

FREVO AND THE CONTEMPORARY DANCE SCENE IN PERNAMBUCO, BRAZIL:
STAGING 100 YEARS OF TRADITION

By

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To my parents Inez and Geraldo Azoubel, who nurtured my love for dance, to my students, who
have inspired me daily, and to the people of Pernambuco
In memory of the dancer and friend Henrique Figueirôa and the capoeirista and friend Aladin

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LIST OF TERMS

Baião	Syncopated dance music from the Northeast first popularized by Luiz Gonzaga
Blocos carnavalescos	Carnival groups of Recife
Bumba-meu-boi	folklore tradition that combines music, dance and comedy blending Portuguese, Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian tradition
Brinquedos	Designates popular traditions that combine music, dance and drums
Caboclinhos	Type of Recife Carnival groups that dress in stylized Indian outfits and feature music with a small flute, metal shakers and a drum, and fast paced-dance performances
Candomblé	Afro-Brazilian religion found especially in Pernambuco and Bahia and characterized by the syncretism of Catholic and African beliefs
Cangaceiros	Outlaws of the Brazilian Northeast
Capoeira	Afro-Brazilian martial-arts dance and music form
Capoeira Angola	Capoeira style created by mestre Pastinha in 1941
Capoeira Regional	Capoeira style based on physical fitness and inspired by other martial arts created by mestre Bimba in the 1930s
Cavalo-marinho	Popular tradition of the Brazilian Northeast, characterized by a combination of music, dance and drama, cavalo-marinho is the Portuguese for sea-horse
Carimbó	Circle dance and music of the North of Brazil
Ciranda	Circle dance of Portuguese influence in the Brazilian Northeast
Coco	Circle dance of participants who sing and play percussion instruments, closely related to samba
Congadas	Popular festivals in which white-clad dancers playing guitars and tambourines parade along the seafront accompanied by a figure of St Benedict in a decorated boat
Clubes Pedestres	Working-class pedestrian clubs in Recife that influenced the development of frevo in the early years of the twentieth century
Fandango	Brazilian popular dance and music tradition of European Influence

Forró	Urban northeastern-style music played by ensembles with accordion, triangle and zabumba drum and danced in pairs
Frevo	Syncopated dance music from Recife's carnival
Frevo de bloco	Type of frevo played in a slow rhythm and usually performed by female choruses in a melodic and lyrical style, and accompanied by string and wind bands in the Blocos Carnavalescos of Recife
Frevo-de-rua	Fast instrumental frevo highly syncopated and played by brass, wind and percussion instruments. Often the favorite style for the performance of intricate frevo steps
Frevo-canção	Solo song frevo popularized in the 1930s in Recife
Ginga	Literally, rocking back and forth in capoeira. It is accomplished by maintaining both feet shoulder-width apart and moving one foot back and then back to the base, describing a triangular step on the ground. Popularly used to express a special way of moving
Lampião	
And Maria Bonita	Important historical figures who were outlaws of the Brazilian Northeast
Malícia	Ability to fool in capoeira, and used in frevo as a characteristic of the "authentic frevo," the "street frevo"
Manguebeat	Music Movement that emerged in the 1990s in Recife
Maracatu	Afro-Brazilian music and dance form that developed in the carnival of Recife
Marabaixo	Dance of the North of Brazil
Modinha	A Brazilian sentimental song form that derives from Portuguese heritage
Ogum	Name of powerful male orixá in the Candomblé religion
Orixá	The generic term for Afro-Brazilian deities in Candomblé
Orquestra de frevo	Professional bands that perform frevo in Recife
Oxum	Name of female orixá in the Candomblé religion
Pandeiro	Brazilian tambourine used in different types of music
Passista	Frevo dancer, the term is also used for chosen dancers of samba schools
Pastoril	Christmas time dance and drama enactment

Polka-marcha	A hybrid march rhythm of the early twentieth century in Recife that influenced the beginning of frevo
Prato-e-faca	Kitchen utensils (plate and knife) played as percussion in samba de roda
Rabeca	Folk violin of Iberian influence found in the Northeast of Brazil
Reisado	Catholic popular tradition of Portuguese origin common in the Northeast especially during the period before Christmas
Samba de roda	Round dance involving small ensembles and instruments such as the atabaque, pandeiro, agogô, cavaquinho and viola
Saudade	Portuguese expression for longing, frequently used to express the feelings related to missing home
Violão	Brazilian acoustic six-string guitar with nylon strings
Xaxado	Dance tradition from the interior of the Northeast, often associated with the historical figures of Lampião, Maria Bonita and the cangaceiros
Zabumba	A double-headed bass drum used to play forró and baião music

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This research analyzes the formalization and development of *frevo*, one of the most important Brazilian popular music and dance traditions, in the streets and theatres of the metropolitan area of Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco. Historical analyses and ethnographical research demonstrate the contribution of selected popular artists in the development of frevo as a dance tradition from 1907 to 2007. My participation in frevo classes and informal interviews with members of popular and contemporary dance companies allowed the collection of specific dates, pictures and video materials about frevo contests and the creation of teaching methods. Information gathered on the work of popular artists Coruja and Nascimento do Passo, and dance companies of Pernambuco illustrate the different interpretations artists have had of this tradition in the twenty-first century.

My investigation focuses on the development of frevo as a popular dance tradition and its influence on theatres and dance companies in Pernambuco. This work addresses controversial ideas that are the nurturing elements of Pernambuco's contemporary dance scene. It investigates the influence of regionalist movements, the ideology of the dominant class, and Freyre's racial democracy on the placement of frevo as a symbol of identity for Pernambuco and as a core element for the state's contemporary dance scene.

I argue that, as Pernambuco celebrates “100 Anos de Frevo” (100 years of frevo), frevo is linked to the nationalist ideology of “mestiçagem” in twentieth century Brazil, associated within Brazil with the mixture of the “three races.” I show the reflection of this ideology on the formalization of the tradition and on the tension between dancers and choreographers as they perform frevo and try to understand its formalization process. These dancers view this process through the eyes of the dominant class, mostly composed of European descendents, who often denies the Afro-Brazilian influence in Pernambuco’s cultural traditions.

I recognize the interest of scholars and tourists in frevo as a musical style and show the influence of frevo in the dance scene of the state, but emphasize that little scholarly attention has been paid to frevo as a dance form. The view of scholars (and performers) of frevo as an “urban expression,” a symbol of identity for the “mixed population” of the city of Recife, has, to a certain extent, focused little attention on the formalization of the tradition, much less on the popular artists who contributed to that key process.

As a researcher, teacher and performer of frevo, I intend to provide a historical background in which to place the new generation of frevo dancers, and to give recognition to the people who have dedicated their lives to preserving the tradition. I investigate the influence of several key artists in the current dance scene, when public spectacles, in this case, the staging of frevo, become the source of inspiration for contemporary dancers and choreographers.

I believe my experience as a frevo dancer, born and raised in the state of Pernambuco, and my close association with the people involved in the tradition — frevo dancers, teachers, members of popular and contemporary dance companies — give me a unique perspective on this research.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

On February 9, 2007, the Brazilian state of Pernambuco celebrated “100 Anos de Frevo” (100 years of frevo). As a music and dance style originating in the street Carnivals in the sister cities of Recife and Olinda, frevo represents the social integration of the ethnic elements that, when combined, form the identity of its people. Recognized by most scholars as an urban expression of Euro- and Afro-Brazilian elements, frevo highlights individual expression and has come to represent Pernambuco’s identity within Brazil.

This research analyzes the formalization and development of frevo as a dance style in the streets and theatres of Pernambuco from 1907 to 2007. Historical analyses and ethnographical research are used to demonstrate the contribution of popular artists to the development and preservation of this tradition. The work of popular artists² Coruja and Nascimento do Passo, as well as popular and contemporary³ dance companies in Pernambuco, illustrates the different paths taken by dancers and choreographers to express this tradition.

Unlike other dance styles of Pernambuco, the heterogeneous and complex nature of frevo is not representative of just one ethnic group, social class or religious tradition. It is often associated with the mixed population of the street Carnival of the cities of Olinda and Recife, as

¹ Although frevo has been spread to the entire state, its origin is associated with the state capital, Recife, and its surrounding area, that encompasses its sister city, Olinda. In this study I will refer to Recife, as the urban area where the formalization of the style has taken place.

² By the expression popular artists I refer to artists from the lower class of the society, who have their social origin in the “povo,” the Portuguese expression that in Brazil is used to describe the common people of the lower classes, mostly associated with individuals who did not have access to formal schooling. From the Latin *populis*, the expression “popular” is directly connected with the expression “povo,” and is used to describe cultural expressions of the lower stratus of the society, of the people who do not belong to the dominant class.

³ In Pernambuco, the term popular dance is used to designate the dance style used by professional dance companies that were founded after the *Movimento Armorial* during the 1970s to perform and thereby preserve folkloric traditions. Contemporary dance companies are the groups that use modern and post-modern dance as their core dance technique.

they moved to the music played by marching bands. Valdemar de Oliveira wrote [my translation]:

Because it was, in fact, in Recife that all this took place, in the Recife of the late nineteenth century, and at the beginning of this century, when the music was emerging dictating the dance, or could it be that, as the dance took shape, it dictated the music. It is impossible to tell: if the frevo music brought about “o passo” [the step], or if “o passo” [the step] or dance, brought about the frevo. (Oliveira 1985, 11)

[Porque foi, de fato, no Recife, que isso tudo aconteceu, no Recife dos fins do século XIX, começos dêste, que a música foi aparecendo, conduzindo a dança, ou a dança foi tomando corpo, sugerindo a música. É impossível distinguir bem: se o frevo, que é música trouxe o passo, ou se o passo, que é dança trouxe o frevo.]

There is not a single historical event that can be pointed out as having stimulated the development of frevo as a dance style. Rita de Cássia Barbosa de Araújo has described frevo as a symbol of identity for Pernambuco: “Originally a cultural manifestation in the Carnival of Pernambuco, and born among the popular sector of the society, frevo started to be seen as symbol of cultural identity for the people of Pernambuco” (Araújo 1996, 21). [Manifestação cultural originada no Carnaval do Recife, nascida entre as camadas populares urbanas, o frevo passou a ser visto como símbolo de identidade cultural para os pernambucanos.] The common people have been its creators, its choreographers as they dance to frevo orchestras during Carnival, and as they perform frevo in Pernambuco and beyond.

Today, people in Pernambuco are proud to have created a music and dance style of their own. The expression “there are as many steps of frevo as there are people in the state of Pernambuco,” is a saying used by professional and non-professional frevo dancers and choreographers to define the continuous development of frevo. New movements are created every day by the common people of the street Carnivals inspiring new styles of teaching and performing frevo, linking the streets of Recife to the contemporary dance scene as choreographers investigate new ways of staging the tradition.

Frevo, Dance Ethnography and Contemporary Dance

In various parts of the world, scholars have investigated processes of formalization and staging popular dance, and although Brazilian popular traditions have been studied, not much attention has been paid to the participation of popular artists in the formalization of frevo. To my knowledge, the impact of Nascimento do Passo's pedagogical methodology and Coruja's performance style on the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco have not yet been studied.

Maria Goretti Rocha de Oliveira has investigated Nascimento do Passo's influence in the staging of popular dance and acknowledged both Nascimento do Passo's and Coruja's roles in teaching frevo to the Balé Popular do Recife, the first company to stage popular traditions in Pernambuco. In her Master's thesis, Oliveira analyzed the process of formalization of popular dance traditions in Pernambuco as they became public spectacles from 1970 to 1998.⁴ My analysis extends this line of inquiry back to 1907, and covers the rest of the twentieth century and up to the present day. My intention is to investigate the influence of several key artists in the current dance scene, when public spectacles — in this case, the staging of frevo — become the source of inspiration for contemporary dancers and choreographers.

Since the eighteenth century, Western intellectuals have become increasingly interested in folk traditions. Influenced by romantic ideas, folklorists were the first to investigate the theme, followed by anthropologists, who tried to interpret the cultures of the world's "primitive people." By analyzing the socio-cultural levels present in "complex" or "civilized" societies, researchers tried to understand the societies by analyzing the folk traditions they assumed best represented their national identity. In the twentieth century, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and psychologists, among others, have been analyzing popular culture from diverse perspectives. The

⁴ In 1993, Oliveira's master thesis was transformed in the book *Danças Populares Como Espetáculo Público no Recife de 1970 a 1988*.

dominant cultural view on this theme has led popular culture to be understood as a rich source for intellectual debate, but at the same time dance has been viewed as a topic not worthy scholarly research.

In the area of cultural studies, more specifically in the dance realm, we encounter several attempts to understand dance as a cultural expression. In *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (1999), dance ethnographer Joan Frosch cites Kaeppler (1978), who states that in 1942, Franz Boas, the pioneer of American anthropology, “laid a foundation for the possibility of examining dance and responses to it in terms of one’s own culture rather than as a universal language” (Frosch 1999, 251). But the discovery of “others” through dance finds resonance in the early twentieth century as modern dance was starting to flourish. The famous Russian choreographer Fokine created over twenty “Oriental” ballets for American Isadora Duncan. American choreographer and dancer Ruth St. Dennis took some of her choreographic inspirations from a poster advertising Egyptian deities cigarettes, and later, with her partner Ted Shawn, she toured and traveled widely, taking complete dances and hundreds of films from travels in Australia and India back to the US.

At this period, although non-European dance research was being done, it was somewhat marginalized. According to Frosch, in 1947, African-American Katherine Dunham, primarily renowned as a performer, choreographer and dance teacher, published her research on Haitian dance “*Las Danzas de Haití*.” The book was published in French in 1950 and for the first time in English in 1983. But it was not until Kurath’s essay in 1960, “Panorama of Dance Ethnology,” that the threads of cultural research in dance originated what became later known as dance ethnology (Frosch 1999, 251-252). The new ideas of researching dances of other cultures resulted in the necessity to find a name for the new area of study. For instance, Kurath

considered the term *ethnic* controversial and suggested that a “culturally complete picture” should include “all dance,” as ballet, jazz, and modern creative dance. She created a method on researching dance through culture and detailed it in “Research Methods and Background of Gertrude Kurath,” which included the preparation and various stages of fieldwork, laboratory study and search for stylistics characteristics, graphic representation of body movement, formations, music and words, theoretical conclusions and comparison with other cultures. Although Kurath is one of the early researchers to consider native experts as collaborators, her research process was criticized as too detailed and difficult to be understood by other researchers and descendants of the collaborators.

The ephemeral and performative nature of dance explains the fact that dance research has not yet been considered a serious object of study and even the name of the study continues to be a subject of confusion, which makes it difficult for the works to achieve fair recognition. Keali’nohomoku considers the term “dance ethnology” to imply “a limitation of the study to cultural parameters, particularly “descriptive,” and instead, she makes use of the term “anthropology of dance” or “ethnochoreology” — suggested by Kurath as an analog to ethnomusicology (Frosch 1999, 257).

The new field of study, now widespread in the U.S. is being referred to as dance ethnography. From the Greek *ethnos*, folk, people; and *graph*, write; it is descriptive in nature and is comprehended by the “participant observation,” the participant of the researcher, in the “field.” The subject has not yet achieved great recognition in Brazil. As a result, the investigation of Brazilian popular dance is spread among several fields: folkloric studies, sociology, anthropology, history, ethnomusicology and tourism. In order to understand the background of my field of study, American works on dance ethnography have informed my own research.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Brazilian folklorists investigated the emergence of frevo in general studies of Carnival. Traditionally analyzed as a combination of music and dance, frevo caught the attention of renowned folklorists and music scholars who included the topic among several works published. Among these scholars are the modernist Mário de Andrade (1934), and the folklorists Câmara Cascudo (1954), Katarina Real (1990), Mário Souto Maior and Leonardo Dantas e Silva (1991).

However, until the mid-twentieth century, the literature written on the subject was restricted to the investigation of the origin of the style, focusing primarily to its musical aspects, only rarely mentioning dance. Since the 1930s, other scholars have registered the presence of frevo in their works as folkloric expression. As it is typical of the time, these critics tended to have a highly romanticized view of cultural traditions, frevo included. In this period, frevo is mentioned in the works of Mário de Andrade (1934), Gilberto Freyre (1941), Câmara Cascudo (1954), and Hermilo Borba Filho (1951), as the central popular expression representing the social integration of Brazilian people in the urban center of Recife. For these scholars, frevo is representative of the mixed population, and as a counterpoint to samba, represents Pernambuco's version of Brazilian social and racial democracy.

Historian Ruy Duarte, in his *História Social do Frevo* (1968), investigates the social aspects of the tradition. In the preface of his book he states [my translation]: “Frevo is not a dramatic dance. It is not folk-music, it is not related to blacks, indigenous people nor to the Portuguese, it may even not be folklore. What the heck is frevo?” (Duarte 1968, 13) [O frevo não é dança dramática. Não é folk music, não tem parentesco com prêtos, índios e lusitanos, é capaz até de nem ser folclore. [Que diabo é frevo finalmente?]] Duarte was among most scholars of the period who tried to explain and find justifications for the diversity present in Brazilian culture as

they followed the trends of European supremacy present in Brazilian society. Duarte disagrees with all other attempts to find the origin of frevo in the Afro-Brazilian community. Although I disagree with Duarte's denial of the Afro-Brazilian influence on the origin of frevo, his book made an important contribution to the debate at the time and expressed the dominant view of the period.

As frevo caught the attention of people around the world, it was consolidated as a symbol of identity of the state of Pernambuco, increasing scholarly attention on the subject. Local intellectuals started to view the topic in the context of the society in which they lived. At the invitation of musicologist Curt Lange, playwright and theater director Valdemar de Oliveira wrote the book *Frevo, Capoeira, e Passo* (1985), which was first published as an article in 1946 in the *Boletín Latino-Americano de Música*. Although one of the most complete works about the subject, Oliveira's book includes an analysis of the musical and social dimensions of frevo, but restricts the dance analysis to the historical aspects of the tradition. He argues that the origin of frevo steps lies in interaction between *capoeiras*⁵ and the marching bands in the Carnival of Recife, an assumption that would be questioned throughout the following years.

Among the literature I consulted in this work, the only scholar I found who attempted to place the origin of frevo outside of the state of Pernambuco was the former president of the Brazilian literary academy, Alberto da Costa e Silva, in his *Um Rio Chamado Atlântico: A África no Brasil e o Brasil na África* (2003). Costa e Silva disagrees with Oliveira on the origin of

⁵ *Capoeiras* in the nineteenth century were considered violent street thugs, and these Afro-Brazilian "gang" members were often used for political violence (especially during elections), in exchange for political protection with the police. It is important to distinguish the term *capoeiras* (street thugs of the nineteenth century), *capoeira* (the art of playing/dancing/fighting), and *capoeiristas* (denomination given to people who play *capoeira*, after the 1930s, when the art is formalized with the creation of *capoeira* schools).

frevo, and questions the fact that frevo is considered an invention of the state of Pernambuco [my translation]:

I heard and watched frevo in October 1972 in Yamoussoukro, in the Ivory Coast... It was during a party for President Houphouet-Boigny. A small group of musicians, with *sansas*, drums and fifes, dressed as panthers or leopards started to play and dance what was for certain a [type of] frevo, and they told me it was a dance of senufo masks... We Brazilians present did not hide our enthusiasm. This was so evident that Houphouet-Boigny invited a military band to play the music again. With horns and wood instruments, the Ivorian frevo became equal to the frevo of Recife. And we danced it! (Costa e Silva 2003, 187-188).

