Masculinity in Carioca Carnaval Drumming*

by MA candidate Gregory Dillon

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* This presentation will be in English.

Abstract. Despite the considerable level of male participation in the Rio de Janeiro samba school parade, the majority of research regarding sexuality in Carnaval focuses on female dancers and femininity. The analysis of bateria, or percussion section, demonstrates how masculine constructions of sexuality are performed in the context of the Brazilian pre-Lenten festival. Sexist attitudes have remained prevalent in samba-school baterias, and continue to prevent women from participating as drummers even in recent times. This is likely due to the essentialist gender roles preserved in Afro-Brazilian culture, which hold drumming as masculine and dancing as feminine. By comparing the samba-school ritual to the spirit-possession ritual in Candomblé, this thesis traces the drummer and dancer gender roles to the African traditions preserved in that Afro-Brazilian religion. In addition, by placing iconic Brazilian figures in a sexual context, this research analyzes the roles of and relationships between ritual participants in the context of their respective historical settings in order to clarify the implications of performing masculinity through drumming in Afro-Brazilian religion as opposed to carioca Carnaval. An analysis and comparison of these two rituals, their participants, and the participants’ gender roles demonstrate that performing masculinity through drumming represents a significant manifestation of sexuality in Afro-Brazilian culture. More importantly, however, the research concludes that the inequitably reciprocal relationship between the drummer and the dancer makes gender equality impossible in the context of Carnaval. Only a reinvention or dismantling of these essentialist roles will permit revelers to participate in the event without gender-marked limitations.

Gregory Dillon, originally from New York, studied at the University of Connecticut where he earned his Bachelor’s degree in English. Pursuing an interest in Afro-Brazilian culture, Gregory worked in Brazil for two years at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. During this period, he was awarded certification as an instructor of Capoeira and Afro-Brazilian heritage. Following his return to the United States, he entered the Portuguese graduate program at UMass Dartmouth, which has allowed him to continue pursuing his interests in Brazilian culture.

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The UMass Dartmouth MA & PhD Program in Luso-Afro-Brazilian Studies and Theory
The Department of Portuguese, in collaboration with the Departments of Art History, Educational Leadership, History, Political Science, Sociology/Anthropology, Teaching and Learning, and the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture, cordially invites you to the MA thesis defense

Gregory Dillon

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