized popular mass to equip itself with a structure compatible with an increasingly complex urban society and the attempts by the upper classes, aware of the dangers which this mass represented for them, to acquire control of this spontaneous formation. By enclosing residents of the suburbs in the tightly controlled framework of the *Escolas*, it would perhaps be possible to prevent the constitutive elements of this framework from slipping toward the state of the "dangerous classes" and they could thereby be maintained in the harmless condition of the "working classes".

The parade of the samba schools, therefore, seems today to express more the socio-economic, political and cultural domination of the upper classes, which throughout time have always been able to maintain their dominant position, than the efforts of the lower classes to liberate themselves from this dominance. In any case it is witness to the numerical force of the lower classes and their organizational capacity. Behind the brilliant parade which can be seen today there looms the urban disequilibrium which results from the wild spread of capitalism such as it exists in Brazil.

<sup>47</sup> The creation by the State in 1943 of workers labor unions closely connected to the Ministry of Labor defused another possible source of rebellion among the popular classes, since this placed their protest actions in a controlled structure. Other forms of control of the masses, originating spontaneously in the thirties, but which were taken over by the State, were the major football clubs and the new Afro-Brazilian cult, *Umbanda*. For this see Pereira de Queiroz, 1981.

An analysis of the roles of the samba schools thus leads to two contradictory conclusions. One is that the parade of the samba schools represents an initial victory of the oppressed masses; the other is a demonstration of the fact that the privileged classes have been able to overthrow it. This double interpretation reflects the ambiguity apparently inherent in social data, which always are multi-faceted. It is often difficult to discern the most important among these various facets. But perhaps it is necessary to carry the analysis further, to see the facts in more detail in order to grasp their essential meaning.

#### THE PARADE OF THE RIO SAMBA SCHOOLS: A BATTLEFIELD

To complete our analysis we must return to a primordial feature of the relationships between the samba schools: the unbridled competition which puts them in opposition in the hopes of triumphing during the Carnival festivities.

In fact the parade of the *Escolas* is a veritable battlefield where jealous competitors face off, motivated by a desire to establish an indisputable and enduring superiority over one another. But here the adversaries are not the upper classes, enemies of the suburbs, nor the wealthy residents of the southern zone, but all the other samba schools, collectively and individually. Despite the evident separation between the street and the grandstands during the celebrations, the larger divisions are to be found elsewhere, namely among the *Escolas*; and the feelings of alienation and aversion which are provoked lead to deeds, and even to crimes.<sup>48</sup>

Developing along with "its" suburb, the samba school became the symbol of this suburb, a manifestation which takes place not just during the carnival period but all year long, since activities continue without interruption month after month. The bitterness of the competition during Carnival significantly strengthens the real solidarity which unites residents of the same suburb. These

<sup>48</sup> This explains in part the increase in crimes during the carnival period. On the day when the jury's decision is made, rivalry is heightened. The explosions of joy and hate are so strong that an important police effort is required to maintain order among the "supporters" from the various *Escolas*. The winners go home to celebrate their victory in "their" suburb. These celebrations are confined to the area of this suburb alone.

persons feel themselves bound by the powerful collective interest which is represented by a possible victory in the parade competition, that is, in a public competition, covered by the media and which attracts the attention of the entire country, and even the entire world. The inhabitants of a suburb are perfectly aware of the fact that the “super-spectacle” in which they are participating is the result of their combined efforts. They share without distinction the same hope, the same anguish, the same happiness in case of victory, and the motives for their disagreement and jealousies remain in the background. The samba school contributes to a stifling of quarrels and seems to eliminate, or at least lessen, the bitterness born of socio-economic differences. It thus constitutes in each suburb a powerful factor for internal cohesion.

But the role of the samba schools can be seen quite differently, depending on the level of the person looking at them. Within the same suburb, the school levels off differences and plays a plainly integrating role. It is an entirely different matter when one looks at relationships between the suburbs. The carnival competition heightens their rivalries, encourages animosity and multiplies disputes. These conflicting reactions, which can even lead to hatred, cancel any possibility for union which might allow residents of the northern zone to combat together against the socio-economic, political and cultural hegemony of the southern zone. And there the role of the samba schools becomes plainly disruptive. They separate the elements which could come together in a collective action threatening the established order in Rio. Should we conclude from this that the samba schools play an ambiguous role? Before affirming such a statement, we should take the analysis even further.

Each *Escola* has its “supporters” scattered throughout the various rich and well-to-do neighborhoods of the southern zone, among whom can be found well-known personalities. When a famous person declares his preference for one or another *Escola* the prestige of the school increases. The *componentes* of the school and the inhabitants of the suburb involved feel themselves enhanced in their self-esteem when they know that “their” group has been distinguished by the “good people”.<sup>49</sup> There are bonds created

<sup>49</sup> It is not unusual for singing and popular music stars, important football

between the poor suburbs in the north and the wealthy neighborhoods in the south. The interest shown in a samba school works in the opposite direction to the socio-economic divisions. Consequently, the school plays once again an integrating role within the overall social structure of the city.