[Eu ouvi tocar e vi dançar o frevo, em outubro de 1972, em Yamoussoukro, na Costa do Marfim ... Foi numa festa em homenagem ao presidente Houphouet-Boigny. Um pequeno grupo de músicos, com sansas, tambores e pífanos, e de rapazes vestidos de pantera ou leopardo começou a tocar e a bailar o que era inubitavelmente um frevo e me disseram ser uma dança de máscaras senufo. Os brasileiros presentes não escondemos o nosso entusiasmo. Este foi tão evidente, que Houphouet-Boigny ordenou a uma banda militar que executasse de novo a música. Com taróis, metais e madeiras, o frevo marfiniano ficou igual ao recifense. E caímos no passo!]

Costa e Silva also addresses the disagreement of the origin of frevo by many intellectuals of Pernambuco, including the writer João Cabral de Melo Neto. However, according to the scholar Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias (cited by Costa e Silva), a similar performance occurred in 1966, in Abidjã, which convinced him that the origin of frevo was linked to Africa. Costa e Silva believes that frevo was taken by the slaves from Brazil to Africa, "... in the same way as the little donkey or the *bumba-meu-boi*⁶ tradition, the *samba*, the Brazilian guitar, the tambourine and the plate-and-knife"⁷ (Moraes Farias, cited in Costa e Silva 2003, 188). [...do mesmo modo que a burrinha ou o bumba-meu-boi, o samba, o violão, o pandeiro e o prato-e-faca.]

⁶ *Bumba-meu-boi* is a folklore tradition that combines music, dance and comedy. It tells the story of death and resurrection of an ox in a play of human, animal and fantastic characters inspired in Indigenous mythology, blending Portuguese, Afro-Brazilian and Amerindian traditions. It started at the end of the eighteenth century in the coastal plantations and cattle ranches of Northeastern Brazil and it spread to the North and South.

⁷ The *prato-e-faca* is an Afro- Brazilian use of European kitchen utensils (dish and knife) as musical instruments. Usually played by women in the Afro-Brazilian tradition of the *samba de roda*, a continuous sound is produced by the movement of the knife, as it is scratched on the edge of the dish.

The search for such origins is purely speculative and based on highly subjective linking of a similarity in sound and movement. Up to that point in history, the attention of scholars was based on these types of assumptions. The works written by scholars born in Pernambuco tended to follow the view of the dominant class to which most of them belonged. Music scholars began to pay attention to frevo as the style was being exported from Pernambuco to other parts of Brazil and to the world. As recognition of Afro-Brazilian culture increased inside and outside Brazil, musicians, and later ethnomusicologists, started to write about frevo in tune with their line of thought. In 2000, the journalist José Teles in his *Do Frevo ao Mangubeat* traced the musical rhythms of Pernambuco starting from the development of frevo until the establishment and repercussion of the *movimento mangubeat*⁸ during the 1990s. The information in this book was not only central to my research, illustrating the musical aspects of frevo, but also placed the tradition within the historical context of the state of Pernambuco up to the twenty-first century.

From the literary sources published outside of Brazil, I have drawn from the work of my mentor, the ethnomusicologist Larry Crook, *Brazilian Music: Northeastern Traditions and the Heartbeat of a Modern Nation* (2005), in which he analyzes the entrance of frevo in the Brazilian national consciousness through the country's newly formed broadcast industry centered in Rio de Janeiro. His work also addresses the transformation of frevo into an emblem of racial and cultural mixture, analyzing the changes which occurred in the musical style as a consequence of modernization in Brazil, but which had experienced a certain degree of stagnation by the 1980s. I also have drawn from the works of scholars Bárbara Browning and Kenneth Dossar in their analyses of capoeira.

⁸ The *mangubeat* was a movement that begun by the bands Chico Science & Nação Zumbi, Cascabulho, Mestre Ambrósio, Chão e Chinelo, among others. They mixed the percussion-heavy local traditions of *maracatu* and *coco* with funk, rock, metal, punk, rap and hip hop, reinterpreting and revitalizing the musical heritage of Recife.

The historical background of my investigation is taken from several sources related to Brazilian history. Freyre's *Casa Grande e Senzala: Formação da Família Brasileira sob o Regime de Economia Patriarcal* (1933), *Sobrados e Mocambos* (1936), *Região e Tradição* (1941), and *Guia Prático Histórico e Sentimental da Cidade do Recife* (1942) outlined the ideas that led to the myth of social and racial democracy spread in Brazil since the 1930s. For a deeper understanding of the context in which frevo finds itself in the state of Pernambuco and within Brazil, I have drawn from the writings of the historian Robert Levine in his *Pernambuco in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1937* (1978), and several works of two of my professors Jeffrey D. Needell, and M. Elizabeth Ginway, as well as the sources cited above, internet sources and published newspapers.

Understanding the class structure and the appropriation of popular traditions by the upper class was crucial to my investigation, and the works written on Brazilian Carnival were of utmost importance. In *Antologia do Carnaval* (1991), folklorists Mário Souto Maior and Leonardo Dantas e Silva collected the writings of several authors that were extremely useful. Among them, Henry Koster's "O Entrudo" (1978), José Ramos Tinhorão's "O Carnaval no Romance Pernambucano" (1991), Leonardo Dantas e Silva's "O Frevo Pernambucano" (1990), and Mário Mello's "A Origem e Significado do Frevo" (1938) contributed to my understanding of frevo in the different historical periods of the Carnival tradition in Pernambuco.

I have drawn on Rita de Cássia Barbosa de Araújo's *Festas: Máscaras do Tempo; Entrudo, Mascarada e Frevo no Carnaval do Recife* (1996), as she placed the Pernambuco Carnival celebration in the context of Brazilian nationalism and identified it as one of the elements that influenced the construction of state and national identity. The work of Felipe Ferreira, *O Livro de Ouro do Carnaval Brasileiro* (2005), placed frevo within the broad national

context of Brazilian Carnival, and compared its development in Pernambuco with the Brazilian national rhythm, *samba*, an analysis I found necessary for understanding the presence of regionalist trends in Carnival.

In analyzing the development of frevo and its dance aspects, the work of Maria Goretti Rocha de Oliveira, *Danças Populares Como Espetáculo Público no Recife de 1970 a 1988* (1993), provided important background for my own investigation of frevo. Oliveira's interviews with Nascimento do Passo, members of the Balé Popular do Recife, its director André Madureira and the Grupo Folclórico Cleonice Veras served as important sources for my analysis of the staging of frevo.

As a dance ethnographer, I also employed a combination of informal personal and group interviews, participation in dance classes, and the investigation of an unpublished booklet containing the main ideas of Nascimento do Passo's teaching method, *Projeto 50 Anos de Frevo no Pé* (50 years of frevo no pé⁹ project), (Passo, 1998, Figure 1-1), press materials, and newspaper articles on the latest frevo productions. After the official celebration of "Cem Anos de Frevo" (A Hundred Years of Frevo) began in February 2007, different ideas about dance and identity have flourished in the society of Pernambuco, and I look forward to seeing more written and choreographic material on the subject in the future.

While recognizing the importance of the literature produced on frevo, the main objective of this work has been to give voice to the popular artists, who have dedicated their lives to frevo, and to investigate the impact of frevo on the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco. This investigation allows for the increased understanding of the encounter, the mixing, and the re-creation of frevo steps, facilitating different interpretations of the subject. Using contemporary

⁹ The expression *frevo no pé*, Portuguese for "frevo on the feet," is used to describe the act of dancing frevo.

ideas, the process of formalization of frevo is questioned, and movements are shown to be tied to individual expression, linking the tradition to its double origin, of both individual and spontaneous expression.

My contact with contemporary dance started in 1996, when I first traveled to the United States. As a dancer, I worked with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and her dance company Urban Bush Women¹⁰ while they were in residence at the University of Florida. Ms. Zollar's choreographic philosophy brought me back to the frevo world to which I belonged, causing me an instant identification with her choreographic material. Her requests for improvisation, the exploration of movements based in previous choreographed material, and her emphasis on individual expression made me familiar with the world I had just entered by dancing for a contemporary company. The solos I performed in rehearsals reminded me of the frevo solos I used to perform in Brazil. In every rehearsal and performance I found room for my own expression, for exploring my creativity, and for challenging my improvisational skills. Soon after, in 1998, I started my undergraduate studies at the University of Florida, and became more acquainted with modern and contemporary dance.

The historical roots and the evolution of modern dance explain the desire of certain individuals to replace the rules of classical ballet with the desire for self-expression. The development of modern dance, dating back to the early twentieth century, was based almost exclusively on dancers' self-expression. Breaking away from the rules of classical ballet, the first generation of modern dancers inspired many followers, who later codified steps, creating their own styles of teaching and performing.

¹⁰ Founded in 1984, the Afro- American contemporary dance company Urban Bush Women is based in Brooklyn, NY, and tours around the U.S.

Developed primarily in the United States and Germany during the twentieth century, modern dance closely resembles modern art and music in its iconoclasm and experimentation. It is typically conceptualized into three main historical phases. The first phase is characterized by the breaking of old patterns established by the classical ballet technique. Known today as “the first generation of modern dance,” artists involved in this period included Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, in the United States, and Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman in Germany. These dancers rebelled against the rigid formalism, artifice, and superficiality of classical academic ballet and each sought to inspire audiences to a new awareness of inner or outer realities, a goal shared by all subsequent modern dancers.

The “second generation” of modern dancers was characterized by the codification and formalization of the styles created by the previous generation. Among the dancers who participated in that phase were Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. The third phase, the period that preceded and motivated the ideas of the contemporary dance of today, was characterized by breaking away from the codification proposed by the previous generation. The main names of this period were disciples of the “second generation” and included Merce Cunningham and Lester Horton. Although differing from one another, these distinct phases were a result of the dancers’ necessity to express their individual needs and visions. In contrast to folkloric and popular expressions, modern dance had no direct attachment to ritual, religion or classical tradition; instead, individual expression inspired the movement tendencies of dancers, who became known as the “fathers and mothers” of modern dance.¹¹

As a dance style, contemporary dance continued this process of rebellion from traditional and pre-established movement patterns of modern dance. Individual expression became its main

¹¹ Although some of these dancers investigated rituals of different cultures, most of their work was based on their individual expressions, deliberately breaking away from previous classical ballet training.

core, and it is a source of inspiration for choreographers and dancers. Subjective themes were explored and human questions invaded the stages through movement. Consequently, traditional movement patterns are analyzed, broken with, and replaced by the creative vision of the choreographer – who is believed to be constantly influenced by her or his surroundings. In this period, the individual is seen as a product of the environment, as the one who constructs occupied space. As a cosmopolitan form of expression, contemporary dance has traveled through out the world, changing the dance scene of many countries that classical ballet had influenced in the past.

Due to geographical and economic factors, Brazil received the first seeds of American modern and contemporary dance much later than the so-called developed countries. Within Brazil, the southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo were early centers of dance activity. In Pernambuco, this new approach did not reach the dance scene until the late twentieth century. These southern Brazilian states have had a stronger influence of European and American formal dance, and welcomed the first ideas of modern dance. For many years, classical ballet and American jazz dance were the two formal styles taught in dance schools and theatres of Pernambuco. As a consequence of the exchange of dancers between dance companies of the Northeast and the Southeast, modern dance gained in popularity, eventually initiating the development of contemporary dance ideas in Pernambuco.

In contrast to dancers in other parts of Brazil, those raised in Pernambuco are somewhat unique, since until now, most contemporary dancers of Pernambuco have not been trained in a specific school of modern dance. Rather, their dance technique derives from their training in classical ballet schools, American jazz, their experience in popular dance companies, or in a mix

of these dance experiences. In the dance realm, the *Movimento Armorial*¹² in Pernambuco played a key role in motivating dancers and dance companies to mix popular and classical forms and to incorporate popular dance vocabulary in their dance training.

In the 1970s, the *Movimento Armorial* pushed popular dance traditions to be staged as theatrical spectacles. This phase is characterized by the creation of the Balé Popular do Recife, influencing the founding of many other dance companies such as the Balé Brincantes, Companhia Trapiá de Dança, Maracatu Nação Pernambuco, and Balé Brasília, just to cite a few. These companies led to the founding of several other dance companies that specialized in presenting the folklore of Pernambuco in forms of theatrical spectacles. Due to their dedication to staging popular dance traditions, such groups started to be known as “grupos para-folclóricos” distinguishing themselves from the community groups, known as “grupos folclóricos” (folk groups), which are the groups that originally invented the traditions that are now being transformed and performed on stage.¹³

When popular traditions are staged, they undergo a process of modification that is motivated by the adaptation of that tradition to its new environment. Choreographers and dancers of the “grupos folclóricos” or “grupos para-folclóricos” adapt these traditions for a new purpose: audience entertainment. In Pernambuco, this process was motivated principally by the tourist industry, leading to the creation of the Balé Popular do Recife, and the many other dance groups soon after.

¹² The *Movimento Armorial* was developed during the 1970s intending to blend erudite and popular culture.

¹³ This process can be compared, to a certain extent, to what happened in the dance scene of Bahia, where Afro-Brazilian rituals are represented by dance companies in tourist events. The Balé Folclórico da Bahia is one of the best examples. Although named Balé Folclórico da Bahia this group is considered a grupo or balé para-folclórico due to its professional intention. Often groups that are by definition “grupos para-folclóricos,” are known as “grupos folclóricos.”

Today, in addition to the founding of many popular dance companies, the state of Pernambuco is also unique because of its contemporary dance companies, which are concerned with using popular traditions as source of inspiration for their shows. As a result of their attention to local traditions, a specific and unique vocabulary of movement developed among the contemporary choreographers, and in blending popular traditions with contemporary concepts, they have created a pattern firmly imbedded in the choreography and dance technique of the state.

Among the traditional dances that have been staged up to today, frevo has been the one that has influenced the contemporary dance scene the most. The formalization of frevo has inspired the formalization of other dance traditions in the state, and at the same time, these other dance traditions have consolidated a technique that is inspiring contemporary choreographers to break new ground in the construction of their styles. It can be said that dancers in Pernambuco have been highly influenced by frevo in their dance technique. Used in diverse ways, frevo steps, along with technical nuances, are present in the numerous pieces, and are firmly rooted in the dancers' unique body movement.

The Significance of this Study

As one of the most important Carnival traditions in Brazil, frevo was designated a historical patrimony in 2007 by the IPHAN, the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Artistic and Historical National Patrimony Institute). However, most literature written on frevo explores the music, giving little attention to the importance of dance and its influence on theaters and dance companies. An investigation of the ideology that elevated frevo music and dancing to a regional symbol will enhance our understanding of the tradition.

Throughout this work, I consider the literature written on racial mixture and the scant literature written on frevo, arguing that frevo is linked to the nationalist ideology of

“mestiçagem” in twentieth century Brazil. First and foremost, frevo is viewed as a regional identity symbol for the state of Pernambuco. Second, frevo has been associated within Brazil with the mixture of the “three races” (African, Amerindian and European). The ideology of downplaying the Afro-Brazilian component in Pernambuco cultural traditions has been present in the dominant class, mostly composed of those of European descent.

As a dance style, frevo is characterized by the contrast of individual versus group expression. The individualized improvisational nature of frevo street performance is being used by contemporary choreographers as inspiration for the formalization and staging of the tradition. The steps once created by the common people in the streets become the inspiration for the “técnica” (dance technique) taught at frevo schools. Presenting the importance of these elements for the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco, this work shows the development of frevo and the influence of traditional tendencies, spread among the population, on the dance itself, and on its tendency to constantly change.

Generations of musicians and dancers have consciously or unconsciously contributed to the development of frevo. Frevo dancing has influenced the emergence of many other dance styles, caught the interest of scholars, and given tourists the opportunity to experience its significance in the streets of Pernambuco’s Carnival. However, despite the pervasive influence of frevo on the tourist industry and on the dance scene of Pernambuco, little scholarly attention has been paid to it as a dance form. As a teacher and performer of frevo, I intend to fill in this void and provide a more accurate historical grounding for the new generation of dancers, giving more recognition to the people who have developed and maintained the tradition.

The informal interviews presented in this study allowed me to collect specific dates, photos and video material on the participation of popular artists, including children, in the creation of

methods of teaching and staging frevo. Through my participation and observation in frevo classes, and my experience as a frevo dancer, I compared the pedagogical methods and choreographic approaches used by dancers during frevo performances. Archival research visits to the Museu do Frevo, Museu do Homen do Nordeste, Casa do Carnaval, and many Carnival associations in the cities of Recife and Olinda were helpful for the collection of relevant written material such as books and newspaper articles on the subject.

I intend that the recordings and written material resulting from my field work contribute not only to the process of formalization and development of frevo, but also to the consolidation of the “professional frevo world,” through the inclusion of frevo dancers in the job market. Although being formalized and staged, frevo has been preserved mainly through street performance, surviving as a popular tradition in the Carnivals of Pernambuco. While the presence of frevo during Carnival has continued to popularize the dance, it has decreased the acceptance of professional frevo dancers in the job market. The association of frevo with Carnival to some extent has influenced the acceptance of frevo in the professional dance scene of the state, making it harder for frevo dancers to be recognized as professional dancers. For some formally trained dancers, frevo is not considered suitable for the stage.

In Pernambuco, professional frevo dancers¹⁴ struggle to make a living, which leads them to perform other dance styles as a way out of their dire socio-economic condition. Because of the nature of frevo as a dance tradition, one that includes the street Carnivals and the stages, it is hard to distinguish an amateur from a professional dancer of frevo. For the purpose of this study, I consider frevo dancers who are paid to perform as professional. I find it useful to separate them in three groups, since different orientation and background link frevo dancers to class

¹⁴ As frevo dancers I refer to dancers who have taken the performance of frevo as a profession, most often known as “passistas.”

issues illustrating the complex nature of frevo: 1- dancers who have learned frevo through their street experience and today perform in tourist events; 2- dancers who have learned frevo by attending a school and/or performing for a popular dance company; 3- dancers who have been trained in contemporary or classical dance, and today perform the new interpretations of frevo, as the style is being staged by contemporary choreographers.

Most dancers who best represent frevo are living in the slums surrounding Recife. Although their dedication to frevo facilitates their inclusion in society, for these dancers, performing frevo can not yet be considered a lifetime career. Recognizing the importance of frevo for the people of Pernambuco and its ability to reach the lower classes of the society (since it originated from the “povo”) will eventually allow frevo dancers to survive as professionals. As one young frevo dancer described [my translation]:

Most of the teenagers who live in the same slum I do are looked on as criminals and are feared by everyone. I am different because I dance frevo, so they look at me as “the artist,” and I am proud of that... the problem is that I never make money when I perform, so I will have to find something else for me to do... God knows what. (Werison Fidelis, interviewed on 07/16/06)

[A maioria dos jovens, que vive na mesma favela que eu vivo, é vista como bandidos e é temida por todo mundo. Eu sou diferente porque eu danço frevo, então eles olham pra mim como “o artista”, e eu tenho orgulho disso... o problema é que eu nunca faço dinheiro quando eu danço, então eu vou ter que achar outra coisa pra mim fazer ... sabe Deus o que.]

Werison Fidelis is among the hundreds of young *passistas* who daily face the dire poverty of Pernambuco. Through this work, I analyse the process of formalization of frevo within the socio- realities of the dance scene in the twenty-first century. The popularity of frevo is incongruous with the poverty of the dancers, and since I see dancing as a tool for education and change, it is my hope that by providing more information on the topic, I will make progress toward facilitating this change. My research is intended to inform scholars and others about the

development of frevo, and recognize the efforts of individuals who have invested their lives in the preservation of this important dance tradition.

The Data Collected and Research Methods

In 1998, right before I traveled to the U.S. to pursue a career as a professional dancer, I visited Nascimento do Passo. He was teaching frevo in the Escola Municipal de Frevo, a school sponsored by the city of Recife. I had previously studied under Nascimento do Passo in a public school, and had learned the steps he created as I worked for the dance companies, but I had never intended to research frevo formally.

