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***Americans Performing Afro-Brazilian maracatu and afoxé:
Navigating Race, Religion, Appropriation, and the Potential of
Anti-Racist Pedagogy***

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World music ensembles offer considerable potential for raising awareness of a *diverse* array of socio-cultural issues. However, all too often presentations of world music and dance overly romanticize their ability to foster cross-cultural understanding, or they are dismissed outright as performing a multiculturalism that reinforces racial stereotypes. This article explores Performance as Research (PAR) with Afro-Brazilian music and dance ensembles in Austin, Texas, specifically focusing on how performance can inform anti-racist pedagogies. I draw from ethnographic research, over six years' participation in the scene, and continuing pedagogical engagement with ensemble members to examine teaching, learning, and performing *samba* as well as *maracatu-nação* and *afoxé*— musics explicitly linked to Afro-matrix religions. PAR provides us with a framework for engaging with the contradictions and complexities of Austinites performing Afro-Brazilian music and dance. I argue that experiences gained in performance uncover the localized embodiment of (trans)national spatio-racial formations, and become the essential components in implementing anti-racist pedagogies that advance efforts to optimize cross-cultural understanding and sustain engagement with communities by facilitating collaborations between culture-bearers, academics, and artists.

PAR and Brazilian Music in Austin

Recently, scholars have investigated the rapid proliferation of Brazilian music ensembles around the world, producing studies on *samba*, *capoeira*, and *tambor de crioula* in such cities as Toronto, Montreal, New York, New Orleans, as well as in Wales and New Zealand.¹ Home to at least 15 active Brazilian music and dance ensembles, Austin is clearly part of this global trend. However, it remains absent from the scholarship, a significant oversight given Austin's branding as the "Live Music Capital of the World."

The Brazilian music scene in Austin is ideal location for exploring PAR into spatio-racial formations and anti-racist pedagogical interventions. The scene is situated within the broader context of world music performance in Austin. Depending on the group, genre, venue, or event, local performers tend to present Afro-Brazilian music as a distinct and unique category while simultaneously drawing on associations with Latin dance music (some liken *samba* and *fornó* to *salsa* and *cumbia*) or with Afro-diasporic music (some connect *maracatu*, *afoxé*, and *coco* with notions of "African drumming") in

order to promote their music to a largely non-Brazilian audience. Significantly, the vast majority of participants—both performers and audience members— are white Americans and the genres performed are almost entirely Afro-Brazilian.

This setting presents a unique opportunity for PAR into the embodied performance of racial formations that are both highly localized as well as (trans)national and simultaneously productive of space.² Both Robitaille and Pravaz argue that, in addition to “sharing” aspects of the music and culture, ensembles performing Afro-Brazilian music and dance in Canada can disrupt and challenge local racial stereotypes and social hierarchies, even if only momentarily.³ Although I do not disagree with these perspectives, I argue that for performers and audience members alike, participating in Afro-Brazilian music and dance performance by itself is not a guarantee that individuals will embark on discussions about race, racism, and, in particular, self-reflection about concepts such as White privilege. Indeed, other authors have long made similar critiques of multicultural music education.⁴

On the surface, ensembles presenting Brazilian music and dance in Austin appear to reproduce multiculturalist discourse at best, or the unknowing continuation of a (neo)colonialist racial project grounded in the (often sexual) White ownership and domination over Black bodies and culture at worst. A deeper analysis, however, reveals a complex entanglement of potentially conflicting embodied meanings. On the one hand, because Brazilian genres are generally characterized as fun and sexy dance music, performances enact the “keep Austin weird” ethos.⁵ This often includes the construction of a White racial identity that views itself as alternative and progressive. For audience members, as well as performers, this is consistent with the branding of Austin as a utopian space of hip cultural diversity, sounding out a liberal cosmopolitanism that ultimately masks Austin’s racial inequalities via the exotic and erotic spectacle of race. The extent to which these ensembles are embedded in the broader racialized civic dramaturgy of Austin is beyond the scope of this article.⁶ For our purposes here, it is important to note that because the pedagogy of the groups typically avoids topics such as race, racism, and gender, and because such performances tend to represent what Eric Lott might call sites where racial/sexual “freedom and play meet,” these spaces tend to reinforce rather than expose and critique racial stereotypes.⁷ As a result, the groups often

unintentionally perpetuate certain aspects of racial bias and exclusion while simultaneously attempting to create moments of cross-cultural encounter and understanding.

On the other hand, the very nature of performance as embodied practice allows us insights into how (trans)national spatial and racial formations are *enacted*. It is through material knowledge gained in performance that practitioners become newly aware of how they occupy racialized identities and are compelled to navigate concerns about appropriation and respectful engagement with cultural forms, including religious expression. In other words, despite seemingly contradictory engagement with racial stereotypes and a performance practice which tends to reify many hegemonic elements of Whiteness, performers equally gain knowledge about how their bodies (re)produce race and place—knowledge which is an essential component of effective anti-racist education. We must therefore reevaluate performance *as* anti-racist pedagogy. Specifically, I suggest we look beyond the power of any one performance piece, and consider instead the “slow burn” pedagogical potential of performance practice. To illustrate this point, I will begin with anti-racist critiques of multiculturalism before exploring how performance orients its participants toward an awareness of how racial formations are (re)produced in the body and thus prompting them for broader anti-racist pedagogical engagement.

