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**THE HIDDEN MEANING OF THE FEAST:
REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER, CLASS AND ETHNIC
OPPRESSION IN A PERFORMANCE OF THE BRAZILIAN
*GUERREIRO*¹**

SUMMARY: The objective of this paper is to discuss the representations of class, gender and ethnic oppression crystallized in an excerpt of a 2019 presentation of Master Cosmo's *Guerreiro* in Juazeiro do Norte, Brazil. The *Guerreiro*, a traditional Brazilian folkloric manifestation associated with the Christmas cycle, encompasses an Epiphany celebration characterized by a series of tunes performed by dancing, singing and/or playing—and sometimes also by acting—yielding a complex, rhapsodic syncretic text. The methodological framework for this analysis is grounded in Eero Tarasti's Existential Semiotics, utilizing its Zemic model to facilitate a nuanced approach to understanding the construction of meaning in the syncretic performative text—from its corporeality to identity, then to social interactions, and ultimately revealing its values and *Weltanschauung*. By applying the semiotic perspective developed by Stuart Hall, this analysis reveals the dynamics of oppression within the discourse. This critical viewpoint is further enriched by the concept of Intersectionality as discussed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which underscores the presence in the discourse of the imprints of the social, cultural, and political context from which enunciation takes place, highlighting its position within unequal power structures. Among the most remarkable results discussed in this paper appear the intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnic oppression in the depiction of black women in the *Guerreiro*, alongside the identification of the primary semi-symbolic rhetorical strategies deployed to construct this representation in the syncretic text.

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1. Introduction: The *Guerreiro*

The *Guerreiro* corresponds to a traditional Brazilian folkloric manifestation of the Christmas cycle aimed to celebrate the Epiphany feast. Despite being in principle a religious feast celebrating the Catholic Faith, the *Guerreiro* incorporates many elements of African and Native Brazilian origins, acquiring an encyclopedic character for the synthesis it offers of different traditions, reflecting the complexity of the construction of Brazilian identity. Compounded by a chain of songs that are performed by dancing, singing and/or playing—and sometimes also by acting—the *Guerreiro* results in a complex, rhapsodic syncretic text that until some decades ago would easily extend throughout many hours, but that nowadays hardly exceeds 60 minutes. In this context the more than 2 hours long presentation of Master Cosmo's *Guerreiro* recorded on December 30th 2019 in the outskirts of Juazeiro do Norte, a city in the hinterland of Northeastern Brazil, can be considered as an authentic remnant of the original splendor of this cultural manifestation.

Théo Brandão dates the formation of what is currently understood as *Reisado*—a predecessor of the *Guerreiro*—to at least 60 or 70 years before the publication of his classic *O Reisado Alagoano* in 1949, tracing its emergence to what he describes as an “amalgam of various folk performances” (Brandão, 1953, p. 13). This allows for an approximate dating of the folk play in the state of Alagoas, in its present form, to at least as early as the 1880s. From this period onward, the presence of Padre Cícero Romão Batista (1844–1934) in Juazeiro do Norte—a late charismatic religious leader currently undergoing the process of canonization—turned that city, which regards him as its principal founder, into the epicenter of one of the most significant pilgrimage routes in the Southern Hemisphere. Oswald Barroso also believes that the *Reisado* arrived in Ceará by the late 19th century (Barroso, 1996, p. 69). Through the direct intervention of Padre Cícero himself, some performers of popular folk plays such as the *Reisado* were invited to settle permanently in the Cariri region, in order to strengthen local religiosity through that cultural expression (Barroso, 1996, p. 179).

A close examination of studies on the *Guerreiro*—a regional variant of the *Reisado* typical from the Brazilian state of Alagoas—reveals a dynamic popular folk play in perpetual metamorphosis. One of the earliest mentions of it appears in 1935, when Arthur Ramos published *O Folclore Negro do Brasil* (1935). In that work, the author presents a complex view, in which the *Guerreiro* would be described as “a struggle between two factions, the warriors and the *caboclos* [a Brazilian term for people of Indigenous descent], interspersed with a number of scenes in which various characters take turns singing their respective pieces”

(p. 105).² Ramos further highlights that the climax of the confrontation between warriors and *caboclos* culminates in the death of the character *Lira*, with the play concluding with the *Bumba-meu-boi*³ (1935, p. 105). The *Guerreiro* described by Câmara Cascudo in his *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*, originally published in 1954, appears as a folk performance of more modest proportions, opposing two groups of warriors—rather than warriors and *caboclos*—yet still marked by the presence of a particular character that appears also in other folk plays, called *Lira*. She is a young woman whose death is ordered by the jealous Queen and assigned to one of the *caboclos*. Struck by *Lira*'s beauty, he proposes that she marry him as a way to spare her life. Incorruptible, she refuses—and is executed. In many versions of the play, she is later brought back to life through the magic and cleverness of the clown *Mateo* (Brandão, 2003, p. 87). Once a quintessential character in the original *Guerreiro* of Alagoas, the *Lira* has virtually disappeared from performances in Juazeiro do Norte over the past decade (2015–2025).

Essentially, the *Guerreiro* is composed of fragments of older *Reisados*, differing from them mainly in the performers' costumes—especially the distinctive cathedral-shaped hat typical of the *Guerreiro*. Câmara Cascudo believed it to be a relatively recent invention, emerging around 1930 and essentially preserving the same repertoire as the *Reisado* (Cascudo, 1988, p. 371). Théo Brandão, in his *O Reisado Alagoano* (1953), considers it essentially a synthesis of the *Reisado* and another folk play, the *Caboclinhos* (Brandão, 1953, p. 19)—a virtuosic reminiscence of Native Brazilian dances (Cascudo, 1988, p. 166). However, in his later work *Folguedos Natalinos*, Brandão (1966) not only restores the opposition between warriors and *caboclos*, but also describes the folk play as containing episodes not found in the *Reisado*, known as “parts”. In these, diverse characters such as the *North Star*, the *Golden Star*, the *Butterfly*, or the *Mermaid* go to the center of the scene, between the groups, and dance and sing their part, implying the presence of short recitatives and declaimed dialogues (Brandão, 2003, p. 83). This fundamental structure remains essentially unchanged in the description found in *Folguedos e Danças de Alagoas*, published by Tenório Rocha in 1984.

Théo Brandão noted in 1982 that the groups of *Reisados*, which had been extraordinarily frequent 40 to 60 years before (1922–1942), especially along the coast and its vicinities, and which used to journey to the banks of the São Fran-

² The original in Portuguese corresponding to the translation that appears between quotation marks reads: “na luta entre dois partidos, dos guerreiros e dos caboclos, entremeada de uma quantidade de cenas, onde várias personagens se sucedem cantando as suas respectivas peças” (author's translation).

³ The *Bumba-meu-boi* is a very popular and traditional Brazilian folk play—a comedic performance whose presence is well documented since the early 19th century, though it likely originated in the late 18th century. The plot varies widely, but it typically involves a character—often a pregnant woman—who wishes for the bull's death in order to eat it, followed by the bull's death, a humorous dispute over the possibility of dividing its meat, and finally, its comic resurrection—usually brought about through the intervention of either a doctor or a sorcerer (Cascudo, 1988, p. 152).

cisco River or to the hinterlands towards Juazeiro do Norte, had by then nearly disappeared—thus highlighting and confirming the existence of the pilgrimage route between Alagoas and Juazeiro do Norte (Brandão, 1982, p. 78). Brandão's account reveals that the decline of the *Reisado* in Alagoas occurred just as, through the intervention of Padre Cícero, the folk play gained strength and expanded in southern Ceará.⁴ As a counterpoint to the growing scarcity of the *Reisado*, Brandão noted that the *Guerreiro*, which emerged through the syncretism of the former with the *Caboclinhos*, fully replaced both and took their place as the only folk play to carry out cross-border excursions and to be staged with a truly dazzling richness of costumes (Brandão, 1982).