With the intent to take my last frevo class with Nascimento do Passo before I left my home town, Recife, I spent the entire day at the school. With the knowledge of my plans to travel, we agreed on a special class, in which we spontaneously danced and discussed the steps he was teaching that day. As we danced for many hours, he explained his teaching methods to me, and he mentioned his dream of having frevo taught in all schools and universities. Before I left the school, he presented me with a booklet he had put together with the multi-media artist Antônio Nóbrega on his method of teaching, *Projeto 50 Anos de Frevo no Pé* (50 Years of Frevo no Pé Project), mentioning his dream that the booklet was translated into English. He emphasized that my trip to the U.S. might turn out to be an opportunity to accomplish that, entrusting me to do so. At the time, the booklet added to my understanding of the steps he had created, thereafter inspiring my dancing career in the U.S.

After taking his class, he insisted I videotaped a combination of steps he had catalogued, so that, in his words, “you do not forget them and can teach what you know to the foreign people you will encounter” (Assim você não esquece eles e pode ensinar o que você sabe para as pessoas estrangeiras que você vai encontrar.) Nascimento do Passo seemed to understand my

desire to teach frevo abroad, but he did not realize how much his philosophy would influence my dance career, and how much it would inspire my dance research.

Growing up in the 1980s, I had always known Nascimento do Passo as a famous frevo teacher in Recife. He distinguished himself from other frevo teachers by wearing frevo costumes every day of the year, not only during Carnival or performances, and he was known for having taught the best frevo dancers in the state. Although popular dance had been always part of my background (I grew up dancing also other northeastern popular dance traditions, such as *pastoril*, *maracatu*, *ciranda*, *coco*, *xaxado*, *bumba-meu-boi*, etc.), my interest in frevo, other than in Carnival, began when I joined the dance company Brasiliana directed by Marcos and Ana Melo in 1990.

This dance company rehearsed in the neighborhood of Afogados, in the suburbs of Recife, and was composed mostly of professional dancers who had studied under Nascimento do Passo and/or danced for the Balé Popular do Recife. While participating in the Brasiliana I first learned a new way that frevo could be performed on stage. The company was composed of dancers with little formal education, with origins in the lower classes, who intended to stage popular dance to take it abroad. Our choreographic method consisted of using frevo steps taught by Nascimento do Passo and Coruja, or participating in street Carnivals.

Our philosophy was to incorporate people trained in classical ballet into the company, in order to add more “technique” and “quality” to the performance. My own formal training led to my inclusion to the company. By technique we meant a degree of performance quality that required formal dance training, the ability to memorize dance steps, and to perform them in a certain order. We intended to dance for the audience’s expectations, instead of improvising, as frevo dancers do during Carnival or in performance for hotel lobbies and tourist events. We

thought that only classical ballet training could teach that type of performance quality. Our intention was to show frevo on stage, for this reason we emphasized synchronism, virtuosity, endurance, and performance quality.

Our view was that frevo did not belong exclusively to Carnival nor did it serve only as a tourist attraction, instead, it functioned as a source of inspiration for new choreographic creations. Although the Balé Popular do Recife had staged frevo among other popular dances, in our opinion, their productions showed similar characteristics to frevo performances for tourists. In fact, that company's financial survival depended of performances for tourists. They intended to preserve what had become known by the people of Pernambuco as the "authentic frevo."

After joining the dance company Brasiliana, my interest in performing popular dance, and in the adaptation of folkloric expressions to formal stage settings increased. Soon after, I joined the Grupo Folclórico de Canto e Dança de Olinda (1991), a folkloric group directed by Carlos Ivan de Melo. This company aspired to show Portuguese and Brazilian dance traditions and to reduce the cultural distance between Brazil and Portugal. Most of our shows aimed at tourists and events for middle-class audiences in Brazil or Portugal — due to its tourist approach, in this group, frevo was purposely shown as a folkloric expression of Pernambuco.

Gradually, the name and frevo steps of Nascimento do Passo and Coruja became part of my professional life. My friendship with the *passista* (frevo dancer) Henrique Figueirôa, and dancers of the Companhia Olindança (a popular dance company I directed), also motivated my interest in investigating this dance style more fully.¹⁵

¹⁵ The *passista* Henrique Figueirôa died in 2006 for lack of financial condition for health treatment. His determination to have frevo as his lifetime career deeply inspired my work with the dancers of the Companhia Olindança.

At this point, the careers of several frevo dancers inspired me. While Nascimento do Passo's booklet serves as a tool for the analysis of the formalization of frevo, it is my sincere hope that by writing this study, I can continue to fulfill part of his dream of having frevo taught in formal settings. I write this work in Coruja's and Henrique Figueirôa's memory, and I wish to dedicate it to Nascimento do Passo as a way of thanking him for his generosity and dedication to frevo, which has been an inspiration to me in my professional dance career.

Frevo dancers in the state of Pernambuco are numerous, but my own personal experience and data collection led me to focus on the influence of Nascimento do Passo and Coruja on the state's dance scene, which made the gathering of material about their lives the starting point of my research. In fact, some of the data collected for this work dates back to a time before I started my Master's degree at the University of Florida in 2005, such as Nascimento do Passo's booklet, and several of his quotations which date back to 1998.

The information from archives retrieved during my field work in 2006 confirmed the influence of Coruja and Nascimento do Passo on Pernambuco's dance scene. This led me to interview former students of Nascimento do Passo, professional dancers, and choreographers of popular dance companies, who, through their dancing and choreographic creations reflect Nascimento do Passo's and Coruja's influence and impact of frevo on the popular and contemporary dance scene.

For the purpose of this work, I chose to investigate the teaching methodology applied at the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges, which I consider to be one of the most important sites for the development of contemporary frevo. It was there, when the school was still named Escola Municipal de Frevo, that Nascimento do Passo developed his own unique method of teaching frevo.

Today, in Pernambuco and beyond, dancers and choreographers from diverse dance backgrounds are exploring different ways of staging frevo. Different approaches, dance training, and socio-economic factors lead choreographers to search for new dance styles, thereby influencing the staging of frevo. In my view, the use of individual expression emphasized by Nascimento do Passo has directly influenced today's choreographic creations. It is my wish that other dancers, choreographers and dance companies of Pernambuco, although not specifically highlighted in this study, also be recognized by this research. Hence, the limited time for field work and the nature of my work forced me to narrow my line of inquiry to these basic issues.

While investigating the influence of frevo on the contemporary dance scene of the state, my experience with the Balé Brasília, (which originated from the Balé Popular do Recife) led my choice to write about this dance company specifically. Additionally, I found the choreography of Valéria Vicente to be the most accessible and directly related to my research. This is not to say that other contemporary dancers and choreographers have not contributed to the influence of frevo in the contemporary dance scene, but the limited nature of this study does not allow me to delve into all of them.¹⁶

Besides the importance of Nascimento do Passo and Coruja in Pernambuco, one event guided my work. As I returned to Recife in July 2006 for my field research, I learned that Nascimento do Passo had been accused of a crime. Shocked by the news, I had to overcome the difficulty of gathering information on a topic which people were avoiding. Most people, dancers and non-dancers alike, were hesitant to inform me about his life due to the fact that he had been

¹⁶ The works of Mônica Lira (Grupo Experimental), Maria Paula Costa Rêgo (Grupo Grial), Cláudia São Bento (Cia dos Homens), Raimundo Branco (Compassos Cia de Dança), Meia-Noite (Grupo Daruê Malungo), Trajetos Cia de Dança (Kleber Azevedo), Marília Hammer and Mariângela Valença (Cia de Dança Artefolia), Christiane Galdino, Sérgio Valentim and Olyvier, and my own choreography, among several others, are examples of the interaction between popular and contemporary dance.

fired from the school he had founded, and was being prosecuted, while the school had been taken over by the governmental authorities, which prohibited Nascimento do Passo from returning.

Every effort I made to communicate with Nascimento do Passo was frustrated by people's fear of being associated with criminal activity. Newspaper articles reported the situation from the perspective of a mother of the student who claimed to be sexually harassed by Nascimento do Passo. Although I will always have Nascimento do Passo as a mentor, in this study, I hope to remain without bias, and I will not attempt to judge the accusation.

I cannot help but note, however, the impact of this scandal. The fact that this first impeded my research, illustrated to me the type of situations that are linked to the impoverished life conditions of most frevo dancers, offering a sociological dimension to my study. Up to this point, none of the accusations have been proven, but Nascimento do Passo has lost his job. Since the time of the accusation, he has been living on the island of Itamaracá, near the outskirts of Recife; he has suffered a stroke, and has stopped dancing and teaching frevo. It seems unjust that somebody who had always worked towards the preservation of frevo would end up spending his twilight years in such dire conditions. How many people inside and outside of Pernambuco have benefitted from his dream of formalizing and preserving frevo? How many are making profit from the method he invented? Nascimento do Passo's decline and economic difficulties inform the socio-economic background of this study. The data gathered in this study illustrate Nascimento do Passo's contribution to frevo, and the living conditions of poverty of most people in Pernambuco, not to mention frevo dancers who suffer from social prejudice and discrimination.

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into 5 chapters. The major purpose is to investigate the development of frevo, and the influence of popular artists in the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco. In

the previous pages, I have explained my research methods, the data collected, the objectives, and relevance of the study, and I provide the literature review on the topic. It investigates the previous studies on frevo and addresses the idea that most scholarship about frevo is written by Brazilians scholars (not dancers) in Brazil.

Part of my own motivation to undertake this research came from the “saudade” experienced when I moved to the U.S. As a Brazilian frevo dancer from Pernambuco, living outside her native land, I have tried to contrast the information written by scholars with my own views and personal experiences.

Chapter 2 focuses on the historical context for this study. I begin by presenting some general information on the history of Carnival in Pernambuco, and then I analyze the issues of class and race, which led to the early manifestations of Carnival imposed by the upper class. The founding of working class Carnival associations in Pernambuco (*clubes pedestres*) is then analyzed in parallel to the beginning of the elite masquerade ball tradition. This chapter reveals the tendency of the state to control public celebrations, illustrating the rivalry among the military marching bands which began the history of frevo. Discussing the historical process after the proclamation of the Republic, I argue that issues of national and regional identity, exemplified by frevo contests and regionalist movements, illustrated the struggles of the society in the production and reproduction of the frevo tradition.

Chapter 3 illustrates the life histories of two popular artists, Coruja and Nascimento do Passo, as they worked towards the preservation and transformation of the tradition. Nascimento do Passo’s methodology for teaching frevo is contrasted with Coruja’s attempt to stage it. The process of taking their life experiences as street dancers to stage the tradition is explained by information gathered in newspaper articles and through personal interviews. The histories of the

elements that constitute today's "authentic frevo," such as the frevo costumes, are also present and illustrate the collaboration of popular artists in the development of the dance. It also addresses the basic elements of Nascimento do Passo's teaching methodology.

Chapter 4 focuses on the development of Nascimento do Passo's teaching philosophy based on individual expression. Frevo is compared to contemporary dance, and personal experiences are used to explain the contribution of the individual expression shared by these two dance forms. I illustrate the influence of the *Movimento Armorial* in staging popular traditions of Pernambuco and of the Northeast, explaining the singular influence of frevo in the dance training of the Balé Popular do Recife in the past decades. I then analyze the work of contemporary artists of Pernambuco, illustrating the tendency toward both innovation and preservation through research on the historical roots of the tradition, noting how they break away from the concepts of authenticity embedded in frevo as a folkloric expression. These data are placed into the historical context presented in the previous chapters through informal interviews and my own participation in dance classes.

In chapter 5, I conclude that the individual expression of frevo is an essential element for the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco illustrating its influence in the works of the new generation of contemporary dancers and choreographers. To understand Pernambuco's contemporary dance scene and the unique style of its dancers and choreographers, we must trace its historical roots and recognize the influence of frevo and popular artists in the streets, dance classes and theatres of Pernambuco.

ESCOLA DE FREVO RECREATIVA NASCIMENTO DO PASSO

PROJETO
50 ANOS FREVO NO PÉ

5 MÓDULOS

Recife - 1998.

Figure 1-1 Nascimento do Passo's Booklet "Projeto 50 Anos de Frevo no Pé." Photo by Juliana Azoubel

CHAPTER 2

FREVO: “BOILING” IN THE LAND OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Although frevo is promoted — through innumerable TV and radio commercials, music albums, and tourist events — as a symbol of identity for the state of Pernambuco, only a very small portion of the population of Pernambuco is aware of the historical and cultural roots of frevo. The first documented usage of the term “frevo” appeared in 1907, in the newspaper *O Pequeno*. Recife’s population, however, had already been using slang terms derived from the mispronunciation of the Portuguese verb *ferver*¹⁷ (to boil over) to describe the animation and effervescence encountered in the crowds of the Carnival. In this chapter, I will investigate the historical roots of frevo in the nineteenth century and then trace the development of frevo from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.

In order to understand the dance elements of frevo, it is important to comprehend the context in which the first steps of this popular tradition took place. While 1907 is formally recognized as the beginning of frevo, the development of the dance techniques and musical repertoire began much earlier. The influence of the European marching band tradition and the Afro-Brazilian fight/dance capoeira¹⁸ are crucial to understanding the origins of frevo. Additionally, Brazilian colonial history contributed to the context in which frevo originated.

In *O Folklore no Carnaval do Recife* (Recife’s Folklore in Carnival), American folklorist Katarina Real describes Brazilian colonial society and the socio-cultural environment in which frevo groups emerged in the Carnival of Recife (Real 1990, 8). Citing French anthropologist

¹⁷ The verb *ferver* was often mispronounced as *frever*, which is said to be the origin of the word frevo.

¹⁸ Considered an art-form, “Capoeira originated among Afro-Brazilians as a mechanism of both direct and indirect resistance to the oppressive controls and violence of Brazil’s slave culture in the country’s colonial era.” (Crook 2005, 181)

Roger Bastides's reference to Carnival in Recife she writes: "to the folklorist observing Recife during Carnival, it seems clear that this Carnival is a type of music school of old habits and tradition" (Bastides 1945, 199, cited in Real 1990, 8). [Para o folclorista que observa Recife durante o Carnaval parece, com grande nitidez, que esse Carnaval é uma espécie de conservatório dos antigos hábitos e tradições.]

The elements found in the Carnival of Recife are symbols of cultural identity of many of today's ethnic and social groups present in Pernambuco. From the perspective of mid-twentieth-century scholars, frevo and Carnival itself represented traditions of the past. Indeed the frevo tradition was constructed around the notion of representing and preserving the authentic culture of the people of Pernambuco, people of mixed origin, represented by the word "povo." Despite the appropriation of the tradition by the upper class, the origin of frevo has always been linked to the "povo," the lower stratum of society.

From *Entrudo* to Carnival

One of the groups particularly relevant for this analysis is mentioned by Pereira da Costa in the book *Folclore Pernambucano*. Da Costa refers to a group of blacks from Recife, who formed the companhias (companies) of dockworkers, and who traditionally participated in the urban festivities of the period called *entrudos* (Costa 1908, 238). Derived from the Latin *introitus*, the *entrudo* was a three-day-long celebration that anticipated the Lenten season of Catholicism. Present in Brazil since the beginning of the colonial period in Pernambuco, the *entrudo* was characterized by the mixing of different social classes and playful games, songs and dances.

The first time the term *entrudo* was used in a formal document in Brazil was in a text of November 10, 1553, found in the Denúncias do Santo Ofício in Pernambuco (Silva and Souto Maior 1991, XIV). Sociologist Felipe Ferreira wrote [my translation]:

It was even common during the period before Lent for the big land owners and the small farmers to leave their rural homes to go to the nearest villages to participate in the festivities called “fat days,” [days before the penitence of Lent] that were for a long time, similar to the festivities of Portugal. (Ferreira 2004, 80)

[Era inclusive comum que durante o período anterior à Quaresma os grandes fazendeiros e os pequenos lavradores deixassem suas habitações rurais e se dirigissem às vilas mais próximas para participarem das diversões dos chamados “dias gordos”, que, durante muito tempo, foram similares às acontecidas em Portugal.]

Following the model of the urban cities of Portugal, Pernambuco was hierarchically divided into many social groups during the colonial era. Despite these class divisions, the entire population participated in public, religious or civic events. Afro-Brazilians comprised the overwhelming majority of the poor population.

Following this period, two types of entrudos emerged. The *entrudo familiar* featured primarily middle-class Euro-Brazilian population and took place inside of the house, and among family and friends. The other entrudo, the *entrudo popular*, involved the poor population of slaves, and ex-slaves and took place mainly in the streets. The *entrudo familiar* was a private occurrence organized by young men and women of the middle class. The *entrudo popular* was a public celebration characterized by the participation of the economically marginalized population, who often resorted to physicality to assert their participation in festivities.

During most of the year, members of the middle class avoided leaving their homes at night, fearing the risk of robbery and personal assaults, safeguarding themselves in the streets in transit by using carriages or strolling in groups. Many scholars have argued that this fear caused the streets to be dominated almost exclusively by slaves. According to Ferreira [my translation]:

Taking advantage of these moments of pleasure provided by the festive atmosphere of freedom, the black slaves not only participated in the customs of throwing water, but also held festivities in their own manner. During the days of the entrudo it was not rare to see groups of slaves showing themselves off in processional parades, with dance and music known as congos or cucumbis. (Ferreira 2004, 93)

[Aproveitando-se desses momentos de regozijo e do relaxamento dos costumes provocado pela atmosfera de liberdade festiva, os negros escravos não somente se entregavam às molhaças, mas também realizavam festas à sua maneira. Não era raro ver-se, durante os dias comemorativos do Entrudo, grupos de escravos exibindo-se em cortejos processionais, com danças e músicas, chamados de Congos ou Cucumbis.]

The separation of lower and upper class manifestations of Carnival was not an official policy, but governmental forms of control were clearly aimed at the *entrudo popular*, not the *entrudo familiar*. As a reaction to these public displays of anarchy, Brazilian elite families used their influence to curtail the street parties of the *entrudo popular*. Ironically, attempts to prohibit the popular festivities never fully succeeded because members of the elite also began to participate in the street *entrudos*. At the same time, when participating in the *entrudo popular*, the members of the elite maintained their own social standing. For example, the throwing of dirty water at people, one of the common customs, illustrates this division, since the poor were not allowed to throw water back at the members of the upper class. This practice goes against some analyses of Carnival, which considers it a time of inversion of social categories (Bakhtin 1968, 15).

After the abolition of slavery in the late nineteenth century in 1888, the population of ex-slaves formed a sizable portion of the new working class in Recife. They comprised the majority of people who participated in the public *entrudo*, which, since the seventeenth century, had been associated with disorder and social anarchy. Since the beginning of the century, Brazilian society was changing rapidly in all areas. The year of 1808 marked the year that the Portuguese monarchy established itself in the Americas escaping Napoleon. The Portuguese Royal Court, having moved from Portugal to Rio de Janeiro, began administrating the Portuguese Empire from Brazil. With the arrival of about 15,000 new inhabitants in Rio, the Brazilian capital was transformed by the influx of customs of European cosmopolitan culture (dominated by French ideals). For instance, in 1816, D. João VI brought the Missão Francesa (the French Mission) to

Brazil with the intention of bringing high culture to the Brazilian people (Ferreira 2004, 104).

This mission began to draw and document the flora and fauna, as well as the urban centers of Brazil.