Learning Rhythm or Culture? Performance-as-Research and Anti-Racist Pedagogies

In response to my inquiries about the relationship of music to social issues in Brazil, performers frequently commented on the structural limitations of time in rehearsal contexts and the paramount goal of learning the repertoire well enough to perform. Rachel explains, “as an Austin Samba school community, [when] we get together, we’re just there to dance. There’s not a lot of speaking about current global issues or things that are happening in Brazil.” Sarah recalls “we [are] so busy learning steps and learning music and practice, practice, practice that we kind of [forget why we started dancing (i.e., fun, community) in the first place] ... It kind of [becomes] show business, I guess... because we’re just pumping: gigs and choreography and sweat and tears.” As Arnold explains it, the primary goal is “to have a performance ensemble that sounds awesome. There’s not always time to go into the historical aspects of it.”

“Cultural” discussion varies widely among the groups. David, a drummer who has experience with both Austin Samba and Maracatu Texas, feels that Maracatu Texas addresses the cultural aspects of the music more effectively than Austin Samba.⁸ Vanessa feels Maracatu members need to do more. She explains that she is very happy people in Austin are interested in and learning to perform maracatu: “I love that people are doing that.” However, she wishes the leadership “took more time to explain to people what it means.” I clarify: “When you say that, are you talking about explaining to the people in the group? Or in the audiences at shows? or both?” Vanessa responds, “In the group. I wish he would take the time [to educate them]. . . . He was like ‘Yeah, there are some videos they can watch,’ but the videos are in Portuguese. They can’t [watch them for that reason].” Vanessa describes the limitations of the current pedagogical approach in Austin ensembles by comparing it to learning a language. She recalls one rehearsal:

But he teaches, “‘Oi,’ that’s how you respond.” So [he is able to create a] call and response, and that’s how you respond. And in my mind I was like, “Dude, when you [learn] how to speak English you cannot just repeat something that someone says to you: Repeat this. No, you need to read.” Give them the opportunity to . . . *understand* what the lyrics are saying. Give them the opportunity to understand the context in which these lyrics were written. What they really mean. You know? That’s what is missing. (emphasis in original)

These comments reflect Deborah Bradley’s work on anti-racist music education. She places multiculturalism within a wider ideology of Whiteness that “obfuscates our implication in maintaining systems of privilege and oppression.”⁹ She further acknowledges that “the traditional [Western music education] focus on music as aesthetic object occludes the social issues embedded in music.”¹⁰ Rather than working as an agent of social change, multicultural music education—the approach most commonly informing performance in Brazilian ensembles in Austin— “reifies whiteness and otherness” by removing racial politics from the music.¹¹

Bradley’s critique—focusing exclusively on music as aesthetic object to the detriment of the socio-political forces that shape the music—appears in the pedagogy of ensembles in Austin. The Austin Samba school discourages political discussions in an effort to maintain a community open to everybody, where no one is alienated or made uncomfortable. Samba School members shared with me incidents in which this policy was rather aggressively enforced. For example, Jessica, a self-identified bi-racial women

from the United States, began as a dancer in Austin Samba and has since moved to performing in the *bateria* (percussion section). She emailed me to share an incident that she recalled after our first conversation. She remembered talking to Austin Samba members about her first trip to Brazil. Jessica wrote:

Among other things, I mentioned that the poverty and disadvantages faced by Black Brazilians [were] especially heart-wrenching. So many of them were begging in the streets. And among the well-dressed young urban professionals in downtown Rio, not a Black face could be found. Well! That set off a firestorm of replies. One particularly memorable reply *suggested that I am racist* because I was moved by the hardships black Brazilians face but apparently didn't care about impoverished White Brazilians.

Jessica continued, "I was naïve to assume that the Austin Samba membership would be interested in the issues and problems faced by ordinary Brazilians. The smart thing was to keep quiet, stay away from controversy, and just learn the Austin Samba choreography (I was still a dancer then)." In this especially overt case, the negation of racial politics was effective and total. As Jessica put it, "I don't think I ever again tried to raise the community's awareness about anything Brazilian. Lesson learned. Perform with blinders on."

In a related example, Ryan, who is a member of both Austin Samba and Maracatu Texas, feels that in general the samba school very much discourage[s] any sort of political, religious, or "social debate over our network, our Google group, where we send out messages and get announcements." Ryan, a U.S. White male college student who has studied in Brazil, recalls:

I remember [someone] at one point shared a New York Times article on Rio just because it was about Brazil. She [told us] "Oh, the New York Times has a thing on Rio today." It was this reporter [who] went to Rio and was ...having an ethical debate with herself over whether it was acceptable to go on a favela tour. [Ultimately, she] saw Rio from the privileged tourist [perspective], and then closed her article by saying "well, I still don't know how I feel about this and that but, at least I got to visit one of the other racial democracies on earth" [chuckles]. I immediately blasted the article; I cut that quote out, put it in quotation marks, and [replied saying] "spoken like a White New York Times reporter staying in a \$250-a-night hotel room in Rio" [chuckles]. You know it was like, look at the history of that country and look at the actual reality and you will see that it is not one bit of racial democracy.