The migration of the *Guerreiro* to Ceará is documented by researcher Oswald Barroso, who states also that the group led by Mestra Margarida was the only active *Guerreiro* in Juazeiro do Norte in the 1990s (Barroso, 1996, p. 12). Influenced by, but distinct from, the original folk play from Alagoas, Mestra Margarida's *Guerreiro* is notable for being performed almost exclusively by women, and for incorporating from a variety of different folk plays characters like the Star, the Mermaid and the *Baiana*, among others (Barroso, 1996). Mestra Margarida, however, did not see herself as the founder of the *Guerreiros* in the region: in numerous testimonies, she recounted that, after migrating from Alagoas on foot with her mother when she was about five years old—on a journey of more than 600 kilometers—she joined the *Guerreiro* of Mestre Amaro, eventually founding her own group at the age of fifteen, around 1950 (Conceição, 2004; 2024). It is also worth noting that the existence of a female *Reisado*—the *Reisado Decolores*, led by Mestra Mazé de Luna—contradicts a popular definition in the Cariri region according to which the *Reisado* would be performed mainly by men and the *Guerreiro*, mainly by women. Although such a gender-based division proves at best imprecise, it undeniably appears in the local imagination, and even the performers themselves repeat this narrative without hesitation.

It is observed today in the Cariri region that *Reisados* and *Guerreiros* differ little in terms of plot or the characters presented—known as the *Figuras* [Figures]—unlike what was originally described in the context outlined by Théó Brandão. The main differences are thus relegated to costume—the *Guerreiro* still preserves the characteristic church-shaped hats, as can be seen in Figure 1—and to music, where there is a subtle tendency towards faster tempos, and a predominance (though not exclusivity) of the syncopated binary rhythm known as *baianada* or *baião*—a variation of the classic *habanera*. Another distinction that has emerged over time is a shared origin: although Mestra Margarida may not have been the founder of the first *Guerreiro* in the region, all the currently active *Guerreiro* groups in Cariri are inspired by her legacy. The *Guerreiro de Nossa Senhora Aparecida* is no exception. Founded in 2012 by Mestre Valdir and Mestre Tarcísio, it is currently directed by Cosmo de Souza Lima—known as Mestre

⁴ Brazilian state where the city of Juazeiro do Norte is located.

Cosmo. One of the pieces performed by the group on December 30, 2019 will serve as the main *corpus* for the present study.

Figure 1

The Characteristic Church-Shaped Hat of the Guerreiro Tradition



Note. The photograph depicts Mestra Margarida, one of its most prominent exponents, wearing the hat—commonly referred to by performers as the *coroa* [crown]. Source of the photography: (Uchôa, 2025).

2. Theoretical Framework

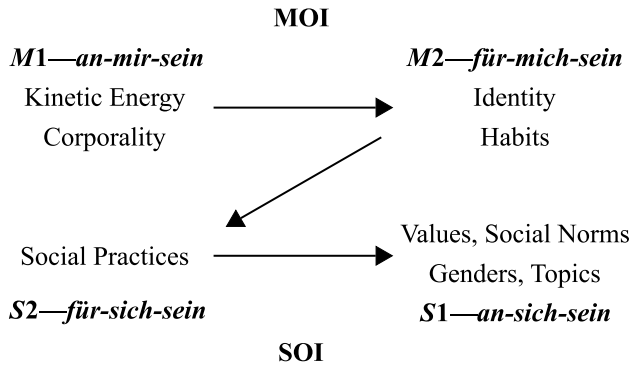
The objective of the present paper is to discuss the representations of class, gender and ethnic oppression crystalized in an excerpt of a 2019 presentation of Master Cosmo's *Guerreiro* in Juazeiro do Norte, Brazil.

The methodological approach adopted in this study is based upon Eero Tarasti's Existential Semiotics (2000; 2021), that offer conceptual and methodological tools that can successfully examine complex syncretic textures like that of the *Guerreiro*, that besides musical and verbal involves also visual elements in its textual web—not to mention the moments in which the performers touch members of the audience, introducing a tactile dimension, or even bring food and beverages to the performance, thus adding to it olfactive and/or tasteable parameters. Existential Semiotics proposes a path from immanence and existence (being) to action and narrativity (doing), and from these to manifestation (appear-

ing). In order to achieve this goal, one of its main methodological and conceptual tools is the so-called Zemic model (Figure 2)—by means of which it is possible to develop an approach from corporality (*M1*) to identity (*M2*), from identity to social interactions (*S2*), and from these to the *Weltanschauung* that permeates the syncretic text (*S1*). The analysis of this *Weltanschauung*, combined with the semiotic approach developed by Stuart Hall (2016), allows us to detect relations of ethnic, gender and class oppression in the discourse. The Zemic model can be represented in the following scheme:

Figure 2

Eero Tarasti's Zemic Model



Note. The diagram outlines the dynamic trajectory between the MOI—the embodied, lived self (*M*)—and the SOI—the normative, social self (*S*)—by mapping distinct existential modalities. It also contrasts ontology (quadrants 1) with praxis (quadrants 2), forming a “Z” (thus “Zemic”) path that begins with ontological corporality (*M1*), progresses through the formation of identity and habitual subjectivity (*M2*), then moves into social practices and interpersonal actions (*S2*), and culminates in the domain of the values and social norms (*S1*) that structure the discourse. Source: author’s own elaboration after Tarasti, 2015, p. 27.

Traditional syncretic texts such as the *Guerreiro* serve as syntheses and reflections of societal norms, and at the same time prove to be able to influence perceptions and to shape social dynamics. More importantly, they also provide a rich lens for examining intricate interplays of gender, class, and ethnic representations in the cultural imagery.

While the present study adopts Tarasti’s Existential Semiotics as its primary methodological framework, it is important to acknowledge other approaches that have contributed significantly to the study of multisensoriality and performance.

3. Analytical Corpus: The Piece *Maria Pretinha*

Among the 34 tunes performed during the *Guerreiro's* 2019 presentation, one stands out as particularly representative of the community's gender, class, and racial tensions: the song *Maria Pretinha*,⁵ sung by the group's *contramestre* [second-in-command], Mestre Valdir. The very name of the character is already highly significant. *Pretinha*, the diminutive of *preta* [Black woman], conveys not only the character's ethnic identity but also a connotation that—paradoxically—can be perceived as both affectionate and demeaning. The lyrics of the piece are presented below:

<i>Maria Pretinha</i>	Maria Pretinha
<i>faz três anos que namora</i>	has been dating for three years;
<i>O noivo dela foi embora</i>	Her fiancé went away
<i>sentar praça militar</i>	to join the military;
<i>Ela foi olhar</i>	She went to watch
<i>A partida do trem</i>	the departure of the train;
<i>Eu lhe dei os parabéns</i>	I congratulated her,
<i>ela começou a chorar</i>	and she started to cry;
<i>Ela me disse</i>	She said to me
<i>que agora vai é tudo</i>	that now, everything goes:
<i>Aleijado, moribundo,</i>	crippled, moribund,
<i>Trata com quem encontrar</i>	She will deal with whoever she finds;
<i>Maria Pretinha foi presa</i>	Maria Pretinha was arrested
<i>pra Siriema</i>	and taken to Siriema;
<i>Coitadinha de pendenga</i>	Poor thing, she was framed,
<i>Está padecendo por lá</i>	and she is suffering over there;
<i>(E) Eu Passei por lá</i>	I passed by there,
<i>Dei um voto a favor dela</i>	and I cast a vote in her favor;
<i>Morena cor de canela</i>	Cinnamon-colored brunette,
<i>Eu peço um beijo ela me dá</i>	I ask for a kiss—and she gave it to me.