The ideals of freedom, associated with French Revolution, which later influenced Brazilian Independence, were brought by the new European inhabitants. After Brazil achieved independence in 1822, when Pedro I became Emperor of Brazil, French cultural influence increased. Portugal was viewed as old-fashioned, while France was considered the center of the modern world by the Brazilian elite, which was comprised of merchants, planters, governmental workers and the royal court. By 1830, the Brazilian elite considered the Portuguese-related *entrudo* unfit for a country that aimed to be equal to the more civilized countries of the world. This extended to Pernambuco. Writing in the Recife's newspaper *O Carapuceiro*, in 1834, Padre Lopes Gama stated, [my translation]:

For what reason, imitating the more cultured countries, do we not eliminate the barbaric and rude celebration of the *entrudo*? In truth, what does it mean to make a population crazy for three days every year, imitating all excitement of the Bacchae,¹⁹ in that unhappy pagan time? Men and women mixing together, getting all dirty and muddy, playing all types of crazy games! (Gama, Padre Lopes in *O Carapuceiro*, cited by Araújo 1993, 154)

[Por que razão imitando as nações mais cultas, não eliminamos o bárbaro, e grosseirissimo divertimento do Entrudo? Em verdade, o que quer dizer enlouquecer todos os annos huma população inteira por três dias, imitando todos os devarios, e furores das Baccantes, nos tempos desgraçados do Paganismo? Homens e mulheres baralhados, todos sujos, enla [mea] dos e fazendo toda laia de desatinos!]

In the attempt to separate themselves from the “mess” of the “povo” represented by the popular *entrudo*, the elite developed their own exclusive Carnival balls, which were elegant, formalized, and civilized celebrations, inspired by Parisian etiquette and by the Carnivals of the Italian and French cities of Venice and Nice. In the social space designed for the elite, members

¹⁹ The expression Baccantes is used here to address the people who followed the traditions of the Roman god Baccho (Dionysus), the god of wine and pleasure, according to legend.

of the lower class were not permitted to participate. Throughout urban Brazil, Carnival balls “civilized” and “controlled” the pre-Lenten festivity of the upper classes. In Pernambuco, there was a desire on the part of the elite to Europeanize themselves, leading to masquerade balls becoming an important Carnival tradition. Soon after that, they moved from private homes where they initially began, to exclusive clubs, theatres, and other commercial public establishments. For instance, in 1847, two local sites of elite Euro-Brazilian culture in Recife, the Teatro do Parque and Teatro Apolo, held public Carnival balls for the elite.

In short, by the 1850s, the population of Recife had transferred to Carnival the same rules imposed by colonial society in general, separating people according to their social standing. The lower class continued the “dirty games” of the *entrudo popular*, while in the masquerade balls of the private clubs and theatres, the members of the ruling class followed contemporary European cultural models. At private balls, the use of masked costumes became fashionable while surviving as an indispensable way for the elite to control entry and participation in such events by the poor who could not afford such elaborate costumes.

By the end of the nineteenth century, contemporary European social dances (waltzes, polkas, schottisches and quadrilles) became an important part of these masquerade balls. Around 1850, the *cancan*²⁰ entered the balls, bringing the French popular style of dancing to Brazilian ballrooms. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the influence of North American culture also made its way into the elite balls when the one-step and the ragtime were introduced as dance styles. At the same time, a rhythm known simply as *marcha*, conceptualized as typically Brazilian, invaded the streets of Brazilian urban centers.

²⁰ Originated from the *cachucha*, a Spanish dance popularized in Paris in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the *cancan* was originally danced by couples, as a popular *quadrille*. As the dance entered Brazilian ballrooms, the couples would split and freely dance, inventing several steps, including the most popular, the lifting and swinging of the legs, that characterizes the dance up to today.

In Rio de Janeiro, the Carnival *marcha* was characterized as a mix of polka, one-step, and ragtime, having its origins in the *marcha-rancho* popularized by Chiquinha Gonzaga's²¹ composition "Ô Abre Alas." The effect of *marchas* was two-fold as Tinhorão portrays in this way [my translation]:

By adopting the formation of religious processions, *ranchos* brought a measure of discipline to the chaos of Carnival. Chiquinha Gonzaga's main motif of her *marcha* of 1899, "Ô Abre Alas," was openly inspired by the rhythms that blacks used in their parade music, as they went along singing their "barbaric" songs. (Tinhorão 1991, 119)

[Foram os ranchos que ao adotarem a formação das procissões religiosas, instituíram um mínimo de disciplina em meio ao caos do carnaval, sugerindo desde logo à maestrina Chiquinha Gonzaga, em 1899, motivo para a *marcha* 'Ô abre alas', declaradamente inspirada na cadência que os negros imprimiam à passeata, enquanto desfilavam cantando suas músicas 'bárbaras.']

In Recife, the seeds for the beginning of the effervescent rhythm of frevo were planted by the *marcha-frevo*s, which coincided with the compositions of the first *sambas* of Rio's Carnival. However, Brazilian folklorist Câmara Cascudo has stated [my translation]:

The Carnival of the groups and *ranchos* of the samba schools of Rio de Janeiro is not like that of the Carnival of Recife, where there is popular participation, a human wave that moves, turns and vibrates in the choreography, in the specific and personal time of frevo, suggested by the irresistible and unique *marchas-frevo*s of Pernambuco. (Cascudo 1962, 186)

[O carnaval dos grupos e dos ranchos, das escolas de samba do Rio de Janeiro não é o carnaval do Recife, o carnaval da participação coletiva na onda humana que se desloca, contorce e vibra na coreografia, a um tempo pessoal e geral do frevo, com a sugestão irresistível de suas *marchas-frevo*s pernambucanas, insubstituíveis e únicas.]

In agreement with Câmara Cascudo, later scholars have emphasized popular participation as one of the core elements of frevo in the Carnival of Pernambuco. The reference to the "personal time of frevo" leads to the analyses of the urban scene of Recife, which, influenced by modernization, began in Carnival groups of urban workers. Emerging out of a colonial society of

²¹ After listening to rehearsals of the Carnival group Rosa de Ouro, Chiquinha Gonzaga composed the first *marcha* of Brazilian Carnival. It is said that up to that time, members of Carnival groups of the elite paraded reciting verses, without any musical accompaniment.

slavery and patriarchy, Pernambuco was divided into several social classes that gave rise to the origin of the Carnival associations and later to its unique social mixture during Carnival.

Although in the nineteenth century the urban population consisted mostly of African descendents (in 1839, Afro-Brazilians made up almost 60% of the population), only with the abolition of slavery in Brazil (1888), and the advent of the Brazilian Republic (1889), did newly free blacks of Recife join the Carnival groups formed of urban working class workers. These Carnival groups were formed based on specific occupations. Nonetheless, in 1869, as a result of modernization, the foundation of the first working-class *clube pedestre* or walking club, known as the Clube dos Azucrins, had officially began the tradition of Carnival associations, inspiring new groups. These *clubes pedestres* provided one of the first opportunities for the development of frevo as a music and dance style.

Within the walking clubs, membership cut across racial lines and included a mix of working class blacks, *mestiços*, *mulattos*, and whites, who worked as ironworkers, street cleaners, dockworkers, etc. Their presence in the streets of Recife and participation in Carnival associations challenged the elite control of Carnival, and was thus seen as a return to the “mess” of the *entrudos populares*.

The term *volta do entrudo* (the return of *entrudo*) became a recurring theme in the press of the period, not only in Recife, but in most Brazilian urban centers. The particular way in which the society of Pernambuco reacted to this struggle for the public space contributed to the unique nature of the Carnival in Recife. During this period, the upper classes in Rio imported Parisian cultural models, and their counterparts in Recife also borrowed these and imported French models directly, which led to the creation of both national and regional identities in Recife.

Guarding the Nation, Maintaining Order, Controlling the Society

Here I will tie in the role of the military to frevo. After the Proclamation of the Republic, in 1889, the military, which once served to preserve order in the nation, re-asserted its control in the provinces, reflecting the policy of the central government, became responsible for maintaining local order and for constructing the image of a “civilized society.” As part of the military, marching bands were created to accompany civic celebrations. In Pernambuco, bands played an important role in developing the frevo music. They became part of the public performance context of Carnival in which frevo was created, mainly through the *clubes pedestres*.

The two principal military bands of the time in Recife, O Quarto and Espanha, became known for transforming their *dobrados* and *polka- marchas* into a faster rhythm. The street Carnival and social clubs, called *clubes de rua* (street-clubs), incorporated their compositions and changed their tempo to match the movements of the people in the streets. This process gave rise to the *marcha pernambucana* (later called *marcha-frevo*), which, by 1905 had all the characteristics of the rhythm known today as *frevo-de-rua* (street-frevo). Among the pedestrians who moved along in the “wave” in the streets, were the *capoeiras*, who followed the bands and interacted with the frevo music, spontaneously moving and creating the dance that became known as “o passo.”²²

Here, I use the word *capoeiras* to refer to the people who played capoeira during the nineteenth century. The practice of capoeira had started in the slave quarters of Brazil’s

²² Valdemar de Oliveira was the first author to distinguish frevo dance from frevo music. According to Oliveira, “*O passo* is the set of steps that characterizes the soloist dance performance in the streets of the Carnival of Recife, under the metal sounds of a frevo orchestra (Oliveira 1985, 61).”

[*O passo* é o conjunto de passos que caracterizam o bailado solista executado, nas ruas carnavalescas do Recife, sob o estridor metálico de uma orquestra de frevo].

plantations as a way for the slaves to confront bush captains and overseers. Following the confrontations, slaves would run seeking refuges in communities which they named *quilombos* — African runaways slave communities in Brazilian territory. For camouflage, music and dance was incorporated to the practice which allowed it to be passed from generation to generation. As stated by Kenneth Dossar:

...slavemasters were not entirely deceived. Throughout most of its history, capoeira remained outlawed... The fighters — in a swing back toward the more frankly aggressive version of the ritual — had in instances become trouble makers and gangsters. They were physically uncontrollable, and at one point laws were passed establishing two special colonies for capoeiristas [capoeiras]. (Dossar 1988, 39)

Although the practice of capoeira was prohibited throughout Brazil, its censure was not as strong in Pernambuco when compared to the states of Rio and Bahia. In Recife, the *capoeiras* were feared by the police and were actually hired by *clubes pedestres* to provide protection during encounters with rival clubs. *Capoeiras* used their strength and agile movements, characterized by a combination of precise and tricky steps, to fight their rivals and protect their groups. In the streets, the *capoeiras* were recognized by the weapons they used and for their love of music. Authors have claimed that no party took place in Recife without a musical band and the presence of the *capoeiras*. According to Valdemar de Oliveira, [my translation]:

Wherever there was a “folguedo” [public celebration], there was the *capoeira*, either participating, or watching; it could be *bumba-meu-boi*, *pastoril*, *cavalo-marinho*, *fandango*, *coco*, or any other “brinquedo.”²³ Music was a constant in their life. The military band functioned as a center for crystallization, joining together the “cafajestada” around it. (Oliveira 1985, 83-84)

[Onde havia um folguedo, aí estava o capoeira, dele participando ou a ele assistindo, fosse o bumba-meu-boi, o pastoril, o cavalo-marinho, o fandango, o coco, ou qualquer “brinquedo”. A música era uma constante em sua vida. E a banda militar funcionava como um núcleo de cristalização, aglutinando à sua volta, a cafajestada.]

²³ The Portuguese word *brinquedo*, which translates to toy, is often used to refer to popular traditions that combine music, dance and drama. The *bumba-meu-boi*, *pastoril*, *cavalo-marinho*, *fandango*, and *coco*, are all forms of *brinquedos*, reflecting rites and rituals of rural life.

Cafajestada is a pejorative Portuguese term that refers to acts resulting in a mess, misdemeanor, or general confusion. Oliveira uses this term to describe a group of lower class males who misbehaved, according to the eyes and rules of the elite. Clearly the behavior of the *capoeiras* was not only condemned by the higher social class, but was also persecuted by the police.

When accompanying marching bands the *capoeiras* were divided based on the rivalry between the bands. This period featured a particularly intense rivalry between the two main military bands mentioned above: the Companhia da Guarda Nacional (the National Guard Band, known by the *capoeiras* as Espanha, or Spain, after its director the Spaniard Pedro Garrido) and the 4º Batalhão da Artilharia (the Fourth Artillery Battalion's, known as O Quarto, the Fourth). The *capoeiras* who accompanied these groups always fought each other (Silva and Souto Maior 1991, 195).

In 1860 and 1864, the newspaper Diário de Pernambuco described two of these battles in which *capoeiras* on both sides were hurt. The prohibition of capoeira during a later period did not affect frevo. On the contrary, it served to solidify the use of Carnival as the period for its action. However, the police prohibited the *capoeiras* from using knives or sticks in the streets of Recife. Although contested by recent authors, Waldemar Valente states that the use of umbrellas in frevo was introduced by *capoeiras* when weapons were banned [my translation]:

...Not being able to walk with weapons or canes, the *capoeiras* used *chapéu-de-sol* [umbrellas], even if old, pretending to avoid the bad weather. That way they fooled the police. And the umbrella was remained up to today. (Valente, in Silva and Souto Maior 1991, 373)

[...Não podendo conduzir cacetes ou bengalões, valiam-se do chapéu-de-dol, mesmo escangalhado, pretextando livrar-se do mau tempo. Com o quê ludibriavam a polícia. E o chapéu de sol ficou.]

In Pernambuco, only by the end of 1880 did the practice of capoeira become legal, and the social context was ready for frevo to be officially “born” and to spread to other cities. Despite persecution by the police, capoeira continued to exist. According to Crook, “In Recife, police repression resulted in camouflaging of capoeira, under the guise of a new dance form- the frevo” (2005, 184).

Although the precise origin of frevo is still in debate, folklorist Valdemar de Oliveira, as early as 1946, linked the origin of frevo to the interaction between the military bands and the *capoeiras*, the latter identified mostly as blacks and mulattoes. Later, in his *Frevo, Capoeira e Passo*, Oliveira referred to frevo dance as “o passo” [my translation]:

I believe the origins of the *passo* to be like a nebulous wave that surrounded the military bands, which, for more than 100 years moved along the streets of Recife, distinguished by the movements of blacks and mulattoes, either playing or fighting. Little by little, these movements would define the shape [of the *passo*], continuing to develop after Abolition, the declaration of the Republic and of the Provisional Government, and the Navy Revolt, a period known in Brazil as the “belle époque.” (Oliveira 1985, 66)

[Acredito que as origens do passo se inserem numa nebulosa onda, às frentes as bandas militares que há mais de cem anos passados percorriam as ruas do Recife, já se distinguiam vultos de negros e de mulatos, brincando ou brigando. Pouco a pouco, essas sombras viriam a definir seus contornos, até que após a fase difícil da Abolição, da República, do Governo Provisório, da Revolta da Armada, do Encilhamento, começa, também para o Brasil, uma “belle époque.”]

According to Oliveira, the development of frevo is associated with the spontaneous interaction (playing, dancing, fighting), the defense and attack movements of the *capoeiras*, the military bands, and the *clubes pedestres* (walking clubs) of the working class. The influence of the *clubes pedestres* is reflected today in the names of the Carnival associations established at the time, which alluded to the work routine of their members: *Vassourinhas* (city sweepers), *Pás* (dustpans), *Lenhadores* (woodcutters), *Espanadores* (dusters), *Abanadores* (fanners), *Verdureiros* (vegetable sellers), *Empalhadores do Feitosa* (Feitosa’s chair caners), just to mention a few. The members of these clubs also influenced the naming of “passos de frevo”

(frevo steps). This influence is seen to this day, with the steps — *tesoura* (scissors), *ferrolho* (doorknob), *parafuso* (screwdriver), *dobradiça* (hinge) and *locomotiva* (locomotive), named after the work tools used by members of the walking clubs — steps which are still performed by frevo dancers.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the *clubes pedestres*, with their origins and mixture of European and Afro-Brazilian elements are symbolic representation of cultural and social differences in Recife. By opening up the space for popular participation in the Carnival celebration that the elite had previously tried to control, there was an initial lack of interest by the media or the bourgeoisie in these clubs, not to mention the police repression which, supported by the press, first decided to prohibit the parades in 1904.

During that time, official status and support of the press was offered by governmental institutions to the groups that obeyed certain rules and that adapted themselves to the standards set by the ruling class. In 1907, the term frevo first appeared in the press as a label for the *clubes pedestres*. By this date the *clubes pedestres* had become known as *grupos de frevo* (frevo groups). By the 1930s, the press and official Carnival associations of Pernambuco tried to integrate frevo into the Brazilian national Carnival by creating contests for frevo composers and exporting frevo to Rio's Carnival. These latter attempts were unsuccessful, due to the strong regional associations of this dance and music.

Frevo was developed as the lower class urban population occupied the public space in the streets of Recife during Carnival. It reflected the social changes and alteration of the relations of power, symbolizing the ultimate expression of the popular Carnival in Pernambuco. As Crook has stated:

...frevo became an emblem of the racial and cultural mixture that was emerging as a unifying element of Brazilian identity. However, the frevo represented not the national but

rather a regional expression of this idea. Unlike the samba, the frevo was never a viable candidate to fulfill the role of the unifying emblem of Brazil's national consensus culture. Rather it served as a variation on the theme of Brazilianness, as a regional musical counterpoint to the centralizing discourses involving Brazil's national cultural essence. (Crook 2005, 170)

The development of frevo in the Carnival of Pernambuco made it a symbol of that state. The analyses of frevo as symbol of identity for Pernambuco must be carried out in this context taking into account the specific historical period in which its development took place.

Pernambuco Beyond Carnival

Since the Proclamation of the Republic in 1888, Brazil has tried to build and maintain national unity. Indeed, since the 1870s, the identity and direction of the nation were the matters for public debate. By the end of the nineteenth century, many intellectuals concluded that the economic and social problems of Brazil, frequently referred to as "Brazilian backwardness," were a result of its mixed racial heritage. One solution proposed was to increase the number of European immigrants in an attempt to achieve racial "whitening." As part of the same concern with Brazil's African heritage, everything that was linked to the mixed population was looked down upon, especially anything related to Africa.

However, some of the intellectuals of this period, influenced by the book *Os Sertões* (1902) by Euclides da Cunha, tried to use the racially mixed people of the interior of Brazil as a counterpoint to the "whitening" discourse which was spreading throughout the rest of the country. According to the romanticized ideas of these intellectuals, the people and culture of the Brazilian backlands played an important role in the construction of national identity. Not until the mid-1920s and 1930s did the cultural diversity of the country and its non-European descendants become recognized as a central part of modern Brazilian identity.

At the start of the twentieth century, constructing a Brazilian national identity prompted many elite artists to incorporate popular themes into their work, as is the case of Villa-Lobos,

who combined traditional instruments of *congadas* ²⁴ with classical instruments during the performance of his orchestra in São Paulo's *Week of Modern Art* in 1922.²⁵ Nonetheless, this example of the cultural exploration of Brazil's non-European roots remained relatively marginal to elite tastes and preferences. In fact, most modernist artists looked to the European Vanguard (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, etc.) for cultural models. As stated by Brazilianist M. Elizabeth Ginway, "Although Brazil's Modernist Movement centered on the formulation of national identity, critics such as Amaral (1970), Teles H. Martins (1973), and Eulálio (1978), among others, have acknowledged the movement's ties with the European Vanguard" (Ginway 1992, 543). At the same time attempts to "civilize" the Carnival reflected the transnational ideas of the elite, who maintained that the European influence in their Carnival balls and parades throughout Brazil were means to "civilize" Brazilian society.

