

MARACATU NAÇÃO NORONHA

Embodied cultural practice and its sustainability on an isolated Brazilian island

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ABSTRACT: Fernando de Noronha is situated approximately 430 km from the northeast coast of Brazil, and is the only populated island within a UNESCO World Heritage-listed archipelago of the same name. This article focusses on the contemporary maracatu ensemble based on the island, Maracatu Nação Noronha, and its significance within the local community. Maracatu is a distinctive northeast Brazilian performance genre with historical links to Candomblé, an Afro-Brazilian religion that blends the African practice of worshipping multiple *orixás* (spirits) with the Catholic practice of worshipping multiple saints. Maracatu has a long history of grassroots performative traditions and is closely connected to Brazilian *carnaval*. Maracatu ensembles typically include percussionists, singers, dancing *orixás* and characters representing members of the court within African crowning ceremonies held during the era of slavery. The article examines the development of Maracatu Nação Noronha since 2002, with a particular focus on music, movement and dance. It explores links between Maracatu Nação Noronha's activities and the historical development of maracatu, and examines how the group has adapted to the island's socio-cultural environment in the process of connecting with, and educating, local and tourist audiences. It discusses the significance and sustainability of embodied practices and cultural identity development and creation in the context of a small island whose community is still significantly rooted on mainland practices. The article draws on field trips by the authors in 2012 and 2014, as well as interviews with local residents heavily involved with establishment and maintenance of island maracatu.

KEYWORDS: Fernando de Noronha, maracatu, Maracatu Nação Noronha, tourism, cultural sustainability

Introduction

After the Fernando de Noronha archipelago (Figure 1) was discovered by Portuguese mariners in the early 1500s a number of European powers attempted to take possession of it before Portuguese forces established a permanent presence on the main island in 1737. In

the 18th Century a penal colony was established, with the island continuing to receive convicts and political prisoners until 1957, when its prison facilities closed. The islands continued to be administered by the Brazilian army until 1988 when the archipelago transitioned to a civilian administration and became incorporated into Pernambuco State. Following this, civilian migration, mainly from within Pernambuco, increased considerably, with the current population now numbering around 2,000 permanent and around 2,000 temporary residents (IBGE, 2016; online) and a variable number of tourists. As this brief description suggests, the island's community is somewhat unusual in terms of its relative homogeneity and the recent nature of its establishment. While there are parallels between it and Minami Daito in southern Japan, a previously uninhabited island mainly settled by Okinawans in 1900 (see Hayward and Long, 2013) and the Galápagos, which has experienced a surge in mainland Ecuadorian migrants since the 1970s (see Basset, 2009), the manner Fernando de Noronha operates as a remote outpost of a mainland culture without original juxtapositions and/or syncretisations of cultural styles makes it distinct – and, like the previously identified locations, gives some explanation for why its cultural practices have been largely overlooked by previous researchers.



Figure 1 - Map of Fernando de Noronha and Brazilian coast (Christian Fleury, 2017)

As discussed by Reis and Hayward (2013), the island has an unusual status in that it is directly administered by a state government rather than having an elected body to oversee its affairs. The island's transfer to civilian administration occurred alongside other measures that have had a major impact on the island: the designation of large environmentally protected areas under Brazilian law (in 1986 and 1988) that continue to be administered by the Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade ('Chico Mendes Institute for

the Conservation of Biodiversity') (ICMBio) and the UNESCO listing of the archipelago as a site of 'Outstanding Universal Value' in 2001. As a result of these measure, tourism and related land use has been subject to various controls. Legislation has established a cap of 246 tourists accessing the island by air at any one day but there is anecdotal evidence that this figure is greatly exceeded at peak holiday periods, when extra flights to the island are scheduled. Data from the State sanitation company indicate that sanitation services were provided to a total of 8,000 people on the island in July 2016 (Marinho, 2016). Tourism continues to play a major part in the island's economy but infrastructural development and amenities remain modest, with the island marketing itself to tourists with interests in local ecology and landscapes rather than more traditional resort-based destinations.