⁵ The video with the original recording, lyrics and English translation of *Maria Pretinha* is available at <https://youtu.be/xjn9Ffuhypk>. The complete performance can be watched at <https://youtu.be/m5lvqYDE6Zs>. For those interested in other complete *Guerreiro* presentations, presentations of Mestra Margarida's *Guerreiro de Santa Joana D'arc* are available at <https://youtu.be/kQbyvZe0XvE> and <https://youtu.be/bg95VCZJlzk>.

4. Plane of Content

The trajectory of the character Maria Pretinha begins with her disjunction from what can be inferred to be her value-object: romantic union within a socially recognized relationship—a state she initially seems to experience with her fiancé, who nevertheless ultimately abandons her to join the armed forces. It is worth noting that the character loses not only her bond with her beloved one, but also a socially legitimizing status. This loss is symbolized by the departure of her fiancé, which she watches helplessly from the station—and which she clearly sanctions negatively, responding to the enunciator's words with tears.

A second key moment in her narrative is marked by a new dysphoric cognitive sanction, in which she declares that her next romantic union will no longer be conditioned by the presence of qualities of excellence in her love object. On the contrary, socially stigmatized attributes—such as physical disability or frailty—are now deemed acceptable.

The third turning point is characterized by another dysphoric state—not modal in nature, as the previous one, but rather a negative descriptive value—represented by the character's conjunction with the condition of imprisonment. Here, the negative aspects take on concrete form through the linguistic choice of terms such as *coitadinha* [poor thing] and *padecendo* [languishing].

It is within this context that the final performance occurs, in which the enunciator favors her in an undefined way, yet very clearly requests something in return—discursively framed as “a kiss”. The trajectory of Maria Pretinha, therefore, can be interpreted as a progressive process of social and existential degradation, in which the character gradually loses her dignity: from the loss of her fiancé to the abandonment of any criteria of selection; from this stage to the loss of physical freedom, marked by her spatial confinement; and finally, to the commodification of her affection—even by supposed allies and friends, such as the enunciator, who, by asking her for a kiss, confronts a woman in a position of vulnerability, whose refusal could jeopardize one of the few remaining sources of support available to her.

This narrative process of successive deprivations finds its counterpart, at the discursive level, in a series of figures that engage in dialogism with cultural imaginaries, particularly with regard to representations of social power relations. Maria Pretinha carries in her name the markers of her condition as both a woman and a Black individual, and the use of the diminutive in this context acquires weight as a possible signifier of devaluation for these categories. Her imprisonment, which combines the deprivation of freedom with spatial restriction, is also associated with the loss—whether temporary or permanent—of the subject's conjunctive relationship with all of her goods, that is, with the descriptive values from which she is now dispossessed. At this stage of her trajectory, Maria Pretinha reaches a condition of indigence marked by the intersectionality—understood in the sense developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)—of her subaltern oppression as a woman, as a Black person, and as someone who is poor. How-

ever, our object of analysis is not the verbal dimension of the piece, but rather the performance as a whole—one whose visual and musical components must now also be considered.

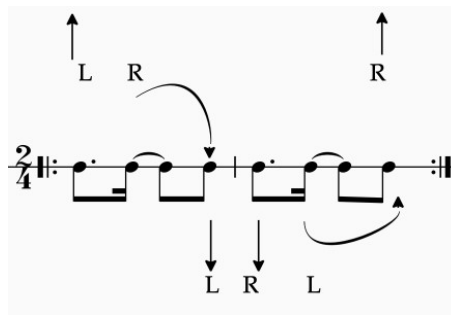
5. Plane of Expression

5.1. Visual Elements

From the perspective of performance, the piece is accompanied by a single type of movement—or *passo* [step]—as the choreographic element is referred to by the group. This step, known as the *baião*, is so called because it typically accompanies songs in the popular binary rhythm of the same name, characterized by the rhythmic cell that appears in Figure 3:

Figure 3

Scheme of the baião dance steps

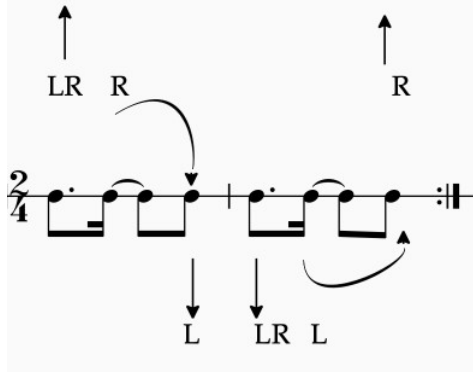


Note. The figure represents the *baião* step sequence in 2/4 meter, notated as a combination of rhythmic values and directional footwork. The symbols above the staff indicate forward movements with the left (L) and right (R) feet, while the symbols below indicate backward steps. Curved arrows represent turns. Source: author's own elaboration.

This step has a circular character, consisting of a 180-degree clockwise turn of the right foot in the middle of the measure, followed in the next bar by a symmetrical movement of the left foot in a counterclockwise direction, completing the choreographic phrase. This choreography is repeated throughout the sung sections of the piece, but presents the variation described in Figure 4 during the instrumental sections that follow each full execution of the lyrics:

Figure 4

Scheme of the variation of the baião steps in the instrumental passages



Note. Symbols above the staff indicate forward movements with the left (L), right (R), or both feet (LR), while symbols below the staff indicate backward steps. Curved arrows represent turns. This variation is marked by a pronounced double forward step (LR) preceding the circular turn, which distinguishes the dance in the instrumental sections from that of the sung strophes. Source: author's own elaboration.

Despite its strong intensifying effect on the movement, the variation ultimately consists simply of marking the downbeat of each measure by striking both feet simultaneously, while otherwise maintaining the same structure as the basic step.

There is, therefore, a certain homology between the form of the content and the choreographic and sonic form of expression—marking the alternation between the presence and absence of oral verbal elements as much as the musical form itself. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the dance remains neutral during the narrative of Maria Pretinha's saga as recounted by the enunciating actor, only intensifying in the instrumental section, in which the voice falls silent and the instruments take over to ornament and vary the theme—this section being referred to by the performers as the *marcha* [march], despite there being no actual correspondence with the musical genre of the same name. Among the many possible interpretations of this contrast, one particularly worth noting is the reading that identifies an ethos of restraint in a narrator who only reveals emotional intensity and affective engagement once the voice is silent. This property represents a construction at the semi-symbolic level⁶—valid for this specific piece in

⁶ While symbolic relations establish associations between signs—understood as unities of the plane of expression—and unities of meaning in the plane of content, tending toward generalization within the linguistic system, semi-symbolic relations instead connect categories—such as *verticality* vs *horizontality*—rather than unities, of the plane of expression with categories of the plane of content—such as *affirmation* vs *negation* (Greimas, Courtés, 1986, pp. 203–204). Unlike symbolic relations, their validity may be

this particular performance—and not a symbolic relation that could be replicated every time the same figures of expression are present.