One of Austin Samba's directors responded shortly afterwards, not to "argue with any of my points" as Ryan explains, but to say "let's keep all things political and religious and

non-Samba off of this forum.” Ryan tells me that he understands the practicality of that position. “It’s just not necessarily the place ... to have the argument [with the group],” and he understands the importance of keeping the network free of clutter so that important messages about rehearsals and gigs are easily and clearly disseminated. However, he points to a lack of other available forums for such engagement with the ensemble as a whole, suggesting instead that those matters are discussed privately among a few interested members.

Jessica and Ryan’s experiences demonstrate the extent to which multiculturalist models of cross-cultural music education inform approaches to Brazilian music performance in Austin. However, the research also uncovered the extent to which performance itself invites anti-racist interventions. Indeed, it is the very nature of performance as embodied practice that often results in performers becoming keenly aware of the ways in which their bodies produce cultural meanings—even if not framed in explicitly racial terms. The examples below provide insights into how racial formations are *incorporated* and *enacted* in (trans)national ways, as well as revealing how, even in the absence of anti-racist education, performers begin to grapple with these issues, indicating the potential for performance to strengthen anti-racist pedagogies.

Embodied Racial Formations and Performance as Pedagogy

Music is a profoundly corporal experience, whether performing (in the sense of producing musical sounds with the voice, body, and instruments) or via various modes of consumption, from dancing—obviously physical—to what might be called more “passive” forms of listening. Suzzane Cusick argues that “musical performances ... are often the accompaniment of ideas performed *through* bodies by the performance *of* bodies.”¹² This includes ideas about race.

Feeling music in the body may be experienced as a profound emotional reaction, capable of transporting us through time and place. However, the ways in which music is felt occur nearly constantly in the more mundane aspects of music-making. This is especially true of particular aspects of performance that are difficult to explain, articulate, and teach. Samba “swing,” a concept that is widely understood as something that has to be learned by “feeling it,” is a prime example. If musical performance includes racial

ideas performed through bodies, it is the mundane aspects that are of particular import for anti-racist pedagogies.

James and I speak at length on the feel of the samba swing. He is a self-identified White American man and one of the principal drummers in Austin Samba, a section leader. Austin Samba is heavily invested in “getting it right,” and James affirms that the group spends considerable time working on samba swing, something that he identifies as the “it” of an effective samba performance. James explains, “It’s really bizarre to think about how the focus is so micro [in our rehearsals]. So instead of [focusing on a macro-level performance and] saying, ‘play this rhythmic phrase,’ instead it’s ‘change the way you play rhythms to *incorporate* this feel’” (emphasis added). James stresses that “the feel is more important. So if there was any one thing that I would say that ‘it’ is, it would be the feel of the music, to be culturally accurate.”

As our conversation continues to explore the minutia of samba swing, James points out that the feel is not just about musical sound but also something that influences the movements of drummers and dancers alike: “[samba] has a completely different feel [than U.S. genres], and its *way*—well, to call it ‘funky’ is not necessarily the right word—but it evokes a different kind of movement” (emphasis in original). I ask him to elaborate, and his response is worth quoting at length here:

James: So in samba swing, there are there are gaps around each down beat. Each down beat is literally heavier than all the other notes. So as opposed to [he taps very straight rhythmic pattern on the table]. It’s more like [taps with space around down beats, i.e. the samba swing]. So you have this notion of here’s the downbeat, and it has more weight. And suddenly the rhythm has this gait to it.

Me: Uh huh.

James: It’s like... when you walk, you don’t walk constantly. You don’t walk at a uniform pace. ... Your head kinda’ ...bobs up and down when you put your weight down [on each foot]. And it’s kind of like you have the weight down and then, on the other side, you have the notes that are closer together, and that’s the movement of you picking up your leg and going back down again. Picking up and going back down again. And so it’s like a lop-sided kind of tire, or like an egg rolling down a hill. Not on its side, but as if it were to roll.

Me: Right.

James: So you have this weight. A kind of slow-down and then a speed-up, and then a slow-down and a speed-up, so it creates this anticipation for each beat. That’s an incredible concept to be able to convey just by changing the placement of notes. And it

makes the rhythm that much more danceable because no matter what accents are being played ... it's *subconsciously communicating* not only this is where the beat is, but ... it's far more alive, *it's less sterile*. And it communicates *a way of moving* (emphasis added).

Me: So these ways of explaining the swing. The weight and the speed up and slow down [James: yea] and the egg analogy. Where did you get those?

James: That was, that's basically from me.

Me: From you?

James: Yeah, like in trying to find a way [of] how to explain it, not only to myself, but in trying to teach it.

In trying to express the inexplicable of samba swing, both to himself and to his students, one of the principal analogies James employs is about bodily movement—the bobbing up and down of walking. Significantly, samba swing is not only “felt” by performers, but it (in)directly delivers embedded corporal information that evokes or compels the body to move in specific ways. The rhythmic swing “subconsciously communicates,” not only “where” the down beat is, but also “a way of moving.” Thus, samba swing becomes a vehicle for embodied knowledge.

James mentions that its swing makes samba “much more danceable” and “less sterile” than other styles—for instance drum core repertoire and Texas Two-Step, he suggests. His statement indicates the extent to which sound and corporal movement is racialized. “Sterile” articulates not only sexual impotence, but also blandness, concepts linked to Whiteness. Samba, as non-White, offers an exotic and spicy counterpoint associated with sexual virility and sensual “ways of moving.”