Meanwhile, in Pernambuco, *clubes de frevo* (frevo clubs) promoted frevo as a rhythm and dance form which made its way into the elite's festivities, finally breaking with the elite's Eurocentric preferences, thereby contributing a new factor to the emerging ideology of Brazil as racially mixed. Yet, the elite of Pernambuco did not embrace frevo simply to embrace the idea of *mestiçagem*; instead, they attempted to adapt it in order to make it acceptable within European aesthetics. The fact that frevo was present in both worlds is unique. It was present in the Euro-Brazilian tradition through the marching bands, and in the Afro-Brazilian tradition through the participation of the *capoeiras*. While the black and indigenous populations were viewed as exotic by members of the elite during Carnival, the influence of Afro-Brazilian heritage in the rhythm

²⁴ *Congadas* are important popular festivals, celebrated at the end of the year, in which white-clad dancers playing guitars and tambourines parade along the seafront are accompanied by a figure of St Benedict in a gaily decorated boat.

²⁵ The Week of Modern Art, in São Paulo, broke boundaries and innovatively blended popular subject matter with European vanguard-form.

of frevo was still downplayed. The social mixing resulting from frevo as a music and dance form, transformed the Carnival of Pernambuco, making it distinct from other states in Brazil.

This deeply held “integration” has been romanticized by the elite and scholars of this period. Araújo, who argued that the iconography of the time exemplifies the association of Carnival with nationalistic ideas, stated that, for the first time the Brazilian press showed indigenous and black people symbolically sharing the space with the European-white in newspapers photography of Carnival [my translation]:

The section ‘Carnaval’ of the *Jornal Pequeno* always included many pictures related to Carnival traditions, which usually showed European Carnival costumes and characters: *pierrôs*, *harlequins*, *dominós*, ladies, gentlemen and medieval costumes. However, before the Carnival of 1910, the same section offered four new pictures: one *caboclo*, two black men and one black woman. (Araújo 1996, 389- 390)

[A seção ‘Carnaval’ do Jornal Pequeno, era acompanhada por inúmeras pequenas gravuras relativas aos folgares carnavalescos, que, geralmente, evocavam personagens do Carnaval europeu: pierrôs, arlequins, dominós, damas e cavalheiros, figuras em trajes medievais. Entretanto, às vésperas do Carnaval de 1910, a dita seção estampou quatro novas gravuras: um caboclo, dois negros e uma negra.]

At the same time, the inclusion of local exotic tradition is not equal to the embrace of national *mestiçagem*. The dominant worldview of this period was still largely Eurocentric. Things did not change until the 1920s, when Gilberto Freyre’s ideas contributed to the recognition of African influence in the formation of the Brazilian identity. The publication of his *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (1933), which became a manifesto for the nationalist movement, strongly influenced the intellectual discourse of the period. Freyre’s ideas were also used in the creation of the Brazilian myth of racial democracy, a national narrative characterized by racial harmony and social mobility despite racial difference. In Pernambuco, this myth was paralleled by the creation of an urban myth of frevo, characterized by the inclusion of all levels of Recife’s society. While samba was consolidated as a national rhythm, frevo was consolidated as a symbol of identity for Pernambuco, as stated by Crook:

The most celebrated Carnival music of Recife that came to symbolize this intercultural and racial mixing was the frevo... It is important to note that by the 1930s, the frevo had already entered Brazil's national music industry as a form of regional counterpoint to the samba and the Carnival march from Rio de Janeiro. (Crook 2005, 156)

Regionalism and Frevo

Regionalist movements have played an important role in the history of Pernambuco and its society. They have given value to local cultural traditions and established ideas of authenticity, rooted in idealized representations of the state's population.

The population of Pernambuco is characterized by a mix of European, Indigenous, and Afro-Brazilian peoples. In the urban center of Recife, the higher socio-economic classes tend to be composed of mostly European descendents, while the "mestiços" (mixed race) tend to occupy the lower strata of the society. The popularity of regionalist ideas started around the 1920s, when intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre tried to explain the formation of the society of Pernambuco by analyzing historical data with anthropological and sociological concepts. Popular cultural symbols were appropriated to represent the "harmonious" interaction of antagonistic segments of Brazilian society.

Freyre's idea contributed to the recognition of the African influence and the relation of Afro-Brazilians to the formation of Brazilian society, which became the foundation for the creation of the myth of racial democracy. Intellectuals and artists supported these ideas. Although they contributed to the relation of power established by the dominant class and paid recognition to popular culture, their analyses were distorted by their origin in the middle-class with its Afro-phobic discourse. These intellectuals were caught between two contrasting worlds that they tried to reconcile: that of the official, formal culture, and that of popular culture. The creator of the *Movimento Armorial*, the writer Ariano Suassuna, is one of the most prominent examples of this tendency. As an intellectual who came from a traditional Euro-Brazilian family,

deeply involved with the government in Pernambuco, he nonetheless followed Freyre's ideology and struggled to bring about the acceptance of popular culture by the upper classes of the society, concepts rooted in the culture of “modernism” of the 1920's and 1930's. As stated by historian Jeffrey D. Needell:

The younger generation of Brazilian intellectuals associated frenchified culture of Brazil's belle époque with the sagging façade of the social and political status quo... *Regionalism* and São Paulo's *modernismo* were reactions against what was increasingly seen as an imitative, official high culture divorced from Brazilian reality. (Needell 1995, 9)

By the 1950s, the attempt to valorize popular culture made its way into frevo contests, which were organized by these intellectual cultural mediators involved in the state government. The contests can be considered as the first attempt of codifying frevo steps, and in this context the elite paid homage to popular artists, who, through their performances, began their trajectory toward formalizing the tradition. In *Antologia do Carnaval do Recife*, the folklorist Leonardo Dantas Silva has written [my translation]:

The “Concursos de Passo” [frevo contests], developed by the press and later by the TV and radio stations, came to motivate the creativity of the passistas [frevo dancers]. That was how Egídio Bezerra, who has since passed, but who was known as the “Rei do Passo” [the king of frevo], along with “Sete Molas,” “Nascimento do Passo” (Francisco Nascimento Filho), and “Coruja” (Arnaldo Francisco das Neves), came to be well known, to the point of founding dance schools. They taught “Pipoca” (Antúlio Madureira), “Meia- Noite,” and many other representative artists of the new generation of passistas [frevo dancers]. (Silva, in Silva and Souto Maior 1991, 204)

[Os chamados “Concursos de Passo”, desenvolvidos pelos jornais e posteriormente pelas emissoras de rádio e televisão, vieram incentivar a criatividade dos passistas. Assim despontaram, chegando a fazer escola, Egídio Bezerra, hoje falecido, mas em sua época conhecido como o “Rei do Passo,” “Sete Molas,” Nascimento do Passo” (Francisco Nascimento Filho), “Coruja” (Arnaldo Francisco das Neves), que vieram a ser professores de “Pipoca,” (Antúlio Madureira), “Meia- Noite,” e tantos outros representantes da nova geração de passistas.]

Although the elite understood that frevo had developed via various elements of all social classes in Pernambuco, they tended to downplay the participation of the Afro-Brazilian community. Inspired by the nationalistic discourse in the country, the regionalists looked to

popular creations as the basis for the formation of the culture of Pernambuco. Yet, these popular creations were viewed as being representative of Brazil's racially mixed culture. In most cases, attention was focused on the mixture of its cultural identity of European and indigenous elements, avoiding and denying the importance of the African heritage.

In 1961, intellectuals, artists, actors, musicians, and students founded the *Movimento de Cultura Popular* (MCP-Popular Culture Movement), which was based on the ideas of Paulo Freire, who was recognized for his socially conscious pedagogy. Paulo Freire wrote *Educação e Atualidade Brasileira* where he conceptualized education outside the institution. As he stated, "... it is precisely, an education like this, that going beyond the walls of the institution, need to be adopted" (Freire 1958, 85). [... é precisamente uma educação assim que, ultrapassando as paredes das escolas, precisa ser incrementada entre nós.] The *Movimento de Cultura Popular* was aimed at the education of children and adults and, as stated by Telles, [my translation], "the increase of the cultural level of the students in order to improve their capability of acquisition of social and political ideas...broadening the process of political understanding of the masses, and motivating social initiatives" (Teles 2000, 77). [Elevar o nível dos instruendos (sic) para melhorar sua capacidade aquisitiva de idéias sociais e políticas...e ampliar a politização das massas, despertando-as para a luta social.]

Supporters of Paulo Freire's ideas included the writer Ariano Suassuna, the playwright Hermilo Borba Filho, the sculptors Francisco Brennand and Abelardo da Hora, and the future Mayor of the city of Olinda, Germano Coelho. This group of elite intellectuals used popular art for didactic purposes, creating a department for cultural development (Departamento de Formação da Cultura) in an attempt to "interpret, develop, and systematize popular culture." They chose six public plazas of the suburb of Recife to use for performances of folkloric groups

with the idea of promoting interest in popular culture among the population. The Recife-based movement greatly influenced other national ideas, and was supported by the political left wing of the country, such as the Student National Union, UNE (União Nacional dos Estudantes), and the Brazilian Communist Party, PCB (Partido Comunista Brasileiro), (Teles 2007, 77).

After the military coup in 1964, the ideas of the movement were prohibited and several of its militants arrested.²⁶ In order to pursue their leftist ideals, the playwright Hermilo Borba Filho and the writer Ariano Suassuna founded the Teatro Popular do Nordeste (Northeastern Popular Theatre). Eventually there were ideological differences between Ariano Suassuna and Borba Filho, who accused Suassuna of making use of popular culture to serve political ends. After their disagreement, Suassuna started planting the first seeds for another regionalist movement which flourished in the 1970s, namely the *Movimento Armorial*.

The Movimento Armorial

Suassuna's *Movimento Armorial* aimed at the creation of a northeastern literary art, based on the mix of classical and popular traditions. The movement started largely as an opposition to North American cultural hegemony in Brazil. The impact of Suassuna's initial ideas attracted other artists and intellectuals to the movement, which expanded its artistic expression to include painting, sculpture, music, theatre and dance. However, the beginning of the movement was characterized by Suassuna's struggle to achieve his main objective: to introduce a better understanding of the popular culture of the Northeast to the Brazilian population in general.

For the new industrial Brazil of the South and Southeast, the cultural and economic backwardness of the Northeast impeded the acceptance of northeastern cultural richness. With

²⁶ In June 1964, Freire was imprisoned in Brazil for 70 days. After a brief stay in Bolivia, he lived in Chile for five years working in the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement. In 1967 he published *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, and in 1968 he wrote his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in Spanish and English in 1970, and in Brazil in 1974 (Bentley, 2005).

the *folhetos de cordel* (cordel literature), ²⁷ as its main inspiration, the *Movimento Armorial* had to break historical, cultural, and regional boundaries that were historically constructed, including the ones imposed by the previous regionalist movements, and the growing distance between “economically developed” Southeast and the “backward” Northeast. As stated by Crook:

From the nineteenth century on, Brazilians increasingly conceptualized their country as one divided into northeastern and southeastern regions, each area endowed with distinct attributes and characteristics. The notion of the indelible differences between the South (as culturally progressive, industrialized and modern) and the Northeast (as culturally conservative, rural and traditional) was an important part of the way Brazil emerged as a modern nation. (Crook 2005, 13)

The *Movimento Armorial* officially started on October 18, 1970 with a concert in front of the Igreja de São Pedro dos Clérigos titled “Três Séculos de Música Nordestina: do Barroco ao Armorial” (Three Centuries of Northeastern Music: From the Baroque to the Armorial), and an art exposition in the Pátio de São Pedro, in the downtown of Recife. With the intention of creating a Brazilian art based on the mix of classical and popular culture, Suassuna gathered musicians with a classical background willing to incorporate and play popular music. This public event united hundreds of people from all levels of Recife’s society.

The concert served to connect the musical and literary elements present in the ideology of the movement. Armorial art was defined as an art that portrays the realistic spirit and the magical elements of the *cordel* literature of the Brazilian Northeast. Inspired on the definition of the word Armorial — used as an adjective for things related to heraldry or heraldic arms — the movement tried to revitalize the medieval troubador traditions of Luso-Brazilian culture of that region, which was represented by the relationship between the music played by the *viola*, the *rabeca*,

²⁷ The *cordel* literature is composed of little booklets of popular poetry that are sold in the street markets in the Northeast of Brazil. They are composed of popular artists’ verses that are developed from themes related to life in the Northeast, often mentioning historical figures like Lampião and Maria Bonita, or important happenings related to local politics.

and the fife that accompanies the verses of *cordel* literature, as well as by the spirit and format of the popular spectacles that are related to this type of literature (Suassuna, 1974).

According to Suassuna, *cordel* literature represented the aspirations of the northeastern people and of the Brazilian spirit. It initially combined three artistic expressions: popular poetry, drawings (that illustrate the covers of the booklets), and music, which represents the way popular artists recited their poetry. In this popular tradition, the reciting of the verses is usually performed by the same person who writes them, and then plays the *rabeca*, a folk violin originated from the Iberian influence in the region.

Although successful in praising popular culture, the ideology of Pernambuco's regionalist movements, including the *Movimento Armorial*, did not greatly value the local traditions based on African heritage. Frevo has been always considered by the middle-class intellectuals and artists involved in these movements as symbol of identity for lower class mixed population of Pernambuco, downplaying its African influence. Since they tended to minimize the African influence in the culture of Pernambuco in general, they also denied the influence of African culture in frevo. In such a context, frevo went through a similar process of "whitening" that influenced the history of Carnival, the same process that also sought to "civilize" the *entrudo*. From the police repression of the *capoeiras* to the process of formalization of the tradition motivated by the regionalist movements, there was a constant attempt to "clean up" the dance and to make it more appealing to "white" eyes.

Frevo Contests, Nascimento do Passo, Coruja and Pernambuco's Dancing Scene

Yet even before the flourishing of the *Movimento Armorial*, frevo continued to be developed by the common people in the streets of Recife. In the 1950s, the state of Pernambuco (official Carnival associations, radio, TV stations, and the press) created contests to acknowledge the year's best frevo dancer. This was one more attempt to control the Carnival of Recife.

Inspired by the contests of the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro, the “concursos de passos” (frevo contests) motivated the creativity of frevo dancers.²⁸ Although the contests stimulated new interest in frevo, the constant attempt of the elite to control Carnival and its popular traditions was also behind the creation of such events.

The contests held in the Pátio de São Pedro during the 1950s and 1960s had the objective of controlling the violence of frevo on the streets. While the poor part of the crowd was “under control” as they watched the virtuosity of frevo dancers, the upper classes enjoyed Carnival in social clubs, and felt safer in their automobile parades, known as the *corsos*.²⁹

The emphasis on European notions of beauty and virtuosity was a pre-requisite to win these contests. These qualities served as inspiration for the people on the streets who then imitated the performance style of frevo contest winners. Gradually, the dance that was once the expression of anger and fear during the fights between *clubes pedestres* was now being adapted to the competition rules set by the institutions controlled by the elite. Performance quality rather than self- defense was the key to winning the competition. In these contests, two dancers, Coruja and Nascimento do Passo, became known for their frevo performances, the latter creating a method for teaching frevo, and the former creating the first performance group dedicated to frevo. These popular artists have taken their experiences of the street to the stages of Pernambuco, contributing to the preservation of a popular tradition.

²⁸ At the time, a parallel competition for frevo music compositions was also established in Pernambuco.

²⁹ The *corsos* were automobile parades of the middle and upper classes where prizes were given for best costumes and best car decoration during Recife’s Carnival.

CHAPTER 3 FROM THE STREETS TO THE STAGE

The origins of frevo are compelling and yet hard to understand. Official authorities have usually failed to support popular frevo artists, due to the socially marginalized roots of frevo's historical tradition. This lack of support has also served, ironically, to inspire these popular artists to preserve frevo. I argue that while masquerading within the colors of Carnival, frevo, as a social phenomenon, represents the constant struggle of the lower classes for social space and integration into the wider society of Pernambuco. This chapter describes the role of key performing artists in this struggle.

As people dance frevo on the streets during Carnival, they are unconsciously contributing to the preservation of this tradition. As I write about frevo, I would like to acknowledge dancers, tourists, and unrecognized people for their spontaneous contribution towards the evolution of the dance style. However, two popular artists, who believed in the teaching and performance of frevo as tools for social change, carried out work essential to the preservation of frevo. The dynamic lives of Nascimento do Passo and Coruja reveal their ascending paths from disciples of street Carnival to masters of a dance style.

Their life stories illustrate the motivation behind the preservation, transformation and formalization of frevo as a dance style. Their lifetime dedication to the tradition is reflected in today's performances in theatres around the world, and their style of dancing, developed in the frevo contests, is now an integral part of the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco.

Brazilian writer, musicologist and folklorist Mário de Andrade, cited by Valdemar de Oliveira, described the choreographic abilities of frevo dancers and their spontaneity in creating steps in the following way [my translation]:

The sudden vibration of frevo is almost intimidating. It is a true allegro in a national presto. It represents without any doubt, the enthusiasm and the ardent Dionysian orgy of

our national music. And that incredible dancer? How is it possible for a choreographer like him to be ignored by the theatres and other dancers? How beautiful! What admirable fluidity! Such talent is a very rich source of inspiration. He deserves a true title of glory, but the country ignores his talent simply because there are so few among us who truly believe in our own culture. (Mário de Andrade, cited in Oliveira 1985, 119)

[A vibração paroxística do frevo é realmente uma coisa assombrosa. É, enfim, um verdadeiro allegro num presto nacional. É sem dúvida, o entusiasmo, a ardência orgíaca, mais dionisíaca de nossa música nacional. E aquele rapaz que dançou! Mas será possível que uma coreografia assim ainda se conserve ignorada dos nossos teatros e bailarinos? Que beleza! Que leveza admirável! É uma fonte riquíssima. É um verdadeiro título de glória, que o país ignora, simplesmente porque entre nós ainda são muito raros os que têm verdadeira convicção de cultura.]

When Andrade describes the “incredible dancer” as a choreographer who goes unrecognized by the official theatres and dancers, and that his fluidity is as a rich source of culture, he makes clear reference to one of the many unknown frevo dancers who spontaneously performed frevo steps during Carnival. The dancer’s improvisational skills, as he choreographed his own performance, caught Andrade’s attention at the time, and the style continues to attract the attention of tourists and people around the world today. When Andrade asked why such talent remains unappreciated, he was recognizing the intricacy of frevo movements spontaneously performed on the streets, while predicting how little financial and artistic support official authorities would provide to frevo dancers during the following years.

During Pernambuco’s celebration of 100 years of frevo in 2007, the media attempted to recognize the contribution of popular artists such as Coruja and Nascimento do Passo in preserving the dance style. However, the difficult lives of both artists illustrate that the society of Pernambuco is still a long way from truly recognizing their contribution to the tradition. It appears that the traditional mentality of the slaveowners in the patriarchal social order of Pernambuco is still present in today’s society: the entertainment of the privileged becomes the job of the less fortunate, who must live in a constant struggle for recognition of their work as artists.

The lives of these two popular artists were dedicated to the dream of preserving the tradition they considered to be the cultural heartbeat of their city. Their countless hours of work never matched their income, which led them to suffer from a constant financial struggle. Coruja's death in 1996 ended his dedication to northeastern traditions and frevo, leaving his family in dire financial straits, despite the fact that his sons, who are musicians, tried to perpetuate the cultural legacy he left behind. Nascimento do Passo is still alive, but his story as a frevo performer and teacher has been also characterized by financial struggle and sadly criminal prosecution.

The lives of Nascimento do Passo, Coruja, and many others popular artists illustrated in this study exemplify the reality of the dance world in Pernambuco. These dancers have struggled to pursue their dreams in a society that uses a forced happiness to cover up its problems, and uses the colors of Carnival to mask its deep social inequalities. The pedagogy created by these popular artists to preserve frevo can be seen a subversive response to the exclusionary society they live in.