However, when observing the two-hour performance as a whole—approximately one hour after the presentation of Maria Pretinha, yet mobilizing a similar imaginary—there emerges, in the piece *Oh Doida* [Oh Madwoman] (Núcleo de Pesquisa, 2024), a figurativization of a female character in the *mise-en-scène* that warrants closer examination.

Figure 5

Performance of the Character Doida [Madwoman]



Note. The image highlights key semiotic traits of the *Doida*: disheveled curly hair, smeared lipstick, and provocative gestures, which index rupture with social order and hypersexualized femininity. Her central position in the scene underscores both her agency and her objectification, as she becomes the focal point of the spectators' gaze, embodying various cultural asymmetries. Source: (Núcleo de Pesquisa, 2024).

Among the various elements that characterize the figure of the *Doida*, the following are worth highlighting: (1) the disheveled curly hair, which, in addition to emphasizing the performer's Blackness, also functions as a sign that simultane-

restricted to particular texts. For instance, in his 1995 comparative analysis of the IBM and Apple logos, Jean-Marie Floch identifies a homology between the categorical oppositions *cold monochromatism vs hot polychromatism* and *rectilinear vs curvilinear* forms in the plane of expression, and the oppositions *servitude vs liberty* in the plane of content (Floch, 1995, pp. 59–60). These semi-symbolic relations are clearly operative only within the specific corpus of his analysis.

ously iconizes, indexes, and symbolizes the semantic trait of rupture with social order that defines the character *Doida*; (2) the smeared lipstick, a sign that conveys femininity, disorder, and an index of anarchic and hypertrophied sexuality; (3) the hand that lifts the skirt, as if fanning the character's genitals—presenting the hypertrophy of female libido as a semantic trait of *Doida*'s madness. It is worth noting that male hypersexualization is rarely associated with madness, whereas, when linked to femininity, it acquires such a connotation in cultural representations, revealing the asymmetry in gender relations. To this sexist framework is added the stereotype of the hypersexualized Black woman—who, although here appears as a subject of her own desire, has historically also occupied the role of a recurrent victim of abuse and sexual violence; (4) in the image, *Doida* appears as the focal point of the gaze of those around her, becoming a valued object—that is, the target of a cognitive sanction—from a collective Addresser, for whom she becomes an object of ridicule and scorn. Despite the temporal gap between the two pieces—*Maria Pretinha* being the 4th and *Doida* the 23rd of the 34 segments performed—numerous points of convergence may be noted between the two characters: both are women, Black, hypersexualized, and subject to the opprobrium⁷ of a collective Addresser.

External to the musical execution of the piece *Maria Pretinha* specifically, the *mise-en-scène* corresponding to *Oh Doida* may be conceived as internal to the broader syncretic performance, functioning as a figurativization—if not of the character *Maria Pretinha* herself, then at least of the imaginary from which she emerges. This approximation, however, has its limits within its cultural framework, which must also be clearly delineated. Originating as a primarily religious manifestation associated with the celebration of the Epiphany, the *Guerreiro*, like many other Brazilian folk plays, absorbed into its representations of the divine and of transcendence the imaginaries of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities—groups that, ultimately, constituted a substantial part of both the local community and the broader targeted audience of these performances. In this respect, it is possible to establish correspondences between certain characters from the folk plays and entities from the pantheon of *Catimbó*—a practice rooted in Indigenous traditions but later incorporating various elements of African origin—or from *Umbanda*—of African origin, but which, in many of its forms, also integrates elements drawn from the imaginaries of Indigenous heritage as well as from those of the colonizer, including not only Catholicism but also Spiritism. In this context, *Doida* closely resembles religious representations of the figure known as *Pomba Gira*, associated with “the stereotype of the prostitute, the ‘street woman’, who dresses in scandalous clothing, displays

⁷ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines opprobrium as contempt; reproach; public disgrace or ill fame that follows from conduct considered grossly wrong or vicious (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

obscene behavior, vulgar language, and exaggerated gestures”⁸ (Silva, 2005, p. 123). What we observe, therefore, is the mobilization of a cultural archetype within the Brazilian imaginary that, without subsuming the meaning of the piece *Maria Pretinha*, establishes an interdiscursive relationship that enriches the significance of its syncretic enunciation.

An important distinction that must be emphasized, however, is that while *Pomba Gira* is associated with a powerful and exuberant spiritual entity, Maria Pretinha, by contrast, is portrayed as a woman weakened by her social condition—as a woman, as a Black individual, and as someone in economic vulnerability. This contrast, though it may be seen simply as a discrepancy between *Pomba Gira* and Maria Pretinha, and as a sign of the inconsistency of comparing the two figures, also allows for a reading in which the incongruity—like a deceptive cadence in music—functions as a rupture of expectation that further intensifies Maria Pretinha’s sense of disappointment and helplessness in the face of a society that, far from fearing the supernatural empowerment of the *Pomba Gira*, ruthlessly steamrolls that woman and her hypersexualized representation. What occurs, then, is a process of *Transzendenz*⁹ in the Heideggerian sense—but one that unfolds in reverse of its usual orientation: rather than ascending toward the sublime, the character descends into the grotesque.

5.2. Musical Elements

Let us now consider the musical structure and its relationship to the lyrics of the song. The melodic structure (Figure 6) is built around two main motifs: the ascending major sixth leap, and the ascending C major arpeggio—the latter appearing in three variations: its retrograde form; its transposition to A minor; and its transposition to A diminished. Rhythmically, two metric structures are set in contrast: one homogeneous, consisting of even eighth notes; and the other heterogeneous, marked by the presence of syncopation. Let us now examine the semi-symbolic relations that arise from the aforementioned oppositions.

⁸ In the original text in Portuguese: “ao estereótipo da prostituta, da ‘mulher de rua’, que se veste com roupas escandalosas, exhibe atitudes obscenas, linguagem vulgar e gestos escrachados” (Silva, 2005, p. 123).

⁹ In the present article, the question of Transcendence is addressed through Tarasti’s Existential Semiotics, which examines it in light of Heidegger’s propositions, for whom it occurs not necessarily through a mystical experience, but simply from the moment in which the human being breaks with their isolation and establishes a relationship with the surrounding world (Heidegger, 1967, pp. 62, 366).

5.3. Melodic Motive 1

Figure 6

Excerpt From the Transcription of the Song Maria Pretinha

Ma - ri - a Pre - ti - nha faz três anos que na mo - ra o noi - vo de - la foi em - bo -
 Ma - ri - a Pre - ti - nha foi pre - sa pra Siri - e - ma, coi - ta - di - nha, de pen - den

ra sen - tar pra - ça mi - li - tar e la foi o lhar a
 - ga es - tá pa - de - cen - do por lé e - la me disse que a
 E eu pas sei por lá, dei um

par - ti - da do trem eu lhe dei os pa - ra - béns e la co - me - çou a cho - rar
 go - ra, vai é tu - do: a - lei - ja - do, me - ri - bun - do, tra - ta com quem en - con - trar
 vo to a fa - vor de - la, mo - re - na, cor de ca - ne - la eu pe ço um bei - jo, e - la me dá

Note. The red circles highlight the ascending major sixth leap (motive 1), interpreted as a marker of *passionalization* in the syncretic text, while the arpeggiated fifths in the blue boxes (motive 2) are often associated with intersubjective oppositions. Source: author's own elaboration.