“Feeling” the music in the body is part of a broader racial formation of the performance, and this racialization crops up in subtle ways and unexpected places. For example, at one point in our conversation on samba, I ask James, “do you think its swing makes it harder to teach?” James responds, “Yes, well, I think it makes it harder for—Brazil is in the Western hemisphere—but [for] Westerners as we would call them, it [makes] it harder for us to teach ... I've heard so many Brazilian teachers say, ‘oh, you just gotta feel it’.” Significantly, the rhythmic feel of samba articulates a distinction between culture-*cum*-nationality. Although he checks himself mid-sentence, the understanding articulated here is that Brazil is outside of the West, i.e. Brazilianness is not White.

Racial stereotypes about the body also inform how Austinites interpret and consume performances of samba. Becky, a dancer, shares a story with me about an interaction she had with an audience member after a Samba School performance at Central Market. A White man in his 50s or 60s—Becky laughs and tells me she’s not good at guessing ages, but that he had white hair—approached her and introduced himself as a doctor, a “researcher in ... orthopedic medicine, and he said ‘I’ve never seen a Caucasian person be able to separate their pelvic platform from their whatever [while] dancing’.” Becky breaks into laughter, “Yeah, he used these technical terms for [the] lower body and how [the upper and lower bodies] were moving independently [laughs] it was really funny.” The doctor tells Becky that he is working with a graduate student who is video recording people dancing, “and he’s noticing these trends by ethnicity, like you totally defy like everything we’ve ever [concluded in our analysis]...’ [chuckles]. And he’s like, ‘will you come into our lab and I’ll take a video?’ and I was like, ‘er, why don’t you just come to a [samba school] rehearsal and there’s like 100 women all defying your stereotype!’ [laughs].”

Becky’s encounter with the researcher underscores that racial stereotypes about the physicality and skill of the Black dancing body informs how Brazilian music is received in Austin. Becky’s stereotype-defying pelvis appears to confirm the point made by Robitaille and Pravaz that Brazilian performance in North America can, at least momentarily, challenge racial stereotypes and perhaps even upend racialized social hierarchies.¹³ However, this encounter also illustrates how samba performance contributes to White racial formations in Austin. That “Caucasians” could articulate such pelvic movements was understood as “weird” by the researcher and a source of pride for Becky, her body rejecting racist stereotypes. This rejection of racial stereotypes is also accompanied by a discourse of White hipsterism that reinforces the performance of Austin as a utopia for eccentric, cool, and liberal Whiteness that claims a racial tolerance that does not align with lived reality of Blacks and Latinxs in the city.¹⁴

The examples from James and Becky perfectly illustrate the complex contradictions present in cross-cultural performance. James is receiving and (re)producing stereotypical descriptions of music that align it with racialized bodies and movements, and yet through explaining how he teaches samba drumming, he is also

aware of the racialization of these processes. Becky's performance simultaneously defies stereotypes while reifying Austin as a wacky place of liberal whiteness. Performance, then, fundamentally draws our attention to bodies and movement, providing important insights into how (trans)national formations of race and place are enacted as well as a setting wherein more strategic pedagogical framing can make powerful anti-racist interventions.

Maracatu or Percussion Group? Cultural Appropriation from Recife to Austin

PAR with the ensemble Maracatu Texas proved particularly rich for exploring how performers in Austin navigate their own identities vis-à-vis their desire and enjoyment learning and performing Afro-Brazilian genres from the northeast of Brazil, including maracatu and afoxé, forms strongly associated with Afro-matrix religions. In order to understand the complex and (trans)national dynamics at work in the performance of maracatu rhythms in Austin, it is essential to consider the history of racism and cultural appropriation that frame maracatu in Recife, Pernambuco.

Maracatu-nação (maracatu nation) also known as *maracatu de baque virado* (flipped-beat maracatu), is a Black Brazilian cultural form from Recife and surrounding municipalities. Likely related to the King and Queen of Kongo coronation ceremonies of colonial-era Catholic lay brotherhoods, Maracatu-nação emerged as a distinct form of parading in Recife's carnival of the 19th century.¹⁵ The ensemble consists of a royal court whose procession is accompanied by a drum battery.¹⁶ Historically, White elites in Recife viewed maracatu with disdain, linking it with anti-Black stereotypes including criminality, poverty, "noise," and "witchcraft" (in reference to Afro-matrix religions). Between 1930-1945, officials undertook an intense campaign against Afro-religious practices in Recife that impacted maracatus as well.¹⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars and folklorists, worried the cultural manifestation was in decline, attempted to "save" maracatu from extinction.¹⁸

However, due to the international success of the "mangue beat" music in the 1990s, in particular Chico Science and Nação Zumbi, maracatu gained renewed attention. White, middle-class residents of Recife, who had long scorned maracatu, suddenly began to celebrate it, ultimately adopting it a symbol of Pernambucan identity.¹⁹ In the wake of this renewed attention, Whites in Recife started to perform maracatu, often

forming their own ensembles known as grupos percussivos. Tensions emerged between such percussion groups and the longstanding Afrodescendant maracatus-nação in Recife, with activists and maracatuzeiros/as critiquing middle-class interest in and performance of maracatu as cultural appropriation, a critique substantiated by the privileged position of the new percussion groups in the Brazilian media.²⁰