Nascimento do Passo: A Life Dedicated to Frevo

Francisco do Nascimento, or Nascimento do Passo as he is known in Pernambuco, considers frevo as the key to his long life. In dancing frevo he finds the strength to face his daily problems. In his words [my translation], "it was thinking about the people of Pernambuco, and understanding their memory of a suffering past that inspired me to create the special formula for teaching frevo" (Foi pensando no povo de Pernambuco, e entendendo a memória de um passado sofrido que eu me inspirei a criar uma fórmula especial de ensinar frevo.)

The information in the paragraphs to follow was taken from his booklet in frevo and an interview I conducted with Nascimento do Passo in 1998. The booklet represents a wealth of knowledge which he had been compiling ever since he started to dream of a frevo school of his

own. It presents the main objectives for the formation of the Escola Recreativa Nascimento do Passo (Nascimento do Passo's Frevo School), which was created not only [my translation]: "... to assure a solid learning process and developing in the students the physical ability to perform frevo, but also to spark their interest in becoming frevo dancers" (...assegurar um bom processo de aprendizado e desenvolver nos alunos não só a habilidade física de dançar frevo, mas o interesse em se tornar passistas.)

Born in the state of Amazonas, Nascimento do Passo lived in the city of Manaus before dedicating his life to frevo. He places great importance on his experience in the folklore of the northern state of Amazonas and believes that this experience has influenced his unique style of dancing frevo. In Manaus, he lived by Praça 14 (Plaza 14), located close to the house of *Boi Caprichoso* (Caprichous Ox). The *boi* is an important dramatic dance tradition of Amazonas. Composed of many theatrical roles, the *boi* is a community presentation which is named after the most important character of the tradition, the ox. From age seven through thirteen, Francisco do Nascimento lived in the neighborhood of Cachoeirinha, close to the *Boi Corre Campo*. Also known as Gibi among the children of his neighborhood, Francisco do Nascimento played every role in another *boi*, the *Boi Malhado*.³⁰

Nascimento do Passo's participation in this tradition symbolizes his connection with popular culture while growing up, revealing his artistic abilities, as well as his humble social condition. Coming from the poor sector of the society, Nascimento do Passo experienced an instant immersion in this popular tradition. According to Nascimento do Passo, he was part of

³⁰ Since the 1930s, due to the influence of the folklorist Mário de Andrade, the *boi* has been considered the most characteristic dramatic dance in Brazil. It has been considered one of the most complete and important cultural expressions in Amazonas.

the *boi* “because everyone was,” explaining how common it was for kids of his age and social background to be involved in traditional form of popular culture.

Nascimento states that “besides having the dance in my blood, I also had an adventurous spirit” (Além de ter a dança no sangue, eu também tinha um espírito aventureiro.) At the age of thirteen, he traveled from Amazonas to Benjamin Constante in a boat that took him to the state of Pernambuco. On his way back, he took the ship Almirante Alexandrino in 1949, arriving in Recife, where he decided to stay and begin life in the big city. The young Francisco do Nascimento had to earn his living, and when he received his first pay check from working as a dockworker in the port of Recife, he rented a room behind the club house of the Carnival association *Vassourinhas*. Soon, he was watching the rehearsal of that Carnival association and felt instantly attracted to frevo.

His love for frevo motivated him to participate in frevo contests, where he won some and lost others. In 1950, he achieved his greatest moment as a frevo dancer in the Primeiro Concurso de Passo (First Frevo Contest), sponsored by the Empresa Pernambucana de Turismo (Tourism Industry of Pernambuco) and Emissoras Associadas (Associated Radio Stations). The try-out was directed by TV host Fernando Castelão, with the announcer César Brasil, who first named the young Francisco do Nascimento, “Nascimento do Passo,” when he won first place in the contest. On that occasion, he danced to the music of Nelson Ferreira, and in his own words, he is still proud of being judged by Egídio Bezerra,³¹ who then had the title of the “Rei do Passo” (King of Frevo).

The contests were pivotal in Nascimento do Passo’s life. After winning the first contest in 1950, he received many invitations to perform at parties; he was featured in several Carnival

³¹ Egídio Bezerra was one of the first Pernambucan passistas [frevo dancers] to dance frevo outside Pernambuco.

magazines, and became proud of popularizing frevo in Pernambuco. In 1966, after Egídio Bezerra passed away (1962), Nascimento do Passo won the prize “Líbano do Recife”³² sponsored by the Associação dos Cronistas Carnavalescos (Carnival Writers Association). In 1973, Nascimento do Passo founded his own frevo school, and in 1988, he received a medal honoring his work from the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco. For the occasion, he wore his innovative frevo costume: colorful shirt tied around his waist, a pair of baggy pants, and a small colorful umbrella. These articles of clothing would become important tools for his teaching method in the following years.

Nascimento do Passo envisioned teaching frevo as part of a larger cultural movement. He dreamed of a frevo school that would develop many human qualities in the students — their moral, intellectual, and aesthetic sensibilities — in addition to their development of an awareness and recognition of the cultural roots of frevo. His methodology envisioned the process of learning frevo as a way to create educational and professional opportunities, motivating artistic production, cultural appreciation and the historical heritage of frevo.

According to Nascimento do Passo, the school’s objective was [my translation] “to give the student the opportunity to express his cultural traditions through sound, movement and feelings” (Dar oportunidade para o aluno expressar sua tradição cultural através do som, do movimento e do sentimento.) Sociability and creativity were the main goals in structuring the stage ability of the student. His motivation was based on the belief that frevo was the perfect means to integrate lower-class teenagers into the educational system. Nascimento do Passo claims that the performance elements of frevo embody key educational cultural values, and as a

³² The prize “Líbano do Recife” was given to the best frevo dancers in the Carnival balls held at the Clube do Libano (Libano Club), an elite club in the Recife neighborhood of Boa Viagem. The site of the contest indicates the control of the event by the elite.

musical and dance style, frevo represents the tradition of a region and its people with its specific characteristics and a specific way of life.

For many years, Nascimento do Passo did not have a place to teach his philosophy or the frevo steps he created, but his ideal of preserving the tradition compelled him to continue his life as a frevo teacher. Before 1998, when I visited the school in the Recife neighborhood of Encruzilhada, Nascimento do Passo taught his classes in many poor neighborhoods of Recife such as Casa Amarela, Vasco da Gama, Alto Santa Isabel, Alto do Mandú, Alto da Esperança, Alto N. Sra. de Fátima, Alto 13 de Maio, Alto do Eucalipto, Bomba do Hemetério, Córrego do Euclides, Córrego do Ouro in Visgueiro, and Morro da Conceição. He also taught in five of the municipal elementary and high schools: Escola Reitor João Alfredo, Escola Mário Melo, Escola Antônio Heráclito, Escola Aderbal Galvão and Escola Vasco da Gama.

In these schools, he was employed as a freelance teacher, and during his free time, he taught classes in the streets of the neighborhoods mentioned above for free. On many occasions, his only compensation was to see the change in his students. In his words, “I knew that some of my students were involved in muggings and fights, but they stopped when they started dancing frevo. Some of them are even becoming frevo teachers” (Eu sabia que alguns dos meus alunos tavam envolvidos com roubo e briga, mas eles pararam assim que começaram a dançar frevo. Alguns deles até viraram professores de frevo.)

Nascimento do Passo’s teaching philosophy was based on his need to move from place to place and his intention to have an impact on the life of kids from the poor neighborhoods of Recife. He would go from street to street, from neighborhood to neighborhood and from school to school to teach his art, in his words, “como um artista mambembe” (as a street actor). Inspired in the European artists of the middle ages, who used to carry their whole lives on their

shoulders and move from town to town looking for performance venues, street actors in Brazil used the term *mambembe* as an adjective for their lifestyle. In the middle ages, the street actors moved periodically from city to city, carrying their costumes, scenery and make-up because they did not want to be restricted in their artistic expression, but were considered outlaws for that reason. Their eagerness for artistic freedom resulted in a tradition banished by the church, which looked down on theatre and performances.

According to Guzik (2007, 22), one hypothesis for the use of the term in Brazil, although contested, is that the term originated from the African language (Quimbundo), designating “distant” and then was appropriated in the theatrical practices as an adjective for the actor or theatre groups that moved from place to place to perform for financial survival and artistic expression. In Pernambuco, governmental authorities have neither recognized nor supported frevo enough, forcing teachers like Nascimento do Passo to move from place to place to teach frevo. His ideas of institutionalizing the art of dancing frevo led him to dream of founding a frevo school which would be the location for the development of his teaching methods. Speaking about his financial condition and his dream of founding the school, Nascimento do Passo stated [my translation]:

I realized that I could not afford to have my own frevo school. It was impossible, it was too expensive. It was something that the government had to pay for. I started teaching in the public school system in 1987, and I started to hassle the public administrators and congressmen to help me create a frevo school. (Nascimento do Passo interviewed in 1998)

[Eu vi que não dava pra ter minha própria escola de frevo. Era impossível, era muito caro. Era uma coisa que o governo tinha que pagar. Eu comecei a ensinar em escola pública em 1987 e comecei a apertar os homens lá, os deputados, pra me ajudar a criar uma escola de frevo.]

Ideally, in his frevo school, Nascimento do Passo dreamed of a structure that would offer the following classes: workshops, the history of frevo, the practical introduction to frevo, its music, and dance training. Another important objective of his methods included the preparation

of frevo dancers for the job market, which later had a great impact on the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco. Nascimento do Passo summarizes his teaching methods, stating that in addition to practicing all the frevo steps, students should follow “The Ten Commandments of Frevo” (Os 10 mandamentos do Frevo, Figure 3-1).

According Nascimento do Passo’s “Ten Commandments of Frevo,” performing the dance is an exercise that develops all the senses. By dancing frevo one would improve vision, hearing, taste, smell as well as cognition. There is also a connection between intuition and the reality of life. Dancing frevo can lead one to a life of more love, and care, while also developing one's mind; to learn how to dance frevo is to have more energy. In Nascimento do Passo’s words, “Frevo is not Carnival, frevo is therapy” (Frevo não é Carnaval, frevo é terapia).

It was this philosophy on which Nascimento do Passo based his method of teaching. For Nascimento do Passo, frevo is taken beyond Carnival, and in addition to his experience as a street dancer, made a point of incorporating concepts that went beyond the frevo tradition, which later influenced his creative process of naming steps, with choreography resulting in the unique style found in his students. The originality of the frevo steps Nascimento do Passo claims to have created exemplifies his open mentality as a teacher.

The Frevo Steps by Nascimento do Passo

It is impossible to trace a chronological history for the creation of frevo steps. Most of them were invented by unknown dancers in the streets of Pernambuco. However, evidence shows that Egídio Bezerra, Coruja and Nascimento do Passo were the dancers who first attempted to formalize the tradition by giving names to frevo steps and by using this nomenclature to teach frevo. More research would be necessary in order to trace the specific contributions of Egídio Bezerra and Coruja in this process. The following paragraphs will focus on the method created by Nascimento do Passo, its influence in the popular dance companies of

Pernambuco, and the modifications this method has been undergoing with the new generation of dancers and teachers as it reaches the contemporary dance scene of the state.

In his *História Social do Frevo*, Ruy Duarte makes an allusion to the dance of frevo as he describes it [my translation]: “A male figure with his bare feet crossed, in a dance step, with his body curved, wearing loose pants, in shirt sleeves with a torn-up umbrella, held in one hand up over the head; this is the full body portrait of the traditional frevo dancer” (Duarte 1968, 35) [Uma figura masculina com os pés descalços e cruzados, em passo de dança, corpo meio curvado, calça arregaçada, mangas de camisa e um chapéu-de-sol, meio roto, seguro por uma das mãos, acima da cabeça eis o retrato de corpo inteiro tradicional e característico do frevo.]

The choreography performed by frevo dancers (*passistas*) in the streets or on the stages of Pernambuco has maintained the same body language mentioned by Ruy Duarte. The people on the streets and the *capoeiras* of the past with their bare feet continue to represent the essence of frevo. But despite of this historical association, in reality, the frevo steps of today have almost no resemblance with the movements played in the “games” of capoeira. Speaking of today’s capoeira, American scholar Bárbara Browning has stated:

Capoeira is always played in a roda —The same circle formations that delimit all traditional Afro-Brazilian dances. Two players enter the roda at a time, and their focus remains on each other, while they may pivot either clockwise or counterclockwise throughout the game. Motion is generally circular. Kicks and sweeps are more often than not arched or spinning and they loop together in a series of near misses. The ideal is to keep one’s eyes fixed in one’s opponent. At times, this necessitates having eyes in the back of one’s head. But the relative placements of body parts or facial features seem to be constantly ridiculed anyway. The capoeirista spends a good deal of time inverted, with hands planted firmly like feet on the ground, feet slapping happily like palms in the air. (Browning 1995, 89)

In capoeira, the essence of the game, played in a circular motion, in a mixture of dance and fight, dictates the nature of the steps. In frevo, this essence is dictated by the main environment in which the dance continues to develop: the street Carnivals. Capoeira, since its beginning on the slave plantations, took the circular formation, which preserved the tradition and its people.

To a certain extent, the “roda” (circle) and the use of music in capoeira helped the survival of the tradition, disguising its rebellious nature. Browning has stated:

The Portuguese tolerated the roda de capoeira because it was merely dance- perceived as motion without purpose or effect, other than aesthetic. And with the circles, African in Brazil trained like fighters in the art of dissimulation- how to grin upside down (Browning 1995, 92).

But this contradicts the historical records of the nineteenth century. In addition, by the time *capoeiras* accompanied marching bands, influencing the development of frevo, there was an attempt to include them as part of society by the upper classes. This absorption benefited the dominant class and asserted the affirmation of Afro-Brazilians, the *capoeiras*, blending ethnicities, at least during Carnival. The steps of frevo truly represent this blend, and found in Carnival the most appropriate scenario for their development.

During Carnival the relation of power is challenged, different classes of Brazilian society occupy the same physical space. Ideally, this is an “equality” desired by members of the lower classes, but in reality it is a permanent struggle that can be as ephemeral as the nature of Carnival. The mechanics of frevo steps are the best examples of that struggle. Frevo steps are characterized by hybridity — a quality that is appealing to dancers — since they encompass a great variety of agile squatting movements, jumps and leaps, involving the entire body and challenging the laws of balance and musicality of the performer, exemplifying Carnival’s ability to mix social classes and ethnicities through joy in the binary time of the frevo music.

The verb “pular” (to jump) defines best the action of a frevo dancer. But in dance, the verb to jump has several meanings. From high lifts of the body, as in to leap, to lower squatting motions and somersaults, or any motion that pushes the body weight against gravity. The Portuguese dictionary also defines this verb in several ways. I found that an analogy of these meanings to the mechanics of frevo steps could lead to the understanding of frevo steps as a

combination of performance and cultural affirmation. By performing frevo steps during the street Carnival, the *passista* is combining the ability to spring off the ground, to move suddenly in one motion, as in surprise, but also to move voluntarily (or involuntarily), as he responds quickly to the pushes of the crowd. Metaphorically, the quick binary beat of frevo music and the environment of Carnival push dancers against gravity as if to struggle to find their place in society.

Going back to associating frevo steps with its capoeira heritage, the performance of frevo, with the torso upright, among other characteristics has driven the body aesthetics of both traditions away from each other. Browning's analysis of capoeira is done through the lense of capoeira as a strategy of survival, and she uses the word maneuvers to describe the movements of capoeiristas. She has stated, "Many of capoeira's maneuvers are inversions, whether literal or ironic, physical or linguistic." I would describe frevo by movements rather than by "maneuvers," since frevo may be represented by a notion of exuberance and individual freedom. Frevo has been providing social license, pushing members of the society to levels that they did not originally belong, challenging the laws imposed by the ruling classes, and therefore, finding the "balance" necessary to preserve a tradition. This individual freedom of frevo is illustrated by the spontaneous and improvisational characteristics of frevo steps.

In the late 1950s, Felicitas, a dancer from Rio de Janeiro who researched indigenous dances and Brazilian folklore, stated in her book *Danças do Brasil* [my translation]:

The frevo is rich in spontaneity and improvisation, allowing the dancer to create — with his inventive spirit — and master the most varied steps, from the simplest to the most acrobatic imaginable. And therefore, they even perform truly acrobatic steps that challenge the laws of balance. (Felicitas 1958, 190-191)

[O frevo é rico em espontaneidade e improvisação, permitindo ao dançarino criar, com seu espírito inventivo, a par com a maestria, os passos mais variados, desde os simples aos mais malabarísticos, possíveis e imagináveis. E assim, executam, as vezes, verdadeiras acrobacias que chegam a desafiar as leis do equilíbrio.]

Capoeiristas often refer to their “upside-down movement,” and the use of their hands on the floor, as their way to find “balance” while fighting. Scholars have linked the use of hands to ancestral connection. Ironically, this search for balance in frevo is represented by the position of the torso (upright), and the use of the umbrella, that serves as a symbol for the “authentic frevo” to be discussed in the following pages.

Attempts to preserve the tradition by naming frevo steps is noted on Felícitas’s book as she cites Dalmo Belfort de Mattos’s description of frevo steps; he describes a total of five steps, each one with a corresponding name, as cited by the author: *dobradiça*, *parafulso* or *saca-rôlha*, *da bandinha*, *corrupio* and *chão de barriguinha*. Felícitas’s book did not make any allusion to who could have named the steps at that point. However, as my research will show, these same steps were included in 1973 in Nascimento do Passo’s method of teaching frevo, so it was hard even for Nascimento do Passo himself to distinguish the steps he had created from those he had learned from watching others.

When Felícitas wrote her book in 1958, it was hard to find out who had invented the frevo steps, considering that most of the time people spontaneously performed these steps during Carnival or even in frevo contests, unaware of their names. Felícitas also mentioned that there were many other steps in the dance of frevo, but unfortunately there was no written material listing the names of these steps, if they even had names at the time. According to the scholar Almirante (1967),³³ [my translation]:

The passo [frevo] had undergone several transformations since its birth. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to state today, the order in which the numerous body movements took place ... One of them, for example, is named “chã de barriguinha.” Chã is a mispronunciation of the French word “chaine” (chain), an expression used in the old

³³ Almirante is the nickname of Henrique Foréis Domingues (1908-1980) on the popular music scene. He was a singer, and radio broadcaster from Rio de Janeiro, and in 1963 published *No Tempo de Noel Rosa*, initiating his academic career.

dances, especially in the quadrilles to indicate that the movement of ladies and gentlemen, holding hands, formed a chain: “chaine de dames,” “chaines de chevaliers.” In frevo, “chã de barriguiinha is also the chain that the dancers, holding hands, walk in a large space pushing their bellies forward; they almost always return, pulling their bellies in and doing the opposite movement; but in this case the “chã” has another name... (Almirante 1967, 3)

[O passo sofreu grandes transformações e acréscimos desde que nasceu. Seria difícil, se não impossível, dizer-se hoje qual foi a ordem em que foram surgindo seus inúmeros movimentos... Um deles, por exemplo, tem o nome de chã de barriguiinha. Chã é deturpação da palavra francesa chaine (cadeia, corrente), expressão usadíssima nas danças antigas, especialmente nas quadrilhas, para indicar aquele movimento em que damas e cavalheiros, de braços dados, formavam uma corrente: “chaine de dames”, “chaine de chevaliers”. No frevo “chã de barriguiinha” é também a corrente em que os dançarinos, dando-se os braços, caminham um bom pedaço empinando a barriga para a frente; quase sempre recuam, recolhendo a barriga e fazendo o movimento contrário; mas aí então o chã tem outro nome...]

Almirante’s statement not only illustrates popular participation in the development of frevo, but also the influence of French culture in the process of naming frevo steps. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the French *quadrille* was one of the first European dances to enter Brazilian ballrooms for Carnival celebration. When frevo reached the higher levels of society, the steps were also influenced by European culture. Names of frevo steps and/or ways of performing them can be analyzed from this angle. However, the association of frevo dancers with the lower classes of society (“o povo”) predominated, and oral tradition tends to explain the origin for the name of each step more fully.