An initial reading of the ascending major sixth interval leap could be interpreted through what Tatit identifies as the “passionalization” of musical expression—a model characterized by “a tensional investment in the very contour [of the melody] in terms of expanding the tessitura range, vowel durations, and the pauses between phrases”, in which “large intervallic leaps” and “the exploration of the upper vocal register” prevail (Tatit, 1998, p. 119),¹⁰ with the aim of intensifying the pathemic¹¹ dimension. This tensional emphasis would mark the song sign, rendering it passionalized.

¹⁰ The original in Portuguese says:

O segundo modelo caracteriza-se pelo investimento tensivo do próprio contorno em termos de ampliação do campo de tessitura melódica, das durações vocálicas e das próprias pausas entre as frases. Surge, conseqüentemente, uma tendência para os grandes saltos intervalares e para a exploração da região aguda, onde as cordas vocais manifestam fisicamente a tensividade. (Tatit, 1998, p. 119)

¹¹ According to Greimas and Courtés, the pathemic role concerns the subject's being and *état d'âme* [state of mind], defined in semiotic terms by a hierarchical modal organization (Greimas; Courtés, 1986, p. 165). Barros illustrates this with the pathemic configuration of *hope*, which may be characterized by a subject who *wants to be*, does not *believe*

Thus, the vocative “Maria Pretinha” acquires a pathemic dimension within the song—a dimension that, as shown in the lyrical analysis, is fully justified by the imaginary it mobilizes. It is worth noting that the next instance of the ascending major sixth—“her fiancé went away”—corresponds precisely to what dramaturgy refers to as the *inciting incident* of the narrative, that is, the turning point that sets the dramatic action in motion (Vogler, 2007, p. 99).

The third instance, “I congratulated her”, marks two important aspects of the song’s structure: the beginning of direct interaction between the enunciating actor and the character Maria Pretinha, and the establishment of the narrator’s *ethos*—the latter defined by an ambivalence in which his empathy toward the woman’s suffering seems to blend with a certain opportunism toward her vulnerability, as though he were seizing the moment to take advantage of her, casting a cynical shadow over the compassion he appears to express regarding her ordeal.

The fourth instance of the ascending sixth leap occurs with the words “crippled, moribund”, pathemizing Maria Pretinha’s loss of any ability to impose limits or criteria on whoever might seek to engage in a romantic relationship with her—suggesting a social and emotional degradation that would force her to accept whoever desired her from that point on. In the following instance, the character plunges into the abyss, imprisoned *de pendenga* [because of a dispute], her dysphoric state being introduced by the adjective *coitadinha* [poor thing] and followed by the verb *padecendo* [languishing], confirming the presence of a dysphoric accent in the syncretic text. Finally, in its last appearance, the interval, now associated with the “cinnamon-colored” skin of Maria Pretinha, establishes a connection between her ultimate degradation—the kiss given in return for the favor granted by the narrator—and the mark of her ethnicity, reinforcing the tensional accent of racial discrimination, here in clear intersectionality with social and gender-based oppression.

5.4. Melodic Motive 2

The structure of greatest interest to us corresponds to the symmetrical pair of opening and closing of the perfect fifth arpeggio. In this piece, a semantic invariance can be observed associated with this expressive figure: the opposition between subjects. Thus, in its first occurrence, the opening/closing pair is homologous to the contrast “she went to see” (the train’s departure)/“I gave her (my congratulations)”. This symmetrical element marks the beginning of the interaction between the enunciating actor and the character Maria Pretinha. It is worth noting that the enunciator’s “congratulations”, which trigger the character’s cry-

that he cannot be, or knows that he can be (Barros, 1988, p. 64). In this sense, a pathemic configuration corresponds to the syntagmatic arrangement of modalities that semiotically defines the state of mind—or passion—experienced by a given subject.

ing episode as a result of her *anagnorisis*¹² of abandonment, may be read either as an act of naïveté or of cynicism.

In the following occurrence, the opposition—still centered on the *narrator/Maria Pretinha* dyad—also involves third parties: “*she told me*” (that now, everything goes)/“*crippled*”. Again, there is a dialogical exchange between the narrator and the character, but this time with the peculiarity that the latter illustrates her progressive degradation by making herself available to anyone, no matter if “crippled” or “moribund”, and to whoever else might come her way.

In the third and final occurrence, there is a contrast between the “I” of the enunciating actor—who presents himself as the benefactor intervening on behalf of the imprisoned woman—and a Maria Pretinha who, either out of gratitude or fear of the consequences of refusing, grants the narrator the kiss he had requested. Furthermore, a subtle variation produces a figure of expression that deserves the attention of the reader: both in “and she started to cry” and in “I ask for a kiss—and she gave it to me”, the perfect 5th is altered to a tritone—the infamous *diabolus in musica*, a widely recognized musical topos of dysphoria, which underscores the dysphoric quality of these excerpts.

Hence, it is important to emphasize the ambivalence of the narrator’s ethos, whose congratulations in the first stanza and supposed help in the final one can be read either as acts of empathy toward Maria Pretinha’s suffering or as sheer opportunism: the actions of someone who, by virtue of his relative privilege, takes advantage of a structurally racist, sexist, and classist situation—a situation that enables him to exploit its distortions for personal gain while preserving the appearance of moral integrity, thus reaping the benefits of systemic oppression without having to assume a morally condemnable discourse.

6. Application of Eero Tarasti’s Zemic Model

6.1. M1

Starting from the *an-mir-sein* dimension, which Tarasti associates with attributes related to corporality and kinetic energy, the following elements can be inventoried: 1) femininity: the female condition of Maria Pretinha; 2) Blackness: the character’s racial condition; 3) precarious clothing: the character’s socio-economic condition; 4) use of the diminutive: complexity involving semantic features denoting minimized magnitude and/or connoting affection and/or depreciation; 5) the character’s crying (after receiving the narrator’s congratulations);

¹² Aristotle defines *Ἀναγνώρισις* [Anagnorisis] in his *Poetics* as the transition from ignorance to awareness, which brings about a reversal in the states of love and hate, or of happiness and sorrow. Its most powerful effect occurs when it follows a *peripeteia*—a sudden reversal in the character’s situation (Yebara, 2022, pp. 164–165). The piece *Maria Pretinha* offers a clear instance of Aristotelian *anagnorisis*: after the *peripeteia* marked by her fiancé’s departure, the narrative traces, step by step, her progressive recognition of the tragic shift from good fortune to misfortune.

6) her suffering (“languishing over there”); 7) cinnamon-colored brown skin: racial condition of the character (shade of her Blackness); 8) imprisonment and kiss: physical elements of intersubjective interaction, but also articulations of the character’s affect and self-perception.

6.2. *M2*

The *für-mich-sein* dimension, in which one moves from mere corporeality to the construction of a sense of identity, renders the elements from *M1* more complex by shifting them from denotation to connotation, such that the identity of the character Maria Pretinha will be defined by the following characteristics: 1) she dated for three years, until her fiancé left her to enlist in the military; 2) regarding their separation, her only reaction was to go watch the departure of the train that took her former fiancé—there is no description of revolt or confrontation, thus inferring a dysphoric pathemic configuration of *resignation*; 3) degradation into prostitution: by declaring that from then on, she would accept anyone, Maria Pretinha assumes a modal configuration of *not-being-able-not-to-do*, thereby declaring herself as an Addressee of any Addresser who might mobilize her for a performance of physical conjunction, and thus embracing an identity condition of prostitution.