Given its history as penal colony, the island has few deep-rooted cultural traditions and almost all arts practices on the island involve various localisations of traditions imported from mainland Brazil. In these regards, Fernando de Noronha's music culture has many of the classic characteristics that Dawe identified in his 2004 edited anthology *Island Musics*. Our discussions take up several themes from his work that have been somewhat under-developed in Island Studies' approaches to island musics and, in particular, what Small (1998) referred to as musicking – ie the human interactions that give music meaning in and for communities. This focus allows us to explore the "positive ethos of self-sufficiency" that Dawe (2004: 1) has identified as distinguishing variously healthy, vibrant and/or sustainable musical communities. This, in turn, leads us to consider those aspects central to a more recent research and publishing project summarised in Schippers and Grant (eds) (2016). The volume and its constituent case studies explore issues of the sustainability of music cultures with regard to five "domains:" 1) systems of learning, 2) musicians and communities, 3) contexts and constructs, 4) regulations and infrastructure and 5) the relationship with the media and music industry. As befits the variety of scales of musical scenes addressed by the project, different factors have different degrees of prominence in the contexts discussed by contributors to the volume. Similarly, in the case of our study of Fernando de Noronha, which also – crucially – addresses dance, factors 1-4 are of particular importance.

Our focus on maracatu music and dance involves attention to particular filaments of Brazilian cultural history concerned with the expression of music and dance as markers of culture and identity with regard to Brazil's African migrant heritage. By addressing a particular musical genre and pattern of musicking on Fernando de Noronha, we engage with the enduring and resurgent traditions of descendents of African slaves and the manner in which their identities are being articulated in modern Brazil. As Bordokas has identified:

Maracatu Nação is the living heritage of the African nations brought to Brazil and the vessel which allows cultural traditions and consciousness to flourish among the traditionally marginalized communities. (nd: 23)

This article explores these aspects in one of the more recent geo-spatial displacements of African Brazilian culture, in the remote island community of Fernando de Noronha, and the manner in which the particular forms of music and dance styles performed by the ensemble we profile have come to offer one representation and embodiment of island culture that aligns itself to the island's distinctive social and geo-spatial character (Figure 2).



Figure 2 - Maracatu Nação Noronha posed on beach with backdrop of iconic volcanic outcrops (promotional photo 2004)

Music and dance as markers of culture and identity

Numerous authors have drawn attention to the power of music and dance as communicative media. Ronström (1994: 29) describes them as “affective, open-ended, multivalent emotional symbolic systems” with a “special potential for creating feelings of communality” while Nettleford sees dance as “one of the most effective means of communication” and “part of a society’s ancestral and existential reality” (1993: 97). More

broadly, Fitzgerald also suggests that “creative work, impacting largely at the emotional rather than intellectual level can convey a sense of the dynamics of identity formation in a compelling and subtly-nuanced manner” (2014: 90), while Green’s description of the complex processes involved in the development of identity through social/musical experiences might readily be applied to the field of dance:

Musical identities are forged from a combination of personal, individual musical experiences on one hand, and membership in various social groups—from the family to the nation-state and beyond—on the other hand. They encompass musical tastes, values, practices (including reception activities such as listening or dancing), skills, and knowledge; and they are wrapped up with how, where, when, and why those tastes, values, practices, skills, and knowledge were acquired or transmitted. (2011: 1)

Based on the work of anthropologists such as Csordas (2002), it is possible to understand dance and music as part of embodied expressions and experiences of the self and of the other that help shape and create collective and individual identity. Because of their constant movement and flux, they create disruptions and ‘unbalances’ that provide new meanings to experiences and are a fundamental part of the creation of culture (Hannerz, 1992). In this sense, music and dance can articulate different life dimensions, such as religious, political and social, at the same time. Csordas’ (2002) concept of embodiment is key to understanding Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions. Contemporary Brazilian dance director Claudio Segovia speaks of music and dance as integral aspects of the country’s cultural heritage and draws attention to the contemporary currency of the forms: “Besides the witness they bear to the past, as heritage, they are still alive, a part of today, and at the same time perpetually in the process of change and renewal” (Sawer, 2014: online). Throughout Brazil, music and dance are often closely entwined, and many genre labels – such as samba, lambada, and forró – have been used to refer to both music and dance forms (and the combination of the two). For example, Fernandes defines the Northeastern genre of forró as “a Brazilian dancing occasion accompanied by the live performance of a particular set of musical subgenres such as baião, xote, arrastapé, and forró” (2012: 1). Within Brazil, the nature of one’s connection with a particular musical/dance genre can also represent a conscious or unconscious statement about identity. For example, Draper III speaks of “forró’s continuing relevance to Northeasterners” (2011: 80) and draws attention to the nostalgic appeal of the genre, while Gomes (2001) notes how southern, middle-class audiences – who had previously shunned this supposedly rural genre – began to regard older versions of forró (based on the traditional accordion, triangle and zabumba trio) as fashionable music at the turn of the century.