The debates between maracatus-nação and the middle-class percussion groups highlight the role of musical practices in defining spatio-racial formations in Recife. Lima describes maracatus-nação as a community-based cultural form headquartered in the neighborhoods in which most of the (overwhelmingly Black) members live. Traditional maracatus-nação have strong ties with Orixás and Afro-matrix religions of their community (*Candomblé, Jurema, Umbanda*). The calunga, the *eguns*, or ancestral Orixás embodied in a doll that accompanies maracatu processions, is just one example of such a tie.²¹ In contrast, newer percussion groups are comprised of mostly White or light-skinned, middle-class youth who live across the Recife metropolitan area; they meet, usually on the weekends and in iconic neighborhoods (Recife Antigo), to rehearse and perform.²² As such, the community-based aspects of traditional maracatu-nação, and its religious significance, are not perpetuated in percussion groups; they typically reduce maracatu-nação to its distinct aesthetic elements—“dance, music, lyrics, and performance.”²³

Maracatu Texas is certainly a product of the growing international interest in maracatu. João, the group’s founder, is a professional percussionist from the Recife metropolitan area. João self-identifies as “*pardo*,” or brown, and does not claim a Black racial identity nor affiliation with Afro-matrix religions. He does know several maracatuzeiros and is sensitive to the tensions between maracatus and folkloric percussion groups. While the audience in Austin is largely unaware of these dynamics, many members of Maracatu Texas, through their embodied practice, come to grapple with their own identities and what constitutes respectful engagement with another’s culture.

To Dance or Not to Dance? Navigating Racial Authenticity, Religion, and Appropriation

Vanessa is from Recife, identifies as biracial, and drums with Maracatu Texas. She shares with me conversations she had with some of the members of Maracatu Texas about her discomfort with the proposal to add dancers to the group. Their discussions provide insights into how performers in Austin begin to explore issues of authenticity, religion, appropriation, and even manifestations of White privilege as related to the consumption of Blackness (viewing the dancing Black body).

Vanessa explains:

Amanda wanted to have a dance group with Maracatu [Texas]. And I didn't like that idea. It bothered me very, very much. And she said, "Why does it bother you so much?" It bothers João also. And I said "Because, have you seen a maracatu group? Maracatu groups don't have dancers."

[Amanda replied] "But I saw on YouTube that it has dancers."

And I said, "It had dancers because that's a performance group . . . not a real maracatu group."

Vanessa explains that both Amanda (a White woman of Brazilian heritage raised in the United States) and Ryan (a White man from the United States) respond, "Oh, we're not a real maracatu group," implying that it would be acceptable, then, for Maracatu Texas to add dancers. In her reply, Vanessa suggests that the existence of Maracatu Texas as an Austin ensemble playing maracatu and other Afro-Brazilian rhythms from the Brazilian northeast is walking a fine line between cultural engagement and disrespectful appropriation: "I said 'I understand, but we're already so far [removed from grassroots practice] because we're not a maracatu group. We're so far from the original, let's not make it worse.'"

As she elaborates, Vanessa expresses frustration that, despite joining the ensemble to learn about Brazilian music and performing these rhythms, she perceives members' lack of understanding of the deep cultural (and racial) significance of maracatu-nação:

I don't think they understand. Amanda doesn't understand because she not from Brazil. Her parents [are] from Belém, [but] she didn't grow up with the culture of maracatu, so I think it's hard to understand this idea of identity and ownership of something. Like, you look at it on YouTube and [she says], "I see dancers." But that's not what maracatu *is*. We know that we are not a Candomblé-based maracatu. But let's not make it worse. Let's not [take] it further away from its origins. . . . It's very important to me that we don't [turn maracatu] into just like, "*confetti festinha*" [a little confetti party]: . . . No, this is not a party.

There is “a certain line” regarding performing maracatu outside of its original context that she “doesn’t want to cross,” and for Vanessa, adding dancers crosses it. She recognizes that she “[doesn’t] belong” to maracatu; she did not grow up in a neighborhood with a maracatu-nação, she has not performed in a maracatu since she was little, she does not practice Candomblé, and therefore, she is not part of the Black communities that perform the music traditionally. “But at the same time,” she tells me, “I know where [maracatu] comes from. I know because, although I was not part [of it], I was closer [than other members of Maracatu Texas].” She grew up witnessing discrimination against maracatuzeiros prior to the post-1990s transformation of maracatu into an iconic sonic marker of Pernambucan identity. For these reasons, she has a greater appreciation for what maracatu-nação means to Black communities in Recife. Vanessa is concerned that ensemble members’ engagement with maracatu is limited to videos seen on YouTube and that the cultural significance of the performance is not fully grasped by them. Instead, Vanessa fears, maracatu is reduced to a commodity for their entertainment.

Vanessa continues and tells me about the reaction she received from her bandmates about her stance on adding dancers:

Me: You said all that to Amanda?

Vanessa: Yeah, I did say that to Amanda, but it’s hard for her to understand [She said] “*Mas que besteira Vanessa, mas que besteira*” (What nonsense, Vanessa, what nonsense).