6.3. *S2*

In the condition of *für-sich-sein*, intersubjective relationships are situated, establishing the effect of meaning of alterity. This alterity is founded through interactions such as: 1) Maria Pretinha’s abandonment by her fiancé, which establishes her vulnerability and sense of helplessness; 2) her fiancé’s enlistment in the army, configuring a framework in which he seeks social inclusion, in contrast to Maria Pretinha’s exclusion from such a process; 3) the congratulations given to Maria Pretinha by the enunciating actor, a compliment which establishes an ambiguous *ethos* in their relationship—somewhere between the naivety of someone who wounds unintentionally and the cynicism of one who mocks another’s suffering; 4) Maria Pretinha’s degradation into prostitution, marked by the modal configuration of *not-being-able-not-to-act*, placing her in the condition of a receiver of any sender who might wish to engage in physical conjunction with her—a sender disqualified within an imaginary that naturalizes ableism, stigmatizing the condition of a possible “cripple” or “moribund”; 5) the depreciation—albeit empathetic—of Maria Pretinha by a sender who qualifies her as “poor thing”; 6) a particularly complex intersubjective relation concerns the narrative trajectory of the pendenga—the interpersonal conflict—that would have led to Maria Pretinha’s imprisonment and subsequent ordeal. It is not clear who the Addresser was that manipulated this trajectory, nor the nature of the conflict itself—what is clearly defined is the deprivation of her freedom through imprisonment,

her condition of hardship expressed by the term *padecendo* [languishing], and her consequent vulnerability and powerlessness in relation to other subjects.

Another complex trajectory concerns the element 7) of this enumeration: the “kiss” granted by Maria Pretinha to the enunciating actor. This trajectory would consist of an initial complex program in which the narrator manipulates another subject in favor of Maria Pretinha—thus causing a second subject to positively sanction the girl. In the following program, the narrator uses the very act that had previously benefited the young woman to manipulate her through temptation, so that she, too, might positively sanction his request—one that constitutes a *to-make-to-do* act ultimately leading her to kiss him. As previously noted, this performance is imbued with ambiguity: it is unclear whether the request was marked by the innocence of a genuine desire or by the opportunism of someone who sees before him a vulnerable young woman, unable to afford the luxury of denying a favor to a benefactor. Nor is it clear whether the narrator truly came to help the girl or merely assisted her in order to make her more likely to enter into physical conjunction with him. In any case, the trajectory of intersubjective interactions undergone by the character may be interpreted as a process of progressive degradation in which, at first, Maria Pretinha loses her desired object within a consensual relationship—only to, instigated by the enunciator, come to see herself reduced to the condition of an abulic object of someone else’s desire, until finally finding herself forced to yield to the harassment of her supposed helper.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting that the character’s depreciation unfolds in three stages—a primordial stage in which she feels valued by her fiancé; a second stage in which, deprived of both her fiancé’s esteem and her own, she feels at the mercy of whoever might want her; and a final stage, in which even those who once seemed to be helpers come to assume the role of her antagonist or oppressor.

6.4. S1

At level S1, Tarasti situates the sphere in which values, social norms, genres, and the worldview imprinted on the text are represented. In this regard, the *Weltanschauung* of this piece may perhaps be subsumed under a few key ideas: 1) The moment when Maria Pretinha announces that, from then on, she would no longer be in a position to refuse anyone who might solicit her. In this way, the valences of attraction and repulsion are neutralized for a subject marked simultaneously by abulia and by a *not-being-able-not-to-do* configuration adjacent to the deontic modality; 2) Another prevailing aspect of the narrative is Maria Pretinha’s abandonment: abandoned by her fiancé, by a justice system that incarcerated her over an undefined “dispute” [*pendenga*], and by her supposed friend represented by the enunciating actor, who demanded physical intimacy in return for the favors he had done for her. Such abandonment is also inseparable, as previously discussed, from a sense of deception and from a rupture in the expectation of continuity in the instance of *seeming*, which always ends up revealing

itself melancholically as discontinuity in the instance of *being*; 3) Another prevailing effect of meaning in the narrative is Maria Pretinha's vulnerability—emotional (loss of her fiancé and self-esteem) and socio-economic (loss of freedom). Such vulnerability can be seen as an aspect of insufficiency—an aspect that also permeates the isotopy¹³ of abandonment, insofar as impermanence may be semiotically perceived as a form of insufficient permanence.

Other key elements deserve to be highlighted: 4) The isotopy of prostitution is constructed through various images and thus permeates the entire text. The theme of the young woman who “falls into a life of sin” after being abandoned resonates with an imaginary that implicitly assumes the fiancée had lost her virginity in the recently ended relationship—something that would practically preclude any new formal romantic engagement in an archaic social context in which a woman depended entirely on a male guardian—father or husband—for economic support. It is from this context that Maria Pretinha would no longer discern any options other than resorting to prostitution as a means of survival. In this way, from this perspective as well, one can identify a semantic trait of insufficiency that defines the character's existential condition.

An asymmetry of power relations becomes evident—regarding gender, the woman cannot afford the luxury of choosing (*cannot-want; cannot-do*), while the male characters can (*can-want; can-do* and, more importantly, *can-make-do*). In terms of ethnic perspective, Maria Pretinha is marked both as Black and as a “cinnamon-colored brunette”, whereas there is no ethnic characterization for the other characters. The use of *morena*, in the Brazilian context, suggests that the character has a skin tone typically associated with racial mixing. In this respect, it is worth considering that, according to a recent study of Brazilian genetic composition published in *Science*, while most patrilineal Y-chromosome lineages in the country are of European origin, most matrilineal lineages—associated with mitochondrial DNA—are of African origin, a phenomenon the authors attribute to the colonial history of sexual violence by the colonizer toward other ethnic groups (Nunes et al., 2025, p. 2). Within this context, the overlap of the mixed condition of *morena* onto *pretinha* suggests that, though her skin tone may be read as brunette, Maria Pretinha is socially construed as Black, bearing the cultural stigma of oppression historically imposed on enslaved Africans brought to the country.

The phenomenon in which, within a mixed-race population, individuals from higher social strata are identified as “white” regardless of skin tone, while those from the base of the social pyramid are identified as “Black”, is portrayed in the renowned song *Haiti* by Gilberto Gil, with lyrics by Caetano Veloso, in which the poet describes men “almost white, almost Black from being so poor” (Sovik, 2002, p. 2). From this perspective, Maria Pretinha, regardless of her ethnic back-

¹³ Barros, in a slightly different way than Greimas, defines isotopy as the reiteration of semantic traces by means of their repetition in discursive figures and themes throughout the text, indicating it as one of the main resources to confer it semantic coherence (Barros, 1990, p. 87).

ground, is “Black from being so poor”, thus highlighting the intersectionality of gender, racial, and class-based oppression. Finally, with regard to her socioeconomic condition itself—which, as previously discussed, is marked by vulnerability—Maria Pretinha’s social oppression is revealed not only in her availability to whoever might want her, but above all in her imprisonment: the ultimate form of social immobilization, which equates to a modal state of *cannot-do/be* and absolute subjection to an indeterminate Addresser represented by the law or the authorities.

7. Dasein and Transcendence

The piece under study clearly substantiates the Dasein status of Maria Pretinha. Recalling Heidegger’s definition of the term, one may say that, for the German philosopher, Dasein refers to the condition of a being capable of questioning, among other things, its own existential situation (Heidegger, 1967, p. 7). The moment of *anagnorisis*, therefore—when the character confides to the narrator that, from that point onward, she would no longer place any restrictions on accepting whoever might approach her—represents a reflection on her existential condition that signals not only her immersion into Dasein, but also the threshold at which Maria Pretinha’s Transcendence takes place. This Transcendence, in this case, is limited to what Tarasti refers to as the first act of Transcendence: negation, in which the subject plunges into a deep nihilism that completely empties of meaning her previous existential condition (Tarasti, 2015, p. 6). The absence of the subsequent stage—the *pleroma*, in which the initial negation is followed by a re-signification of the world—is entirely justifiable, insofar as the stage of negation may extend indefinitely over time (Tarasti, 2015, p. 8).