Tavares argues that, “our conceptual system is rhythmically linked to our physical and cultural experience. In the African Diaspora, gestures and bodily habits comprise the performative field which are the ‘sites’ of experience” (1998: 5). In this sense, Afro-Brazilian music and dance, together with the common performative elements of some of these cultural expressions, such as ways of dressing, or costumes used in processions such as *carnaval*, and the religious-pagan relationship that several of these present, are part of a way of living (practice) that has the body (pre-objective) at the very centre (embodied). These bodies, in return, help create and establish an identity that is collective and individual at the same time.

The History of Maracatu

Lara (2007) defines maracatu as an expression of Afro-Brazilian popular culture that includes music, dance, characters and rituals. She highlights its significance to Brazilian culture, asserting that, for some, maracatu is a way of life, a representation of their culture, and a form of resistance. Vanspauwen (2005: np) agrees and indicates that maracatu “allows lower class people (sic) to use rhythmic continuity in order to shape their societal criticism” (2007: 113). The author compares maracatu with reggae in the way “it forcefully but implicitly vents common frustrations about poverty, inequality and disenfranchised ethnicity, and calls for a communalising spirit where one stays true to what one believes” (Vanspauwen, 2005: np). However, unlike reggae, the musical expression of maracatu is only one of its main components; maracatu is an example of a traditional Brazilian *folgado* – a term that “signifies a celebration or festival”, sometimes defined as a ‘dramatic dance’ or a “‘folk story with dance’, a popular festival with strong religious and ethnic elements” (Watts and Ferro, 2012: 886). Maracatu origins are closely linked to the Northeastern city of Recife and its surrounding areas, a region that has an eclectic ethnic and cultural past that is lively performed during *carnaval* processions that include “dramatic reconstructions of, for example, the uprising against Dutch occupation in the eighteenth century, the flourishing sugar industry that was based on slavery during the colonial era, the folk reinterpretation of the Congo empire on Brazilian soil and the ‘belle époque’ of Recife” (Pinto, 1994: 20).

There is considerable debate about the origin of the term maracatu. Kettner identifies a number of possible early uses of the term: for instance, to describe a street gathering of African descendants playing drums; as a code word to indicate the arrival of police to break up a gathering; or as a word used to end a gathering (2013: 20). Silva (1988) suggests that the 19th Century press began to apply the term to describe street processions in which Afro-Brazilians played drums. There is, however, widespread agreement that the origin of the maracatu performance is in the Reis do Congo (literally ‘Kings of Congo’, sometimes referred to as the ‘Act of The Congos’) ceremonies in colonial Brazil from the second half of the 17th Century until the abolition of slavery in 1888 (Guerra-Peixe, 1980, Kettner, 2013, Lima, 2014, Real, 1990, Silva, 1988). The Portuguese colonial administration accepted these ceremonies using them as a means of better “inspecting and controlling the order and hierarchies between black subjects” (Silva, 1999: 364). The ceremonies involved the election or appointment of a black African ‘king’ to represent his nation and act “as an intermediary between the government and the slaves” (Kettner, 2013: 17). The extended African ‘court’ included king and queen, as well as positions such as prince, princess and ambassador. The crowning ceremonies included music (with a focus on drumming), dance and costumed theatre. After the abolition of slavery the ceremony was discontinued, and there was shift in authority “from these Kings and Queens to religious leaders and prominent figures in the African communities” (Real, 1990: 71); however, aspects of the ceremony were retained in the form of large street processions with large groups of drummers and dancers. The parade groups included costumed characters representing Portuguese court members and *orixás* from the Candomblé religion.

Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion that combines the (African) practice of worshipping multiple *orixás* (spirits) with the (Catholic) practice of worshipping multiple saints, and the religion incorporates multiple *nações* (nations) “loosely connected to the African ethnic place of origin” of the participants (Kettner, 2013: 27). Candomblé *orixás* are connected to forces of nature and imbued with human qualities. *Calungas* – dolls made

using elements such as wood, wax and cloth - are used to represent both *orixás* and ancestors, as well as to protect the *nações*. Candomblé *nações* have a *terreiro* - typically a simple house with a large open space at the back where ceremonies take place. Members “express through dance, music, and beliefs the communal ethos” (Kettner, 2013: 29). During 18th and 19th centuries there was increasing hostility towards the Candomblé religion from within the Catholic Church and government. Crook notes that this hostility reflects the manner in which Candomblé has been perceived to “symbolically represented the barbaric, uneducated, and uncivilized side of Africa” (2005: 152). In the early 20th Century “along with the Afro-Brazilian religions, maracatu went through a long period of marginalization” (Kettner, 2013: 28) with many groups ceasing to operate (Lima, 2014, Silva, 1999). By the 1960s, maracatu was in serious decline, and there was a general lack of interest in the preservation of folkloric traditions – a tendency that was compounded by overt discrimination of Afro-Brazilian culture during the military dictatorship era (1964-1985).