The name of the step mentioned above by the scholar Almirante, for example, is commonly known as the mispronunciation of the Portuguese noun *chá*, which would be translated into English as “tea.” While some state that the correct name is *chá de barriguiinha*, Nascimento do Passo advocates for the “correct name,” which according to him, “is chã de barriguiinha, because the people talk this way.” [É chã de barriguiinha porque as pessoas falam assim]. And he continued, “I guess they wanted to say, *chá de barriguiinha*, but they would end up saying *chã*; now I am not sure why they would call a step like that “belly tea” (*chá de*

barriguinha) [laughs]. (Eu acho que eles queriam dizer *chá de barriguinha*, mas eles acabavam dizendo chã; agora eu não tenho certeza porque eles chamariam um passo como aquele “chá de barriguinha.”)

Nascimento do Passo explanation illustrates the unconscious adaptation of foreign influence by the people of Pernambuco. The name of the step is even explained by the mispronunciation of a French word, exemplifying how much foreign culture has contributed to frevo. As stated by Farris Thompson, as he speaks about the influence of European culture in *milonga*, “Dancers become translators reconciling styles from different worlds” (Farris Thompson 2005, 136). In frevo, these two different worlds become one through Carnival, as steps are being performed, and as they are being taken to dance schools, and dance companies around the world.

Maria Goretti Rocha de Oliveira (1993) has traced the transformation of popular dance to theatre spectacles in Pernambuco. In her work, she discussed the importance of frevo contests and the constant struggle of Nascimento do Passo, mentioning his teaching of frevo steps to the Balé Popular do Recife and to the Grupo Folclórico Cleonice Veras, the two groups that first staged popular dance in Recife. According to Oliveira in the *Diário de Pernambuco* of 1977, Nascimento do Passo had listed, along with the teacher Jurandir Austermann, 48 basic frevo steps (Oliveira 1993, 86). By the time Oliveira published her book in 1993, Nascimento do Passo had listed some 120 steps. In order to make his teaching methods more efficient he had selected 30 basic steps of frevo that he believed to be essential for the education of a *passista*

(frevo dancer).³⁴ Nascimento do Passo stated in his own booklet that when the *passista* is able to perform the 30 basic steps, he is ready to perform all the others.

When I attended Nascimento do Passo's classes, he emphasized the importance of performing all the basic steps, and the memorization of the order in which they were taught in class. In Nascimento do Passo's pedagogy, the first step warms up the body to perform the second and so on, [my translation]: "There is no need to perform all those exercises that people do at the gym. If you are a frevo dancer, you will be ready for anything, and if you are not ready yet, you will be after you perform all of them, but only if you perform them in the right order, of course." (Não tem nenhuma necessidade de ficar fazendo esses exercícios que as pessoas fazem na academia. Se você é dançarino de frevo, você tá pronto pra qualquer coisa, e se você ainda não tá pronto, você vai ficar depois que você dançar todos eles, mas só se você fizer eles na ordem certa.) Nascimento do Passo truly believed in his methodology as the best way to train frevo dancers, and he carried out his teaching philosophy in every class he taught.

As a formally trained dancer, I noticed that his class was a mixture of his life as a street dancer and his ideal of preserving a tradition through the formal education of his dancers. While he emphasized the improvisational skills necessary to be a *passista*, he also encouraged uniformity of movements in his students [my translation]: "If you are trained in my method you have to do as I do, not as you want to," he yelled during class. (Se você é treinado no meu método você tem que fazer como eu faço, não como você quer.)

³⁴ The 30 basic steps cited by Oliveira are: *lavanca, ritmo, swing de ombro, a onda do passo, saci-pererê, ponta de pé e calcanhar, trocadilho, pontinha de pé, pontilhando, chutando de frente, chutando de lado, muganga, abre o leque, folha seca, patinho, cumprimentando, passa-passa em cima, passa-passa em baixo, base, carrossel, tesourão, gaveta, faz-que-vai-mas-não-vai, serrote, banho-de-mar pra frente, banho de mar pra trás, guerreiro, rojão, abre alas, and pernadas.*

The structure of his class illustrated his teaching philosophy. Every class required a great degree of discipline. Nascimento do Passo did not allow sitting, talking, or taking a water break during his classes. At the end of every class, all students were required to perform a solo for the other students. He believed this practice made dancers accountable for the material taught, and motivated individual creativity. According to Nascimento do Passo [my translation], “If you cannot do all the steps in your solo that means you did not pay attention to the steps while I was teaching them, unless you are lazy or something like that. Otherwise, you should be able to do them, because I repeat them over and over during class” (Se você não consegue fazer todos os passos no seu solo, isso significa que você não prestou atenção nos passos enquanto eu tava ensinando, a não ser que você seja preguiçoso, ou alguma coisa parecida, porque senão você pode fazer eles, porque eu repito eles sempre.)

The emphasis on repetition was another characteristic of his class. Nascimento do Passo believed that “the more you perform the steps, the stronger you get, and you do not need to go to the gym, you just need to dance frevo.” (Quanto mais você faz os passos, mais forte você fica, e não tem que ir pra academia de ginástica, só dançar frevo.) Following his technique was another requirement in his classes. His students had to dance as he did, but “with a lot of swing,” in his words, “The entire body has to move while dancing frevo, especially the shoulders; they should move right on the beat, otherwise it is not frevo, it becomes something else” (O corpo todo tem que mover quando se dança frevo, especialmente os ombros, eles tem que mover no ritmo certo, senão, não é frevo, vira outra coisa.)

In Nascimento do Passo’s teaching methodology, a frevo class is divided into four parts, with each accomplishing different goals. In the first part, the students are told to relax and warm up (some basic frevo steps are included), and in the next three parts they begin to perform the

steps in a logical order, from the easiest to the hardest. To give an idea of how the steps were named after his street experiences will help elucidate the core of his work. I will translate their names, making an association with the social context in which they arose and then try to associate this social context with the body mechanics of frevo. The steps below are listed in the order chosen by Nascimento do Passo for his classes:

Part 1

- 1- *Passo* = the basic step
- 2- *Remador* = the rower
- 3- *Boneco de Olinda* = the giant male doll from Olinda's Carnival
- 4- *Manivela* = hinge
- 5- *Cata-vento* = pin wheel
- 6- *Abanador* = the fan
- 7- *Bico de papagaio* = parrot's beak
- 8- *Lavanca* = Nascimento do Passo's mispronunciation of *alavanca*, the Portuguese for mechanical crane
- 9- *Primeiro metrô em cima ou metrô de superfície* = the first subway

Part 2

- 10- *Maçaneta* = doorknob
- 11- *Base descendo* = squatting on the foundation
- 12- *Sobe em ritmo* = going up on the beat
- 13- *Swing dos ombros* = shoulder swing
- 14- *Onda do Passo* = the frevo wave
- 15- *Saci Pererê* = Saci Pererê (a folkloric figure of a one-legged black boy from the Brazilian folklore³⁵)
- 16- *Ponta de pé-calcanhar* = toe- heel
- 17- *Trocadilho* = grape vine
- 18- *Pontilha de Pé* = on the toes
- 19- *Pontilhando* = dancing on the toes

Part 3

- 20- *Balanço* = the swing
- 21- *Chapa quente* = hot grill
- 22- *Chutando de frente* = kicking forward
- 23- *Chutando de lado* = kicking sideways

³⁵ The fact that Saci Pererê is one legged is the reason for the name of the step, which consists of jumps on one leg, while the other leg is bent and hooked on the back of the other knee – in a “four” shape.

- 24- *Muganga* = having fun as you dance
- 25- *Abre o leque* = opening the fan
- 26- *Folha seca* = dry leaf
- 27- *Sobe e faz passa-passa em cima e desce de cócoras* = passing the umbrella while jumping then squatting.
- 28- *Passa-passa em baixo* = squatting and passing the umbrella
- 29- *Rã eletrizada* = electrified frog
- 30- *Carrossel* = carroussel

Part 4

- 31- *Tesourão* = big scissors
- 32- *Gaveta* = drawer
- 33- *Faz que vai, mas não vai* = teasing
- 34- *Serrrote* = the saw
- 35- *Banho de mar para frente* = swimming in the ocean free style
- 36- *Banho de mar para trás* = backstroke in the ocean
- 37- *Guerreiro* = the warrior
- 38- *Rojão* = firework
- 39- *Abre-alas* = based in the expression “abre-alas” that translates to asking permission to start dancing for Carnival parade.
- 40- *Pernada* = kicks

According to Nascimento do Passo after completing the steps above, the student should be able to perform all the following steps:

- 41- *Tesoura passando a sombrinha* = scissors passing the umbrella
- 42- *Vôo da andorinha* = the swallow’s flight
- 43- *Tesoura em retrospecto* = the reverse scissors
- 44- *Tesoura no ar* = scissors in the air
- 45- *Tesoura cruzando no ar com a esquerda e a direita ou cruzando em vice-versa* = scissors crossing in the air with the right or left leg
- 46- *Coice de burro* = donkey back kick
- 47- *Pernadas* = kicks
- 48- *Tesoura simples* = basic scissor
- 49- *Tesoura tramelando* = locking scissors
- 50- *Dobradiça* = hinge
- 51- *Ferrolho* = doorknob
- 52- *Parafuso* = bolt
- 53- *Chã de barriguinha* = the belly movement
- 54- *Pulando corda com as duas sombrinhas* = jump roping using two umbrellas
- 55- *Tramela tramelando* = *tramela* is a type of door lock, and by *tramela tramelando* he means a continuous movement of the door lock.
- 56- *Passeando na pracinha* = walking around the plaza
- 57- *Pisando em brasa* = stepping on coals

- 58- *Rojão* = firework
- 59- *Pontinha de pé* = tip toes
- 60- *Espalhando brasa* = spreading coals
- 61- *Saca rôlha* = cork screw
- 62- *Serrote* = the saw
- 63- *Carrossel* = merry-go-round
- 64- *Ligadura* = link (this is Nascimento's version of the Portuguese noun *ligação*, which means link)
- 65- *Locomotiva* = the train
- 66- *Plantando mandioca* = planting manioc
- 67- *Festival de bailarino* = the ballet dancer festival
- 68- *Patinho* = duckling
- 69- *Apertando a porca* = tightening the screw
- 70- *Enxada* = hoe
- 71- *Chave de cano* = plumber's wrench
- 72- *Alicate* = the pliers
- 73- *Tesourão* = the big scissors
- 74- *Britadeira em movimento* = movement of the screw driver
- 75- *Metrô subterrâneo* = the subway
- 76- *Metrô de superfície* = trolley car
- 77- *Pulo de grilo* = grasshopper jump
- 78- *Pé de vento* = fleet of foot (literally wind foot)
- 79- *Rã eletrizada* = the electrified frog
- 80- *Psso do cinquentão* = the step of the fifty-year-old man
- 81- *O ginasta no passo* = the gymnast dancing frevo
- 82- *Passo do mamulengo* = the marionette step
- 83- *Passo do capoeira* = the capoeira step
- 84- *Passo do bêbado* = the drunken step

Nascimento do Passo emphasizes the repetition of certain steps throughout the class as necessary for the physical preparation of the dancer. For instance, the step *rojão* (step 38 and step 58 of the list) should be performed twice toward the end of his class (see list, part IV). He justifies this repetition by the necessity of the student to review some principles of that step that he might understand only after performing other steps in between. In this specific case, the performance of steps 39 to 57 would lead to improve the performance of the step *rojão*. This may be meaningless to a non-trained dancer, but the more frevo classes I teach, better I understand Nascimento do Passo's philosophy. This specific step, for instance, functions to a frevo dancer almost as a "plié" functions to a ballet dancer, as a foundation. The more you

perform a “plié,” or in the case of frevo, the *rojão*, better you perform other steps, and as you master other steps, you improve the way you perform your foundation step.

The preservation of the historical roots of frevo is also illustrated in Nascimento do Passo’s methods. The majority of the steps are named after the tools used by the urban working class at the beginning of the twentieth century. Out of the list above, at least 33 steps have names related to working instruments; example include *serrote* (saw), *parafuso* (screw), and *ferrolho* (door lock), among others. There is also a close association between the names of the steps and the environment where frevo is danced: the big city of Recife, surrounded by the ocean, and its modern buildings. Examples include such steps as *banho de mar pra frente* (swimming on the ocean free style), step 35, *banho de mar pra trás* (backstroke in the ocean), step 36, and *metrô* (metro), steps 75 and 76, among others.

People’s everyday experience and the important influence of Carnival are also reflected in the names of several steps: *plantando mandioca* (planting manioc), step 66, *Abre-Alas* (which derived from the Carnival expression based on the music “Ô Abre Alas”), step 39, *Boneco de Olinda* (the giant male doll from Olinda’s Carnival), step 3, and several others in the list above. Nascimento do Passo’s performance of the *passo do bêbado* (the drunken step) exemplifies his spontaneous way of naming and performing frevo steps. He proudly states that the creation of this step “just happened” while he was drunk during Carnival.

Although he claims to have stopped drinking after he started dancing frevo as a lifetime career, he still remembers the times when the steps were just flowing in his mind. As I asked him about his creative process, Nascimento do Passo stated [my translation], “This step.... I never thought about it, I swear. I just remember that every time I got drunk I did it, but I think I also got inspired by other people that were drunk during Carnival ... I was not the only one to be

drunk during Carnival.” (Esse passo.... Eu nunca pensei nele, eu juro; eu lembro que toda vez que eu me embreagava eu fazia, mas eu acho que eu também me inspirei nas outras pessoas que se embreagavam no Carnaval... Eu não era o único não a ficar bêbado no Carnaval)

In the class I attended in 1998, Nascimento do Passo held a plastic cup full of water and imitated a drunken person performing frevo steps to explain how this step had just naturally happened for him. The *passo do bêbado* (the drunken step) is characterized by the lack of balance of the dancer, as if one had lost control of his center of gravity. When performed today, dancers explore circular motions of the torso and arms in contrast with precise movements of legs and feet. Two forward heel steps are followed by the circular motion of the arms, resembling the motion of a drunken, except that instead of carrying the “drink” in one of the hands, the dancer carries a frevo umbrella. The video below shows Nascimento do Passo’s “performance” of this idea.

[Object 1-1 video of Nascimento do Passo performance of the drunken step\(9,813kb, .mpg\)](#)

The connection between the name of the steps and the performance of the movements is used as an important pedagogical element of Nascimento do Passo’s method, since it facilitates the students understanding of their performance. The simple words used to describe each step also makes the “frevo vocabulary” very accessible for children and people with a low level of formal education. In many cases, the names of the steps are simply translated from the main characteristic of the movement performance, as for example, chutando de frente (kicking forward), chutando de lado (kicking sideways), passa-passa de frente (passing the umbrella in front), etc. I am afraid my attempt to describe frevo steps will either simplify the dance or complicate the understanding of the reader. I would much rather dance! We can always connect steps with words, but in order to understand frevo, we have to connect our heartbeat to the

movement. The examples to follow will just serve as illustrations for the meanings of some frevo steps:

Tesoura (scissors): Begin with weight on one of the feet (i.e. left), with the other foot extended on the side, resting on heel. Jump toward the foot that has your weight and place the other foot back — landing one foot in front of the other with toes of both feet pointing outward (toe to heel, heel to toe). Jump toward the same direction landing on right foot, left foot extended to left side, heel on ground. Jump back toward left foot, placing the right foot behind it. Jump again continuing to go toward the same direction, landing on left but extending right foot, resting on heel. The arms (one hand is carrying the umbrella) are making diagonal lines while the feet are “scissoring.”

Abre-Alas (named after the expression “abre-alas” that translates to asking permission to go through in Carnival parade): With the weight on both legs, keep them spread apart with the knees slightly bent. Both elbows out, with the umbrella held by one of the hands — both hands are placed toward the belly-button. Move stiffly forward as if elbowing through a crowd. Shoulders are leading the entire body to move forward, alternating the movement of the torso toward right, and left.

Ferrolho (doorknob): Legs spread wide, feet set apart- one forward, one back — the weight of the back leg is on the ball of the foot, and the weight of the front leg is on the heel. Flip from the ball of one foot to the heel of the other as you make both legs straighten as you hop from one direction to the other successively, changing the direction of the entire body.

Ferrolhando (the movement of the doorknob): Same of the step above, but performed in double time, not in the usual “binary time” of most frevo steps.

Nascimento do Passo recognizes cultural diversity and international influence in the names of frevo steps. For instance, the majority of the dancers associate the step *passeando na pracinha* (strolling in the square) with one of the steps performed by American dancer and actor Fred Astaire in his musicals. This step reminds us of the European “grapevine,” except that due to the binary fast-paced rhythm of frevo, the dancers pivot less and hop more, while carrying the umbrella.

At the same time that steps were being codified at formal frevo contests, American cinema had a strong influence on Brazilian culture, reinforcing the ideology of the defenders of the “white origin” of frevo, who still associate some of the dance movements exclusively with European or American sources. The squatting movements that are the highlights of many frevo performances are often associated with the Slavic influence in Pernambuco (Figure 3-2). The director of the Balé Popular do Recife, André Madureira, cited by Oliveira has stated [my translation]:

You will notice that the frevo has absorbed the best steps and movements from the universal culture, but in Pernambuco’s own way. As you watch the frevo steps, you will find them in Russia, in the Russian ballets, especially the squatting steps: *locomotive*, *patinho*, *encaracolado*, *parafuso*. You will notice that all these steps have a very strong origin in the steps of Russian dance, but performed in Pernambuco’s way. Why is that? Because in the 50s, many Russian dance groups came here... They danced on the streets, and performed in theatres and on the streets. The people would watch the Russians dancing and what would they do? In the next Carnival they would incorporate those steps into their own dancing. (Oliveira 1993, 152)

[Você vai ver que o frevo ele absorveu o que de melhor tem em passos e movimentos da dança universal. Só que à maneira própria de Pernambuco. Então você vê os passos de frevo, você vai encontrar eles na Rússia, nos balés russos, principalmente os embaixo: locomotiva, patinho, encaracolado, parafuso; todos esses passos, você vai ver que tem uma origem muito forte nos passos de dança russa só que numa maneira dançada pernambucana. Por que isso? Porque na década de 50, aqui vinham muitos grupos de dança russa... Eles dançavam na rua, tinham apresentações de teatro e as apresentações de rua. O povo via aqueles russos dançando e o que faziam? No carnaval seguinte eles colocavam da maneira como eles achavam que era o passo na rua, dançando.]

As a member of the lower class, Nascimento do Passo tends to associate these squatting movements in frevo with the influence of capoeira rather than the influence of European dancers. Although some ambiguity can be found in Nascimento do Passo's view of the origin of frevo — he contradicts himself at times most likely because of his unconscious assimilation of the dominant (whitened) ideology — he teaches the African influences in the history of frevo and sees this as an extremely important component of his method. When putting the booklet together, Nascimento do Passo emphasized the importance of the historical knowledge for the frevo dancer. Linking frevo with capoeira, he defined the frevo dancer as “the gymnast who, at some point in history, was called *capoeira valentão*” (the brave *capoeira*).

He thought it important that students know that the *capoeiras* used weapons while dancing in front of the marching bands in the Carnival of Recife and Olinda, and that as a result of the police repression toward the practice, the dancers replaced their weapons by umbrellas. In this context, he views the frevo umbrella as a symbol of resistance, and stresses that the students' understanding of that part of history could transform them into better dancers. In his words, “It is important that they [the students] understand and feel what they are dancing” (É importante que eles (os alunos) entendam e sintam o que eles estão dançando).