In the case of the syncretic text under analysis, it is worth noting that Transcendence—with its plunge into the reality of Dasein and the consequent *anagnorisis* regarding it—does not occur through the sublime, but rather through the grotesque. This possibility is not excluded from Tarasti’s proposal, who envisions it among the many forms of Transcendence by negation (Tarasti, 2015, p. 7). Maria Pretinha’s immersion in Dasein takes place through an *anagnorisis* that reveals the sordid mundanity of *Weltlichkeit*.¹⁴ Thus, the Transcendence experienced by her takes place through the overcoming—or more precisely, the violation—of her own limits, in a process that leads not to the sublime, but to the grotesque. When she declares that henceforth she would no longer be able to choose her partners, the character exemplifies her new existential condition by imagining herself alongside people with special needs—a cripple and a mori-

¹⁴ The question of worldliness will be developed in light of Stuart Hall’s cultural studies, identifying the thematic and figurative elements that reveal the marks of class, gender, and race oppression in syncretic discourse (Hall, 2016). In this way, as Heidegger himself suggests, attention is drawn to an approach to *Weltlichkeit* based on an ontological interpretation of the entities of a given environment, whose character would only be revealed through its structuring (Heidegger, 1967, p. 66).

bund—drawing on a cliché from an ableist imaginary that was naturalized in the early twentieth century (often materialized in those days by hiring individuals with uncommon features for circus roles), but which is now repudiated by contemporary sensibility.

It is worth noting that, although there is no information about the exact date of the piece's composition, the mention of the "departure of the train" allows us to situate its creation between the beginning of passenger train operations in northeastern Brazil, in 1858, and their discontinuation, around 1990. Regarding the mention of a place named Siriema, no municipalities with that name were found, but rather small villages, two of which are located near old railway lines: one in the region of Paulo Afonso, in Bahia, and another near Caxias, in Maranhão. Given that the origins of the *Guerreiro* tradition lie in Alagoas, and the railway line that passed through Paulo Afonso, in Bahia, also traversed the state of Alagoas, it is consistent to hypothesize that the Siriema mentioned in the song's imaginary might refer to the district by that name in Paulo Afonso—even though the possibility that it is a fictional locality cannot be ruled out. It is worth highlighting that, in addition to its proximity to the railway and its associated imaginary, as well as to various other cities of the region mentioned in the canonical *Guerreiro* repertoire, Siriema is also relatively close to the birthplace of another historical figure frequently referenced in the folk tradition: the *cangaceira* [female outlaw of the Brazilian backlands] Maria Bonita, wife of Lampião, the "king of the *cangaço*",¹⁵ who was born and raised in an area approximately 40 km from the urban center of Paulo Afonso. Thus, the locality is also associated with references tied to mythical figures of criminality and their cultural imaginary in Brazil. This element is noteworthy because Maria Bonita and her husband Lampião are celebrated in numerous pieces of the *Guerreiro* repertoire and occupy a central place in Brazilian cultural imagery, through their representation in oral and written literature, popular music, cinema, and audiovisual productions (Lima Irmão, 2015, pp. 17–28).

Another element contributing to the grotesque dimension of Maria Pretinha's Transcendence lies, it bears repeating, in her imprisonment. The prison, by reinforcing the modality of *cannot-do/be* through the restriction of spatial mobility, reverberates in the instance of *doing* a limitation intrinsic to the character's very existential condition—that is, to the instance of *being*. Upon realising she could no longer afford to select her romantic partners, Maria Pretinha became a priori confined in existential terms, bound to respond to any proposal made to her with the same, unchanging "yes". In this light, the kiss that concludes the narrative may be interpreted as a continuation of this same impossibility of refusal, and

¹⁵ Among the many definitions of the *cangaço*—a concept not so far from the North American Wild West banditry—Lima Irmão considers that, besides a social phenomenon marked by the actions of armed outlaws who plundered farms, villages, and towns in the Brazilian Northeast, the *cangaço* represents also a manifestation of class struggle from the illiterate and poor peasants against the domination of an equally illiterate but wealthy and despotic ruling class of landowners (Lima Irmão, 2015, p. 21).

such a kiss sets up an opposition between thematic categories such as *love*, *loyalty*, and *friendship* in the instance of *Schein* [*to-appear*], and *lovelessness*, *disloyalty*, and *betrayal* in the instance of *Sein* [*to-be*]. The narrator's kiss, then, may be read as a demonstration of affection on his part and of gratitude on the part of the protagonist at the level of *appearance*—but of opportunism by the enunciating actor and of Maria Pretinha's submission and oppression at the level of *being*. This final stage enriches the semantic fabric of the text, allowing it to be read either literally and optimistically, or through the lens of the grotesque, marked by cynicism and the recognition of deeper, more complex and contradictory layers of meaning construction.

Finally, a last but necessary element to consider in the construction of the grotesque is precisely its contrast with the sublime. Victor Hugo asserted that the counterpoint between the grotesque and the sublime, just as between comedy and tragedy, lay at the heart of modern drama (Hugo, 1876, p. XXIV). In this respect, its presence in the *Guerreiro* performance, and its alternation with moments that emphasize the sublime, can be understood—within Hugo's framework—as a strategy for structuring the performance in a way that aligns with the genre constraints of modern drama. This contrast is not foreign to Tarasti's conception of Transcendence; on the contrary, the interplay of the grotesque in the negation of *Dasein* and the sublime in its affirmation aligns coherently with the contrast between the nihilism of the first stage and the *pleroma* of the second. Indeed, it is Tarasti himself who foresees the possibility, in the stage of Negation, of incursions into the realms of parody and mockery—explicitly including the grotesque in the latter (Tarasti, 2015, p. 7); likewise, the Finnish semiotician considers, as possibilities for Affirmation, processes he names illumination, initiation, and transfiguration—all of which are related to sublimation or the sublime itself (Tarasti, 2015, p. 8). Tarasti nonetheless emphasizes that his model was conceived more for the study, in Kantian terms, of the *transcendental*—that is, what pertains to our forms of apprehending objects (Kant, 1913, p. 49)—than of the *transcendent*, which refers to what lies beyond the bounds of possible experience (Kant, 1913, p. 526). In the case of Maria Pretinha, her transcendence follows Heidegger's understanding of transcendence as grounded in an original gaze upon the world—one capable of encompassing it, apprehending it, and shaping it (Heidegger, 1955, p. 39). Thus, although Heidegger does not explicitly address the categories of the sublime and the grotesque, Maria Pretinha's *anagnorisis* fits his concept of Transcendence insofar as it entails a substantial change in the quality of her outlook on the world—one that proves capable of transforming the universe around her.