The late 1980s saw the re-establishment of democracy and the beginning of a revival of interest in Brazilian folklore and genres such as maracatu. Barnardino José da Silva founded Maracatu Nação Pernambuco in 1989, and the group “began to include complex choreography, a horn section, and other stage and instrumental elements” (Kettner, 2013: 23) and made some of the first CD recordings of maracatu. Despite the music’s history, Maracatu Nação Pernambuco eschewed close connections with the Candomblé religion, which led to criticism from traditional maracatu practitioners. The Recife-based *mangue* (or *manguebeat*) movement also made a significant contribution to the renewal of interest in Pernambucano folk traditions (Galinsky, 2013). The movement supported the creation of new musical hybrids through the combination of Brazilian genres such as maracatu, *ciranda*, and *coco* with international popular music genres such as rock, soul, punk, rap, heavy metal and reggae, and *manguebeat* musicians intentionally referred to their music as *envenenado* (‘poisoned’) “to express their disdain for traditional purism” (Sharp, 2014: xii). Chico Science (aka Francisco de Assis França) became the most prominent 1990s *manguebeat* musician. He incorporated maracatu rhythms, as well as *alfaia* drums and other percussion instruments associated with maracatu, into his live and recorded work with Nação Zumbi. Chico Science’s expanding career was cut short when he died in a car accident in 1997 on the way to a performance, but by this time the maracatu crossover phenomenon was well established.

Both traditional and hybrid approaches to maracatu continue to thrive today. Leading groups such as Maracatu Nação Estrela Brilhante do Recife perform internationally¹, and spread of maracatu rhythms across Brazil and internationally has also meant that links between maracatu performance, the Candomblé religion, and the concept of *nação* have become limited or even non-existent (Lima, 2014). As Kettner has emphasised, there is a marked difference between “a traditional maracatu nation and a percussion group that plays maracatu rhythms.” (2013: 10)

Maracatu Nação Noronha

Maracatu performance on Fernando de Noronha commenced as a result of the interaction between a micro-community of Candomblé believers interested in maracatu performance

¹ Maracatu ensembles have also been formed in numerous international cities, such as Toronto, New York, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm, Edinburgh, Auckland, Manchester, and Melbourne (Courteau, 2008, Cruz, 2012).

who attracted the attention and engagement of a broader community (domain 2, in terms of the aforementioned sustainability models). The original impetus came from Dona Nanete, one of the island's longest continuous residents and the matriarchal head of one of the island's most important extended families. Dona Nanete arrived on Fernando de Noronha in 1947, when the island was under military rule. She was a follower of Candomblé, but had to hide her religious activities since the island authorities strongly opposed the practice, and her husband was a conservative man of rural origins who did not share her love for the arts or support her involvement in activities outside of the home. She maintained her Candomblé practice by holding secret meetings at her house with other island women who followed the religion, and she had a long-held desire to bring maracatu to the island.

In 2002, Nanete's daughter, Dôra Martins, established a local maracatu group with a group of friends, with costumes made by her mother. After seeing the ensemble's initial colourful and dynamic performances, a number of other islanders became interested in joining. Despite this, the regulatory-infrastructure aspects of the island's administration intervened (domain 4) with regard to regular departures of members who held only temporary island residence permits. This disrupted the continuity and development of the group, and it disbanded after a short time. As Junior Waldeck (Martins' nephew and Nanete's grandson) has described, two years later a different group of people tried to establish a new ensemble, taking the costumes Nanete had made and making a deliberate intervention (in terms of domain 1 - systems of learning) by bringing in a *mestre* (master/director) from Recife to train them. Repossessing his grandmother's materials, Waldeck intervened (domain 3 - contexts and constructs) by taking the maracatu materials to his aunt *pousada* (guesthouse) and asserting that she needed to become manager of the materials and the broader project of local maracatu performance in order to ensure its continuation (interview 2014). Nanete and Martins then used their own money to buy instruments, and a further initiative began in 2004, when the group began to stage occasional performances at a prominent tourist venue, Bar do Cachorro, run by Nanete's son, Ney Martins. Although the ensemble was now established on a firmer footing than in 2002, residency issues once again created difficulties – this time in relation to the search for a qualified *mestre* who could provide professional leadership.