Of particular importance is Vanessa’s depiction of Ryan’s reaction because, according to Vanessa, he should have a better understanding of the issues at play because he has traveled to Recife and has some experience playing maracatu there. However, Ryan’s engagement with the repertoire in Brazil has not necessarily translated into a greater sensitivity to the racial implications of performing it:

It’s hard to explain, and even Ryan knowing [about where the music comes from did not seem to help] . . . For example, when I was talking to Ryan, he was saying, “But maracatu has dancers!” And I [said] “No, they don’t have dancers.” And he said: “Yes they do. I played in Maracatu Caxangá.”²⁴ And I said [that was] “Maracatu Caxangá, not a real maracatu, Ryan. It’s a [staged] performance of a maracatu.” [Ryan]: “Yes, but even when they have the parade, [the dancers] perform” and I said “Oh whoa, whoa, whoa, my dear. You’re not talking about dancers. You’re talking about the Queen and the King. And you’re talking about

people carrying an *agbê*²⁵ and moving to it. Nobody tells them “1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8, turn turn turn.” Nobody. “Legs up! Kick!” *Nobody* does that. There’s no such [thing], I have never seen anything like that in a real maracatu group in Brazil. So do not call the Queen and the King dancers. They are *not* dancers; they are there for a very different reason. So don’t call them dancers because that’s disrespectful.”

Note that Vanessa draws attention to how bodily movements can be misinterpreted, the consumption of those bodies in motion embedded in racialized assumptions that can erase religions significance or histories of struggle for cultural rights. Further, Vanessa compels Ryan and Amanda to reexamine issues of authenticity and respectful engagement in ways that prompt them to consider their own desires, consumption, and embodied performance vis-à-vis Black religious culture.

Vanessa continues:

We had a whole conversation about this. And he was like, “but [Maracatu Texas] is not a traditional maracatu group” [and therefore having dancers would not be inappropriate].

And I was like, “I understand, Ryan, but it’s my culture, and ... if you take that away...”

And he’s like, “But culture is [relative], this thing that [we call] culture doesn’t really exist, blah, blah, blah.” And I was like, “Are you trying to take away my identity? That’s my freaking identity. I come from Recife. I saw these things. I heard these things. I couldn’t experience [the procession and the drumming] in my own skin because I knew that I didn’t belong there, my parents’ didn’t allow me to. When it became popular [in the 1990s] I had a little taste of it. I have so much respect [for maracatu] because I went to Candomblé houses, I went to Casa de Xambá,²⁶ I learned about Casa de Xambá, and I have so much respect for it. Don’t try to take away from me saying that culture is [irrelevant]. I was like “Fucking Bullshit, man! Are you trying to take my identity away!?” [laughs]. It was like a very heated conversation . . . but then at the end of the day we’re like, ok, I respect you and I don’t judge you.

For these members of Maracatu Texas, the discussion reiterates that performance is constitutive of identity, not only the cultural identities of those who created and continue to maintain maracatu-nação, but their own identities situated in Austin. In this case, joining Maracatu Texas, gaining some knowledge of the groups in Recife, did not in itself lead to anti-racist practice, but rather a reinforcing of misinterpreted consumption and appropriation. Without Vanessa’s intervention, this issue—the presence of dancers as

reflecting broader debates about racial appropriation—would not likely have been addressed by Maracatu Texas. This example illustrates the need for utilizing not only anti-racist pedagogies in such ensembles, but also culturally sustained anti-racist pedagogy that embraces multiple and often contradictory perspectives from cultural producers themselves. The question of dancers also underscores how issues of authenticity—what James referred to as “getting it right”—involves more than appropriate and respectful engagement with foreign cultural forms. It presents a valuable opportunity to address issues of race and its intersections—gender, sexuality, urban space, economic inequality—with social justice not only abroad, but, perhaps more importantly, in the local settings in which these forms are being consumed and (re)produced. Continuing reflections with Ryan, Vanessa, and myself underscore the ability of such discussions to unmask how whiteness operates, the localized racial implications of staging maracatu, and underscore the importance of performance for generating such debates.

Navigating Racial Authenticity, Religion, and Appropriation with “Paper Drums”

In September, 2017 Maracatu Texas hosted Dudu, a percussionist and long-time active member of Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante do Recife, for about a week of group rehearsals, workshops, private lessons, and guest performances. I attended one of the group rehearsals led by Dudu. I arrive very excited and eager to both speak to Dudu about Recife, get his take on teaching maracatu to non-(Black)Brazilians, and to learn from him. However, I am unable to introduce myself when I arrive. He and João are both very busy tuning drums. I find them both either on their knees or squatting over *alfaias*²⁷ that are on the floor, their left hands bracing the wooden shells of the drums, their right hands pulling hard the ropes that tighten the leather drum heads. There isn’t time for me to chat with Dudu prior to the start of the rehearsal; as we form a circle, I am offered an *agogô*²⁸ and join in.