8. Final Considerations

One of the many difficulties faced by the present research concerns the complexity of defining the boundaries of the syncretic text, particularly with regard

to interdiscursivity.¹⁶ Greimas used to remark informally within his close circle of collaborators that *hors du texte, pas de salut* [outside the text, no salvation]. In making such a comment, the Lithuanian linguist was primarily referring to verbal texts, in which the boundaries of the text—even from a material standpoint—are far more clearly defined than in the case of a syncretic performative text within the context of a traditional culture. In addressing the differences between verbal texts and syncretic texts within the context of orality in traditional cultures, Yuri Lotman observes that, while the former constitute complete texts or fragments of a purely semiotic nature, the latter—as syncretic and/or ritual texts—are mnemonically bound to oral references that are specifically anchored in a given temporality and spatiality (Lotman, 1990, p. 250). In the present analysis, the issue raised by Lotman gains remarkable concreteness and clarity. This is because each sign—whether visual or auditory—present in the *Guerreiro* performance has the potential to exhibit both a performative dimension, whose structural role in the syncretic text can be associated with a relatively clear function and semiotic value for an external observer, and a ritual dimension, whose mnemonic and symbolic associations often elude an observer unfamiliar with the cultural codes being mobilized—and, at times, pertain to a symbolic framework specific to the tight-knit community encompassing the performers, their collaborators, and their respective existential references.

In the analyzed piece, *Maria Pretinha*, certain convergences and divergences were noted in relation to another piece from the same performance—*Oh Doí-da*—in which the interface with the ritual and mythical aspects of the folk play they belong to begins to take shape. Actually, there are other pieces in the same performance in which the connection with religious imaginaries becomes even more tangible, such as *Eu que não tenho medo do Dragão Devorador* [I, Who Am Not Afraid of the Devouring Dragon], in which the well-documented syncretism between the Catholic saint Saint George and the orisha Oshosi, an entity venerated in both *candomblé* and *umbanda*, reveals the complexity arising from the superposition of millennia-old imaginaries from originally distant cultures that intersected in the New World.

As aggravating factors of complexity in pieces where the ritual dimension supersedes the performative one, we must highlight not only the totemic elements and their broad symbolic range, but also two particularly delicate issues. Firstly, when foundational aspects of meaning are silenced for being taboo, around which a declared or tacit customary law conceals from the outsider's gaze precious interrelations and causalities necessary to understand the nature of the

¹⁶ Fiorin defines interdiscursivity as the process through which themes and/or figures from one discourse are incorporated into another (Fiorin, 1994, p. 32). In the case of the *Guerreiro*, for instance, visual, musical, and verbal elements of this Epiphanic celebration relate not only to Christian traditions but also to Native Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian religious imaginaries. The result is a complex, encyclopedic, and kaleidoscopic texture whose comprehension often eludes those unfamiliar with the references—frequently mobilized simultaneously—by the multiple modes that shape this syncretic text.

symbolic apparatus in question. Secondly, when it comes to particularities of religious imaginaries that, unlike those of major world religions, have not undergone a process of unified doctrinal systematization. Thus, for instance, when a certain *umbanda* practitioner says that Saint George corresponds to Oxóssi—thereby mobilizing the full symbolic framework of colors, chants, myths, offerings, etc., associated with that entity—and another claims the correspondence is with Ogum, the absence of doctrinal standardization allows both to be equally correct, within the particular scope of their own religious spaces. In such cases, it falls to the researcher who wishes to engage with greater depth and consistency to become acquainted with the specific worldview of the community being studied, particularly in terms of the imaginaries it mobilizes.

Another point to emphasize is that Tarasti's model does not oppose Greimas's canonical generative trajectory; rather, it complements and enriches it—on the level of expression, by being more permeable to the structural role of figures of expression (particularly with regard to corporeality and its representations), and, on the level of content, by encompassing existential issues of great depth and complexity, such as worldview and Transcendence. Thus, while a Greimasian narratological perspective would focus on the junctional configurations of Maria Pretinha, attentive to the successive forms of spoliation she suffers, Tarasti's model—without invalidating any of Greimas's propositions—moves more swiftly toward examining the immense existential void experienced by the character, shaped by the pragmatism she is forced to adopt in the face of a progressively oppressive alterity. It plunges the narrative into an ambiguity on the edge of cynicism, in which even gestures of apparent generosity culminate in the character's systematic humiliation.

At the level of *S1*, then, we encounter an exclusionary value system that segregates the protagonist based on her skin color, her gender, and her socio-economic collapse—producing a toxic intersectionality that contaminates both her intersubjective relationships (in which she is permanently cast as the Addressee) and her junctional ones (in which she undergoes successive programs of spoliation). While the use of a major mode and relatively brisk tempo may be idiomatic traits of songs in the *Guerreiro* repertoire, the festive character of the piece nevertheless suggests a banalization of the character's suffering—an interpretation reinforced by the monotony of its choreography, confined to the basic *baião* step throughout the sung sections. As previously noted, only during instrumental interludes does the dance intensify, with a more agile and leaping variant of the basic step—suggesting that the character's silence, homologous to her physical immobility, holds within it most significant moments of the syncretic text in terms of pathemic states, implying rapid mobility at the level of modulations and modalizations of being.

These modulations and modalizations, in turn, suggest an affinity with the effect of meaning of uneasiness—*l'inquiétude*—a configuration discussed by Greimas and Fontanille in their *Semiotics of Passions* (1993, pp. 193–195). Thus, the moments in which the verbal instance falls silent are precisely those in which

the choreography emerges, marked by an intense articulation of modulations but preceding the discretization of modalities, and thereby operating within the realm of the sensible rather than the intelligible. Again, idiomatic though the procedure may be, its combination with the other factors mentioned before cannot but contribute to constructing what may resemble a muted scream from Maria Pretinha—a character so suffocated by the intersectionality of the oppressions she endures that no trace of revolt, protest, or even lamentation appears in the verbal discourse.

Thus, while the protagonist's silence in the verbal instance may suggest resignation in the face of such oppression, the choreography can be seen as an aspectualization that—without fully actualizing its content—nonetheless allows a glimpse of the uneasiness of a silent scream which, lacking the minimal freedom required to be expressed, remains latent, buried in silence after a kiss she would not have had the option to refuse.

Finally, one last point worth discussing concerns an issue as delicate as it is timely. Given that traditional cultural manifestations like the *Guerreiro* live under constant pressure to disappear—drowned by the hegemony of the culture industry, by economic infeasibility, by ruptures in the transmission of these traditions, and by the oblivion imposed by the frenzy of contemporary media culture toward traditional expressions—what is the sense in defending such traditions, especially when it becomes clear that some of their manifestations bear the marks of what is now considered abject in terms of racism, sexism, and classism, once naturalized but now deemed intolerable?

Some argue that the persistence of elements now recognized as racist, sexist, or classist may explain and even legitimize the gradual decline of such traditions (e.g., Albernaz, 2021, pp. 334–341; Albernaz, Lima, 2021, pp. 505–507; Carrico, 2012, pp. 31–32). Others advocate for unconditional preservation of the repertoire, emphasizing its intangible heritage value (Mira, Cerqueira, 2019, pp. 94–97). Still others defend selective preservation, either omitting or adapting the most problematic pieces (Carrico, 2012, pp. 35–36).

A growing body of scholarship, however, supports critical preservation, which seeks to safeguard the traditions while at the same time exposing and problematizing the mechanisms through which they reproduce structural inequalities (Cruz, Motta, Silva, Vellinho, Beltrame, 2021). It is within this last perspective that the present study positions itself, understanding that a critical engagement with the *Guerreiro* is essential for preserving its cultural significance while confronting the asymmetries it reproduces. Such a perspective allows that the mechanisms that naturalize such forms of violence are laid bare in detail, so that their normalization can be dismantled, and the situations of oppression can be presented as testimonies of a past that, while it must not be revived or perpetuated, also cannot and should not be forgotten—especially because only by knowing this past it is possible to understand and confront the enormous asymmetries inherited by contemporary society.

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