Eventually, Martins made progress by recruiting Mestre Babu, a former member of one of Pernambuco's leading maracatu performance groups, and he settled on the island in 2004. Initially, the group only possessed a small number of instruments; a situation that changed in 2007 when a government-funded local environmental project recognised the cultural value of Maracatu Nação Noronha and donated money to pay for local adults and children to learn the percussion skills necessary to perform large ensemble maracatu (Waldeck, interview, 2014). Local cultural activist Grazielle Rodriguez, Nanete's grand daughter, has described the 2007 *carnaval* presentation by the maracatu group as the first high quality parade performance staged on the island (interview 2015); and in 2008 Bar do Cachorro began to schedule weekly 'Cultural Night' performances for tourists and locals. While Mestre Babu gave percussion lessons to people interested in participating in the group, leading to an overall improvement in the standard of performance, this improvement resulted in a less-inclusive approach to membership. Waldeck recalls that after he returned to the island after university studies in Recife he found that maracatu had "turned into a closed group, no one could go out, no one could get in" (interview 2014). But the exclusive approach to membership began to change in 2009, as ensemble members confronted the issue:

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Some people were developing a bit of a 'star complex'... People really understood you cannot be a hostage to these people, must open it up again because no one can come. After that maracatu is open. (interview, 2014)

Since that time, Maracatu Nação Noronha has continued to exist in two main forms – a smaller, core group (of around 12-15 musicians and dancers) that presents performances at Bar do Cachorro on Monday evenings, and a large procession group (featuring instrumentalists, singers, costumed *orixás* and court characters) that performs as part of the *carnaval* procession.

Waldeck has identified concerns about island people's willingness to commit adequate time and energy to maracatu: "People put work first, fun second, third place is maracatu." (interview 2014) and Maracatu Nação Noronha has also faced obstacles in gaining acceptance within the largely Protestant island community, given the genre's historical links to the Candomblé religion and the more "extreme" elements of its traditional practice, such as spiritual possession and animal sacrifice. One tactic has been to present maracatu as an important part of Pernambuco's cultural heritage rather than a quasi-religious practice. Group members have also actively engaged with islanders by presenting community workshops. For example, a 2011 project offered maracatu training to island children on Saturdays. Evidence for the growing acceptance of maracatu on the island can be ascertained by growing community support for the provision of a cultural space for Nanete. Mariana de Albuquerque, former Pernambuco State Government Cultural Project Officer, recalls that, in 2014 local politicians consulted islanders about what to do with "a very big room in a building close to the Bar do Cachorro... Everybody said they should have that room for the maracatu and especially for Dona Nanete." (interview 2015).²

Mestre Babu initially worked with a small group of instrumentalists and expanded the ensemble's skills beyond drumming, introducing conga, cowbell and carrilhão. He also identified one of the drummers (Robson Nascimento) as a suitable singer, and later added a second, Elda Pazhas. Membership of the small group is attained through audition with the *mestre*, and potential members are required to attend at least three days a week in order to develop suitable level of skills to join. A small group of around 15 instrumentalists, singers, and dancers performs weekly at Bar do Cachorro in full costume presenting a set of maracatu songs and instrumentals. These concert-style performances are designed to both entertain and educate audiences and they present the genre as an important Northeast Brazilian cultural activity without highlighting any religious connections. At a 2014 performance attended by one of the authors, Waldeck (one of the singers) explained aspects of maracatu tradition and local manifestations of the genre to the audience, and strongly emphasised the fact that the Noronha group is not a religious group, and is not associated with any extreme Candomblé elements. Gabrielle Rodrigues has explained that this focus on culture, rather than religion, was initially conceived as a way of making the genre more appealing and less threatening to local, mainly Protestant, audiences (interview 2015). Since tourist audiences proved to be interested in the genre's cultural traditions, the performances also began to incorporate talks about maracatu history.

² The year 2014 also saw the first local musical 'fusion' project involving maracatu, when leading island musicians, Diogo Mutti and Ricardo Buiú, organised and directed a Chico Science 'covers' show at local tourist venue Bar Muzenza (aka Pizzaria). Mestre Babu and Junior Waldeck were recruited to play maracatu-based rhythms that represent an integral element within Chico Science's musical hybrids. Waldeck recalls that "people loved the show, all the places people stop me" (interview, 2014).