Speaking to the group of thirty drummers in Portuguese with one of the four Brazilian members of Maracatu Texas translating, Dudu repeatedly talked about Estrela Brilhante in ways that stressed a separation between a real maracatu-nação and a percussion group. Addressing Maracatu Texas as a grupo percussivo, he articulated his excitement that the members were interested in learning about his culture and playing this

music, but cautioned that they need to understand where it comes from. Dudu repeatedly framed maracatu as a form of cultural resistance to enslavement and racism, stressing the close ties between maracatu-nação and Candomblé terreiros. Reinforcing the distinction between “real” maracatus and the activities of percussion groups is one way in which maracatuzeiros/as and Black activists combat cultural appropriation and the consumption of Black cultural forms removed from the bodies and communities that created them. Interjected throughout the presentation were explanations of how maracatu is performed in Estrela Brilhante (discussed and understood by the audience as an example of maracatu-nação authenticity par excellence). Dudu linked Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious resistance (*resistência*) against oppression to physical endurance (also *resistência* in Portuguese). The linguistic play and broader allegory of resisting racism and resisting fatigue while playing strenuous and physically demanding music was no doubt lost in translation on the vast majority of the English-speaking attendees.²⁹

Significant for our purposes here is how often Dudu articulated maracatu authenticity by conflating the physicality of the body’s interaction with the materiality of the alfaia drums. “Real,” authentic rehearsals (unlike what takes place in Austin) last for hours, and “we don’t put the drums down.” Dudu makes a clear separation between authentic maracatu-nação performance practice—maracatu-nação is physically demanding—and that of the aficionados in percussion groups that perform maracatu rhythms. This distinction is embodied in the drums themselves. Dudu points to the padded nylon straps most of the drummers use to secure their alfaias, explaining that in Estrela Brilhante, drummers use rough and hard ropes that cut into the skin. Further, the group uses alfaias made of *macaíba* wood, a local palm tree. Alfaias made of *macaíba* are “stronger,” “heavier,” more demanding to play physically, and produce a louder and distinct timbre. Dudu strikes a Maracatu Texas member’s alfaia and then beats his own (*macaíba*) alfaia for comparison. Maracatu Texas drummers express awe at the loudness of the drum. Dudu explains that drums in the U.S. also have foam inside, which dampens the sound. “It’s no good, take that out!” he admonishes, “it’s only good if you’re going to make a recording.” Dudu stresses his point by saying, “We call these drums “paper drums!” The point is clear: performers in Austin are not, and can never be, a “real” maracatu, and our lightweight attempts at performing maracatu only serve to reaffirm the

boundaries between the authentic Black expression of maracatu-nação and the music of percussion groups that celebrate the form and play its rhythms.

After a few minutes of drumming, a man interrupts our rehearsal. He is from the liquor store next door. He is very polite and claims to love the music, but asks if there is anything that can be done: the shelves of expensive liquor against the wall are shaking and he is afraid the bottles will fall. Our original setup had the alfaías against the right wall of the studio, where, despite being “paper drums,” their loud bass vibrations apparently reached and shook the shelves next door. The news was met with “yeahs!” and enthusiastic laughing! We flip positions, lining the snares against the wall in question, which seems to solve the problem. Although we will never be an authentic maracatu, and we might not “*faz a terra tremer*” (make the ground shake) like maracatu-nação Estrelha Brilhante, we nonetheless feel quite proud of our powerful and disruptive weirdness vis-à-vis the adjacent business.

Dudu’s performance-based pedagogy presents a clear separation between authentic maracatu-nação and percussion groups, stressing that maracatu-nação is rooted in Recife, the Orixás, and racial struggle. It is specifically in performance that these distinctions emerge through embodied practice. How our bodies move and interact with the materiality of maracatu, the differences in the sonic capabilities, the weight of the wood and the feel of the straps on shoulders, the presence or absences of Orixás, the strength and endurance—the *resistência* to not only rehearse, parade and beat the drums but to physically, culturally, and spiritually survive centuries of racial violence—all these differences are made known in the body. Yet, it is through Dudu’s workshop that many members of the became aware of these issues, and in particular the religious significance of maracatu, for the first time. It is by (re)directing the ensemble members’ attention to their own racialized bodies in Austin vis-à-vis the “authentic” racialized bodies of maracatu-nação members in Recife that Dudu utilizes performance to make an anti-racist intervention, inviting Maracatu Texas to confront their embodied engagement with *his* culture.

Performance-as-Anti-Racist Pedagogy

By focusing our attention on embodied knowledge, PAR offers considerable potential for strengthening anti-racist pedagogies. The examples cited here indicate that

while the ensembles in Austin discursively treat music and dance as separate entities from their cultural context—the meanings of the music, dance, lyrics, their relationship to religion, race, and social justice issues— performance is simultaneously bringing some of these issues to the fore. Over time, participants, by performing, by doing, engage with broader issues of racial formation, cultural appropriation, and religious expression. Embodied knowledge compels practitioners to navigate themselves vis-à-vis cultural contexts and their performance. It is often through performance that members first become aware or cognizant of the racial implications of their embodied actions. As such, PAR can facilitate reflections on how race is *known* and what race *does*, essential components of anti-racist pedagogies that are equally helpful on a stage and in an academic classroom. It also suggests that multicultural presentations of music should not be dismissed completely. However, without intentional anti-racist framing and approaches, Afro-Brazilian music ensembles in the United States can all too easily reproduce racialized stereotypes of exotic-erotic non-White bodies. The examples explored here indicate the need for, and great potential of, implementing performance as anti-racist pedagogy. I hope this article will contribute to continued discussions, experiments, and collaborations with anti-racist performance pedagogies moving forward.