This influence is all the greater in that the *Escolas de Samba*, by giving their support to the action of the *bicheiros*, associate the “orderly society” with the “criminal society”, also weaving tight connections between the “working classes” and “dangerous classes”, in the northern zone where such classes proliferate as well as in the southern zone itself where their presence is less important. Each *bicheiro* openly conducts his private guerrilla warfare against the other *bicheiros*. This guerrilla activity is confined to each neighborhood, and so to each school, but it can also be extended to the entire city. However, the *bicheiros* should certainly not be thought of as representing the “generals” in the guerrilla warfare of the poor; the struggle they are involved in against other *bicheiros* is meant to defend only their own interests. Moreover, their very existence is only possible thanks to a division of society between a minority of wealthy persons, economically and politically dominant, and the mass of the poor, among whom they nourish hopes of acquiring a miraculous fortune without effort. The poor masses provide the *bicheiros* with resources both in money and in the strength of their numbers, whereas the upper levels of society ensure their power, at least to the extent that the *bicheiros* are tolerated by the upper classes. But this is almost always the case, since the former are the objective allies of the latter.

The integration of the *bicheiros* into metropolitan society requires the maintenance of the division between rich and poor, which means there is an absolute necessity to raise obstacles to the formation of a united front by the poor suburbs in the northern zone against the wealthy neighborhoods of the southern zone and to safeguard the existing order. The *bicheiros* must encourage at all costs the rivalries and dissensions between neighborhoods, for these are the active ingredients of their integration into metropolitan society, even though they have no legal right to exist since they

players, high society VIPs and famous politicians to make known their preferences for this or that samba school. Some even go so far as to participate in its procession.

violate existing legislation. The rivalry between the samba schools thus constitutes a major advantage for the *bicheiros* in their effort to maintain their positions, and the competition which sets the samba schools in opposition then becomes the efficient instrument of their integration into *carioca* society.

Serving as foundation for the *bicho* bankers, the samba school, which is part of the "orderly society" through its organization, its *componentes* and its functions, as well as being part of the "criminal society" through its patrons, tends to demonstrate that the division between the two parts of society is not as clean as might be thought. In fact, if in the suburbs of the northern zone the *Escolas de Samba* bring together "working classes" and "dangerous classes", at the level of the metropolitan society the enthusiasm stirred up by their processions unites the inhabitants of the northern zone, whose violent quarters represent the "criminal society". Any division between "order" and "crime", between the establishment of rules which are essential to social life and violation of these rules thus seems in contradiction with the side-by-side existence within the samba school of the *componentes* recruited from among the respectable representatives of the "orderly society" and the shadier representatives of the "criminal society", both of which thereby manage to get along quite well. In the suburbs, as in the metropolitan areas, both elements of society, fully involved in the samba schools, are connected by an entire network of subtle relationships, generally underground, which are revealed and fully developed within organizations such as the samba schools.

In sum, the essential characteristic of the samba schools is to be an integrating factor in *carioca* society, a factor which, paradoxically, exacerbates certain internal divisions of this society and even leads to conflicts and a constant struggle. But the dissensions being discussed here are not the kind which endanger the social order. By developing competition between the *Escolas* and encouraging their rivalries, the upper classes seem to all appearances to be applying the motto "Divide and conquer", a motto which the *bicheiros* share as well, in an unspoken mutual agreement, but one that is essential for retaining hegemony.

The samba schools, which have been transformed by their massive success into the essential attraction of the carnival season in Rio and in all of Brazil, thus form an extremely important element

supplying internal cohesion to the various levels of the national society and to the entire country since their “super-spectacle” has become one of Brazil’s prides. The enthusiasm, which makes the entire country stir in excitement before their processions, proves this.

Behind this demonstration of power provided by the *Escolas de Samba* when they set the imposing mass of their *alas* in movement, symbol of the power of the popular masses, behind their joyful dances, which seem so freely exuberant during the celebrations but which are in fact rigorously controlled by the whistle-blowing of the leader, their primary function is hidden. And this primary function consists in reinforcing the internal solidarity of a society formed of socially discordant classes, in consolidating the existing socio-economic, political and cultural hierarchies. Their fierce rivalry at the moment of the festivities and throughout the year is the guarantee of the permanence of society as it now is. Each school, in its rational organization, reflects the image of this society and celebrates the order which it proclaims. Order is in fact the fundamental element in the realization of the carnival celebration, and a rigorous respect for it is an essential condition for determining the victory of a competing school.

The powerful rhythm of the drums and tam-tams during the carnival events, which excites the same emotions in both the actors and the spectators, and which imposes the same behavior, the same gestures and the same cadences on all: is this not ultimately an expression of the primordial necessity of submitting to order?

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