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The weekly Cultural Night performances take place on the dance floor (rather than the stage) and ensemble members are in very close proximity to the audience. Performances are loud, physical and theatrical - with performers making large, exaggerated physical movements. This is especially true of the (three) alfaia drummers, who use dramatic extended arm movements connected to the prominent maracatu alfaia rhythms, which have a distinctive heavy accent on the first sixteenth note after beat 3 in a bar of 4/4. The agogô bell plays a repetitive syncopated pattern that provides a tempo reference for group members, while sectional changes are signalled by the *mestre* - with the temporary removal of the alfaia drums providing a notable textural modification at sectional changeovers.

Performances often include music written by members of the ensemble, since Mestre Babu has collaborated with singers Robson Nascimento and Elda Pazhas to compose a number of original songs. Lyrics typically focus on some aspect of maracatu traditions, such as the symbolic significance of maracatu instruments. They also make occasional reference to life on the island - as in the song 'Pra Quem vai Chegar', which includes the lyrics: "aqui tudo é paz, tudo é lindo, golfinhos se exibindo" ('everything here is peace, everything is beautiful, dolphins showing-off'). At the end of each show, tourists in the audience are encouraged to participate in both music and dance activities. A number are invited to borrow an instrument, learn a simple rhythmic pattern, and then perform their part within an ensemble made up of fellow tourists (Figure 3). After this, all audience members are encouraged to join in a *ciranda* dance - a rhythm/dance from Itamaracá in mainland Pernambuco - before continuing with single/couple dancing. This conforms to the tendency that Gibson and Connell draw attention to of including tourists "in some elements of performance, whether drumming or dancing, where identities are created and re-created" (2005: 197) as a means of encouraging tourists to "negotiate the identities of their home environment with newly encountered tourist spaces" (ibid: 198).



Figure 3 - Maracatu Nação Noronha drummers and tourists (photo: Junior Waldeck, 2014)



Figure 4 – Tourists participating in a *ciranda* dance at Bar do Cachorro (photo: Junior Waldeck, 2014)

The annual *carnaval* parade performance takes place on the Saturday evening of the carnival period. The *carnaval* rehearsal period begins around one month before the performance, and culminates in an intensive period of daily practice during the week before the parade. Participation in the parade ensemble is open and anyone who can learn the two musical pieces played at the parade are eligible to join the ensemble for the event. Prominent local residents are also invited to participate as court characters and a number of dancers play the part of *orixás* such as Iemanjá (mother/ocean), Oxum (freshwater/gold/precious stones), Iancã (female warrior) and Xangô (male warrior, thunder/justice). Linking back to our earlier discussion of embodied performance practices, Waldeck has explained that many observers familiar with the customary parade believe that the people appearing in role as *orixás* temporarily embody them and thereby merit the symbolic protection they receive by following the imposing visual and sonic presence of the massed drummers. As a result of this, the appearance of *orixás* in *carnaval* performances forms a visible and spiritual-conceptual link to the very traditions that are frequently downplayed in the music's promotion on the island (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – Orixá maracatu performers at 2010 *carnaval* (photo: Junior Waldeck)

Conclusions

Kettner (2013: 23) has drawn attention to the “the inclusion of maracatu in the cultural market during the 1990s” and has suggested that this re-connection represents an important element of the maintenance of Brazil’s cultural legacy. This article concurs with this characterisation and argues that, by exposing tourists and residents to a local, historically-grounded manifestation of maracatu, Maracatu Nação Noronha can be seen to be making a notable contribution towards the enrichment of contemporary Brazilian culture. Tourism plays a significant role here, providing both an audience through weekly shows that enable the ensemble to continue and to consolidate its identity as a distinct Fernando de Noronhan entity. In this manner, the importation of maracatu along with a population largely originating from Pernambuco state has allowed maracatu to become localised on the island as both an imported *but also* socially appropriate form for the community that sustains it. In this manner, it is multiply embodied – in the actants that facilitate it, in the community, and in the resource context and physical space of the island. Through local investments in the “domains” of systems of learning (domain 1), building a performance community (domain 2) and creating appropriate contexts and constructs (domain 3) in the face of regulations on personal movement that affect participants (domain 4), maracatu shows every sign of being a sustainable local practice on the island for some time to come and, thereby, acts as model for other fledgling cultural practices on other remote, low population islands.

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