¹ Courteau, 2007; Eisentraut, 2001; Gibson, 2012; Mercier, 2013; Pravaz, 2010; Pravaz, 2013; Robitaille, 2014; Stanyek, 2004; Stanyek, 2011.

² Omi & Winant define “racial formation” as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.” See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

³ Pravaz 2011; Pravaz 2013; Robitaille, 2014.

⁴ See Bradely 2006; Bradley 2017; Volk, 1998.

⁵ The “Keep Austin Weird” motto first emerged in spring 2000 and within a year, the original message—intended as a celebratory reminder of the city’s “underlying sense of nonconforming quirkiness”—had evolved into a marketing logo for supporting local business. For Joshua Long, the rise of the “Keep Austin Weird” movement is not only a

fitting representation of the struggle to maintain a unique sense of place and ethos of quirkiness in Austin in the face of the city's meteoric expansion, but it also illustrates a central component of Austin's topophilia that continues to gain widespread traction even if it has become a commercialized cliché—a sense of deviation from the standard. See Joshua Long, *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁶ For more on how Brazilian ensembles, city planning, and the performance of race and place in Austin, see LaFevers, 2018.

⁷ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 53.

⁸ The Austin Samba School, whose official name is “*Os Acadêmicos da Ópera*,” was founded in 2001 and performs *escola de samba* or *batucada*-style samba associated with Brazilian Carnival. Austin Samba has an active membership of over 100 performers, including at least 40 drummers and 60 dancers. Maracatu Texas, a percussion group with roughly 30 members, performs Afro-Brazilian styles from the Brazilian Northeast, such as maracatu, *afoxé*, *coco*, and *ciranda*. It was formed in 2014 when two previous ensembles playing *afoxé* and maracatu, Maracatu Austin and Batuque Raíz, joined. A third group, Origens, was active from 2011 until 2015, when it also merged with Maracatu Texas.

⁹ Debora Bradley, “Standing in the Shadows of Mozart: Music Education, World Music, and Curricular Change,” in *College Music Curricula for a New Century*, ed. Robin Moore, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 208.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Suzanne G. Cusick, “On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, eds. Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zürich & Los Angeles: Carciofoli Verlagshaus, 1999), 27.

¹³ Pravaz, 2013; Robitaille, 2014.

¹⁴ See LaFevers, 2018.

¹⁵ The first record of a coronation of an African ethnic royalty (The King and Queen of Angola) in Brazil is from Recife's *Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos* (Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks) church in 1666. However, the ritual dates back to at least 1642 in Portugal. In fact, African Royalty coronation ceremonies connected with catholic brotherhoods occurred throughout colonial Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. See Andrews, 2004, 69-72; Crook 2009, 147-148; Fryer 2000, 61; Metz 2008, 67. Ivaldo Marciano da França Lima is highly critical of the predominant view in maracatu historiography that the maracatu represents a continuation of the King of Kongo rituals in Africa, “as if maracatus were a mere survival, sometimes understood as totemic, of old/ancient (*antigos*) African customs brought by the slaves and perpetuated/maintained (*perpetuados*) by their descendants that did not even know what they were doing.” Lima 2012, 67-69. For more on this, including the influence of Herskovitsian retentionist theories on maracatu scholarship, see LaFevers, 2014.

¹⁶ Ivaldo Marciano da França Lima reminds us that; “the Black king and queen are accompanied by a royal procession in which each element has its own function and symbolic significance” Ivaldo Marciano de França Lima, *Maracatus do Recife: novas considerações sob o olhar dos tempos* (Recife, Brazil: Edições Bagaço, 2012), 48..

¹⁷ Guillen 2007.

¹⁸ Lima 2012, 22.

¹⁹ See Avelar, 2011; Galinsky 2002;

²⁰ See Carvalho 2007; Esteves 2008.

²¹ Ivaldo Marciano da França Lima, “Maracatu-nação e grupos percussivos: diferenças, conceitos e histórias” in *Inventário Cultural dos Maracatus Nação*, ed. Isabel Cristina Martins Guillen (Recife, Brazil: Editora UFPE), 52.

²² *Ibid.*, 54; Esteves 2013, 77.

²³ Ernesto Ignacio de Carvalho, “Diálogo de negros, monólogo de brancos:

transformações e apropriações musicais no maracatu de baque virado” (master’s thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2007), 17.

²⁴ A pseudonym.

²⁵ A gourd shaker, also known as a *chequerê*.

²⁶ Vanessa is referring to *Ilê Axé Oyá Meguê* or Terreiro Santa Bárbara, commonly known as the terreiro Xambá or casa Xambá. Feeling religious discrimination in the neighboring state of Alagoas, *babalorixá* Artur Rosendo Pereira moved to Recife and founded the terreiro in 1930. After violent repression forced the terreiro to close in 1939, it was reopened in 1950 and moved to its present location in Olinda in 1951. See Oliveira and Campos, 2010 and www.xamba.com.br.

²⁷ Large bass drums, *alfaias* are the essential instruments in maracatu percussion.

²⁸ A double bell.

²⁹ It is unclear if the five Americans with some Portuguese language skills picked up on this linguistic association.