Nascimento do Passo claims to incorporate in his method the things he experienced in the streets, bringing a sense of social reality to frevo. The use of the umbrella is one of the best examples of this. He states that all the movements in frevo can be done toward the right or left side of the body, and one should be able to carry the umbrella in either one of the hands. In his words, “Since the use of the umbrellas in frevo derives from attacking and defending, you should be able to hold the umbrella with your right and with your left hand. When you are fighting, you do not have time to choose between the right and left hand, you have to defend

yourself no matter what.” (Já que o uso da sombrinha de frevo é originário do ataque e da defesa, você tem que segurar a sombrinha com sua mão direita e esquerda. Quando você está brigando, você não tem tempo de escolher entre direita e esquerda, você tem que se defender de qualquer jeito.)

The non-religious association of frevo explains the “utilitarian” use of the umbrella; which is mostly associated with defense or balance of the dancer. But this use goes beyond defense. The umbrella is for frevo what the use of props is in most dances of the Afro-Brazilian tradition: a symbol. The dances of the *orixás* in the Candomblé religion include objects that represent tools of their trades, for instance, the iron implements or swords of the *orixá* Ogun, the mirrors of the *orixá* Oxum, and several other objects that are representative of their personal characteristics.

In the case of frevo, no religious value is given to the umbrella, but the “tradition” of using the umbrella as a symbol of authenticity could be associated to the Afro-Brazilian heritage, hence the importance of umbrellas as a royal symbol in West Africa, and in the Afro-Brazilian *maracatu* tradition. But in frevo, instead of a royal or religious symbol, the umbrella became a symbol for the traditional/authentic frevo. No frevo dancer performs frevo without an umbrella. As I teach frevo, I tell the students: “the umbrella is the frevo dancer’s best friend,” adding some sentimental value between the performer and the object. Nascimento do Passo taught me by saying that a good frevo dancer should know how to drop and how to catch the umbrella while performing, should know how to take care of the umbrella, and when possible, even learn how to make and fix the object. In his own words, “by the way you use the umbrella I know who you are, as a passista and as a person...” (Pela forma que você usa a sombrinha, eu sei quem você é, como passista e como pessoa). This statement defines the use of the umbrella beyond frevo

performance. As in Afro-Brazilian traditions, moral and personal values are associated to an object that serves as a tool for its preservation.

This is not to say that there is a direct association between Nascimento do Passo, or frevo dancers in general, to Afro-Brazilian rituals. In fact, I do not recall his religious beliefs, which can also be indicative of very little attachment to religion on his part, considering how much time I spent with him. But instead, I want to acknowledge the strong influence of the Afro-Brazilian heritage, which is intrinsic to the dance of Pernambuco, through body movement, through the presence of objects, and through sentimental values.

In trying to bring frevo from the streets into classrooms, Nascimento do Passo states that frevo does not assign any gender difference, another characteristic that could be associated to the practice of capoeira and several Afro-Brazilian rituals. In frevo, men and women typically play the same roles and should be able to perform the same steps (Figure 4-3). He reinforces this idea by saying that, in the beginning, only men used to dance frevo, first the *capoeiras*, and later the winners of frevo contests, but as time passed, as it happens with capoeira, women learned the steps and became in some cases, even better performers of the style. The presence of women in frevo can be a determining factor for some of the stylistic changes frevo has undergone.

But Nascimento do Passo reinforces that it was mainly from his street experience as a frevo dancer and frevo contest winner that he named some of the steps he uses in his method, despite gender. Inspired by the “Rei do Passo” (King of Frevo), Egídio Bezerra, who had named some of the steps he performed in the contests, Nascimento do Passo named the steps he learned from men and women who performed in the streets, and also addresses that as he created the steps, he did not care if it was a “male step” or a “female step,” they just happened, according to

him. In this same way, his students also contributed to the creation of frevo steps, despite gender.

And although frevo functions as a religion for Nascimento do Passo and should be studied with great respect, he always emphasized that the frevo dancer should have the freedom to invent new steps. The attention to innovation within the tradition is based on the individual expression that Nascimento do Passo observed during his life time as a street dancer. Traditionally people spontaneously created the steps as the music was played by the frevo bands and as the crowd moved during Carnival. After practicing in the streets and in his home, Nascimento do Passo named each step and created new ones. When I asked how he went about creating frevo steps, Nascimento do Passo stated [my translation]:

The people in the street just created them, and I found them beautiful, so I would go back home, imitate, and think to myself: what does this step remind me of? Oh, a scissor! You know scissoring the legs opening and closing them the way we do... and from then on that step would be named 'tesoura' [the scissor step.]

[O povo na rua simplesmente criava eles, e eu achava eles bonitos, então eu voltava pra casa e pensava comigo mesmo: esse passo me lembra o que? Ah! Uma tesoura, Você sabe, abrindo e fechando as pernas como eu faço... e daquele dia em diante aquele passo era chamado tesoura.]

Some dancers in Pernambuco claim that Nascimento do Passo did not invent the frevo steps he claims to have invented. However, it is imperative to recognize that either by creating, by naming or just by organizing the steps into his teaching method, Nascimento do Passo played an important role toward the development and preservation of frevo as a dance style, and in doing so, he contributed to the formalization of many other popular dance traditions. Today, because of Nascimento do Passo, people who have never attended a frevo class are able to recognize the most popular steps of frevo, similar to the way in which classical dancers learn to identify essential steps of ballet.

The grammatical mistakes found in the names of some of the frevo steps are a consequence of the spontaneous way that Nascimento do Passo named them — together with his lack of schooling. When questioned on the correct pronunciation of one step, he answered [my translation]:

If I created the steps, I should be the one who names them, in the way I speak. And people should pronounce their names in the same way I do, and if people insist in pronouncing them in the way they learned in their school, just to be fancy, then they do not want to learn them in the right way: in Nascimento do Passo's way.

[Se eu criei os passos, eu tenho que ser quem dá o nome deles, do jeito que eu falo. E as pessoas têm que pronunciar o nome deles do jeito que eu falo, e se as pessoas insistirem em pronunciar do jeito que eles aprenderam na escola deles, só pra ser chique, é porque eles não querem aprender eles do jeito certo: no jeito de Nascimento do Passo.]

And as we discussed the subject and danced, he mentioned [my translation]:

Do you see this step you are dancing right now? I always called it “carancolado.” The other day, a woman came here saying that she was doing research at the university. As soon as I taught her this step, she said: but mestre, you are saying “carancolado,” you should say “encaracolado.” That was when I lost control and said: You know what? *encaracolado* [curly] is your hair! My step is *carancolado* [Mispronunciation of “encaracolando” — making it curly]! Don't you think that if I created the step I should at least have the right to say it the way I want?

[Vê esse passo que você está fazendo agora? Eu sempre chamei isso de “carancolado”. Outro dia, uma mulher veio aqui dizendo que ela tava fazendo uma pesquisa pra universidade, assim que eu ensinei ela a fazer esse passo, ela disse: mas mestre, o senhor tá dizendo “carancolado”, o senhor deve dizer “encaracolado”. Foi quando eu perdi o controle e disse: quer saber de uma coisa? Encaracolado é o cabelo da sua cabeça! Meu passo é carancolado. Você não acha que se fui eu quem criou o passo eu devo pelo menos ter o direito de dizer do jeito que eu quero?]

Nascimento do Passo considered it an insult that the researcher corrected his pronunciation. In Pernambuco the use of the expression “encaracolar” is very common and translates to “making it curly.” For Nascimento do Passo, “carancolado,” instead of *encaracolado*, is used as an adjective to describe “curly hair.” This way of naming frevo steps shows the relationship between Nascimento's spontaneity as a street frevo dancer and his dream to preserve the tradition by codifying and naming frevo steps in his own way.

While Nascimento emphasizes his work in creating and naming the frevo steps, he acknowledges that he was not the first *passista* to do this: “Egídio Bezerra was the one who started it and I learned a lot by watching him dancing.” Since Egídio Bezerra was already considered “O Rei do Passo” before Nascimento do Passo had won his first frevo contest, Egídio likely inspired Nascimento to construct his own method of teaching and his own performing style. In his *Frevo, Capoeira e Passo*, Valdemar de Oliveira quotes Egídio Bezerra [my translation]:

I’ve been dancing frevo since I was a little boy. I invented many steps: *peru de chapa quente*, when the body bends, [turkey on a hot grill] ; *tesoura aérea*, a jump crossing the legs, [airborne scissors]; *todo duro*, a system of bending the body successively, [named after a Brazilian boxer]; *cortando jaca*, jumping with the legs open and rounded, [cutting the jack fruit]; *escamado*, dancing in diagonal on the pass way, [fish scales]; *mulher carregando o menino*, when the umbrella stays in between the legs, [woman carrying a boy]; and *parafuso* [the screw], when the legs stay crossed changing directions constantly. (Interview with Egídio Bezerra to the journalist Ney Lopes de Souza, in the *Jornal do Comércio*, in Recife, in the Carnival of 1967)

[Danço frevo desde menino. Criei vários passos: “peru na chapa quente” (envergadura no corpo); “tesoura aérea” (saltos cruzando as pernas); “todo duro” (sistema de envergaduras sucessivas), “cortando jaca” (pulando com pernas abertas em circunferência); “escamado” (saracoteando em diagonal na passarela); “mulher carregando o menino” (sombriinha e declive nas pernas) e “parafuso” (pernas trançadas com mudanças contínuas de posição).]

In addition to the creation of frevo steps, there is a strong similarity between the backgrounds of Nascimento do Passo and Egídio Bezerra. Both have similar life trajectories, both won frevo contests and trained generations of frevo dancers. Even with their limited degree of formal schooling (they often had to ask other people to write down the steps they were creating), their efforts to name the steps was a way to look into the future and consciously or unconsciously preserve the tradition.

The names of the steps created by Egídio Bezerra, and later, by Nascimento do Passo are widely known, and are mentioned in some of the most popular songs of the Carnival of Pernambuco. With their unique creation process, they differ from most choreographers who

attended a formal dance school in order to be able to choreograph. Egídio Bezerra and Nascimento do Passo learned choreography through oral transmission and informal practice, by passing or failing “the tests on the streets.”

Nascimento do Passo’s dream of formalizing the tradition has come true, as frevo is now taught in classrooms. He considers frevo the most important of all rhythms in the state of Pernambuco and views frevo as the leading dance style of Carnival, the one that incorporates all the other regional dance styles and music from Pernambuco and the entire Northeast. He wants frevo to be taught in the schools to be as close as possible to the way people dance in the streets, but his ideas clearly link the teaching of frevo to all sectors of society through contact between rich and poor. For example, in his booklet he writes [my translation]:

We should sing and dance some *frevo-canções*³⁶ praising the frevo composers, and the *passistas* [frevo dancers] from the past and from the present. We should recognize the work of reporters and journalists, the writers, theatre directors, photographers, and all the Carnival people who have kept frevo alive, by teaching frevo not only in the classrooms but in the streets, main avenues, and in the ballrooms of Recife and Olinda. (Nascimento do Passo’s booklet 1998)

[Nós devemos cantar e dançar os frevo-canções, exaltar os compositores de frevo, e os passistas do passado e do presente. Nós devemos reconhecer o trabalho dos repórteres e jornalistas, os escritores, diretores de teatro, fotógrafos, e todas as pessoas do carnaval que mantiveram o frevo vivo, ensinando o frevo não apenas nas escolas, mas nas ruas, grandes avenidas, e nos clubes do Recife e de Olinda.]

As Nascimento do Passo taught his frevo classes, he became known for his openness as a teacher. When speaking about the time he taught at one of Recife’s samba schools, Galeria do Ritmo, he observed that the steps of frevo are imbedded in many different dance styles, including samba. Speaking of the samba dancers’ learning process he commented, “As time went on, I began to notice that as they learned frevo, their bodies developed more freedom than when they

³⁶ Frevo-canções [frevo-canção] are solo song frevos with instrumental jazz-band accompaniment that first developed in the 1930s among professional popular composers in Recife. Typical instrumentation includes trumpets, saxophones, trombones, electric guitar and bass, drum kit and piano. A solo singer is backed by a small mixed chorus. The frevo-canção is not linked to any particular Carnival association.

danced samba, especially their arms.” (Quando o tempo foi passando, eu comecei a notar que à medida que eles iam aprendendo o frevo, o corpo deles começou a mover com mais liberdade quando eles dançavam samba, especialmente os braços.) Nascimento do Passo was referring to the incorporation of his teaching method and style in the *samba school* classes, a style characterized by the freedom of arm movement in contrast to the precise movements of the legs.

Today, Nascimento do Passo’s students are recognized as they perform frevo in Pernambuco and beyond. Besides mastering the steps created by Nascimento do Passo, his students have a distinct style from other dancers represented by their particular way of dancing frevo characterized by looseness in the arm and shoulder movement, described by Nascimento do Passo as the “swing” of frevo. This swing is found in the frevo performed by the common people on the street Carnival, but not necessarily in the frevo performed by some dance companies. According to Nascimento do Passo, he has always dreamed of bringing the street style to the classroom, teaching his students what he has learned in the “school of life.”

Frevo Costumes

During Carnival, tourist events and theatrical performances, frevo costumes are an essential part of frevo dancing. The starting point of my investigation into the origin of frevo costumes was based on my assumption that, even though frevo dancing had its origin in the movements of the *capoeiras* protecting the marching bands in Recife, the frevo costumes of today have no direct association with the white pants worn by the *capoeiras* of the past, or even the *capoeiristas* of the present (Figure 3-3). In addition, the frevo costumes dancers wore before the 1950s bear little resemblance to today’s costumes (Figure 3-4).

Having been exposed to frevo since childhood, I never learned the origin of frevo costumes, but was always intrigued by the standardization of the Carnival frevo costumes and the ones used in theatrical performances. The emphasis on individuality and innovation that

characterizes frevo as a dance style and the individuality expressed in all frevo steps are also transposed to the frevo costumes of today. If in frevo, dancers are not following a specific religious or cultural tradition, why is there a specific way of dressing is associated with frevo? Who chose the “authentic frevo costume,” and for what reason?

As one of Nascimento do Passo’s students, I was also intrigued by the fact that I had never seen him wearing anything other than a frevo costume in every class he taught. Furthermore, whenever I encountered Nascimento do Passo in a supermarket, bank, or even walking on the streets of Recife, he was always wearing a colorful frevo costume. What I did not realize was that today’s frevo costumes are, in fact, one of Nascimento do Passo’s “inventions,” and one of his important contributions to the dance style.

Most popular traditions in Pernambuco are associated with a historical period or religious tradition which set the style for the costumes worn by their participants. For instance, the popular tradition of *maracatu*, as it passes through the street Carnivals of Recife and Olinda, transports spectators to the colonial period of Brazilian history with its costumes that represent both Afro-Brazilian expression and the influence of the European Royal Court. The *maracatu* is a parade representing an African nation and it is culturally linked to the coronation of the king of Congo in past centuries. Up to these days, participants wear elaborate costumes resembling those of Louis XV (Carvalho, 2000). When participating in the *maracatu*, people of all ages, social, and financial conditions transform themselves into kings and queens, wearing historical costumes that are important for the preservation of that tradition (Figure 3-5).

The *caboclinhos*, a Recife’s Carnival tradition, is represented by groups of people that dress in stylized indigenous outfits and features music played by a small flute, metal shakers and a drum (Figure 3-6). In both examples, costumes are used for group identification: in the first

case, as Afro-Brazilians, and in the second, as a blend of indigenous and European heritage. Here it is clear that a mixture of cultural identities is at the root of these two popular expressions: the former, the Afro- and Euro- Brazilian mix, and in the latter, the Indigenous and Euro-Brazilian. At the same time, frevo costumes, do not identify ethnic elements so much as symbolize the struggle of one frevo dancer, Nascimento do Passo, as he tried to make his way to a higher level of society.

Nascimento do Passo's permanent struggle to preserve the tradition was followed by his individual struggle to establish himself as "alguém de valor" (someone of value) in the society of Pernambuco. His lower class origins, and background as a street dancer, never allowed him to be recognized by society at large. In his words, "in our society, if you are born poor you will always remain poor and be seen as somebody with no manners, almost like a criminal." [Na nossa sociedade, se você nasce pobre, vai ser sempre pobre e vai ser sempre visto como alguém sem educação, como um criminoso]. Metaphorically speaking, through his frevo, Nascimento do Passo wanted "to jump" to another level in the society. In an informal conversation in 1998, he demonstrated how much prejudice had interfered with his life as a frevo dancer.

As we discussed the topic further, I noticed that he had unconsciously developed his own prejudice against Afro-Brazilian culture as a survival mechanism. For instance, when I mentioned my trip to the U.S. he advised me to learn any style of dance I wanted, but emphasized, "Please do not get involved with capoeira, since I have heard that *capoeiristas* have gone to the U.S. as well. If you have the opportunity to better yourself, please do not get involved with them." (Por favor só não se envolva com capoeira, porque eu ouvi dizer que os capoeiristas já estão por lá também. Se você tá tendo a oportunidade de se tornar alguém melhor, por favor não vá se envolver com eles.)

His statement is explained by the historical roots of frevo and the police repression suffered by the first frevo dancers, at the time known as *capoeiras*,³⁷ at the turn of the twentieth century similar to what Nascimento do Passo experienced as a street dancer during the 1950s. Nascimento do Passo's background and position in the society explains his fear of my involvement with capoeira. He firmly stated, "Although frevo has its roots in capoeira, frevo dancers should be different; they should try to compel society see them as better people." (Mesmo tendo raízes na capoeira, os dançarinos de frevo têm que ser diferente; eles tem que tentar fazer com que a sociedade olhe pra eles como pessoas melhores.)

It was in search for this difference, and social ascension that Nascimento do Passo began as a frevo dancer, and, in continuing his efforts, he essentially invented today's frevo costumes. When I interviewed Rosane Almeida, director of the Espaço Brincante³⁸ in São Paulo, the spouse, and professional partner of the musician and dancer Antônio Nóbrega, who also has been one of Nascimento do Passo's student, and helped him to write his booklet in 1998, she mentioned an episode which first influenced Nascimento do Passo in fighting for his recognition as a frevo dancer [my translation]:

In a bank in Recife, he signed a check as Nascimento do Passo instead of Francisco do Nascimento, his real name. According to Nascimento do Passo, the fact that the cashier would not recognize him as the same person served as the biggest push for him to understand that "all the work he had done to spread frevo had not yet had strong enough impact on society." He needed people to know who he was, and only then, they would respect him as a frevo dancer. (Rosane Almeida interviewed on 12/18/2006)

Foi num banco em Recife, que ele assinou um cheque como Nascimento do Passo ao invés de Francisco do Nascimento, o nome verdadeiro dele. De acordo com Nascimento do

³⁷ Scholars often refer to the people who fought in front of the marching bands as "capoeiras," but the people who practice the formalized martial art/ dance style of capoeira as "capoeiristas," respecting the nomenclature of the period, the former, the eighteenth/nineteenth century, and the latter, after the formalization and legalization of the style in the 1930's.

³⁸ The Espaço Brincante is a theatre-school founded by Antônio Nóbrega and Rosane Almeida to teach Brazilian popular music and dance.

Passo, o fato de que o caixa não reconheceu ele como a mesma pessoa, serviu como o maior empurrão pra que ele entendesse que todo o trabalho que ele tinha feito pra divulgar o frevo não tinha sido suficiente para causar impacto na sociedade. Ele precisava que as pessoas soubessem quem ele era, e só assim eles o respeitariam como um dançarino de frevo.]

From that day forward, Nascimento do Passo decided to wear, in his daily activities, the same costume he wore while dancing frevo in the streets. He decided that his outfit had to be comfortable, and remind him of Carnival. The idea resulted in wearing a shirt tied around his waist, and a pair of pants that matched the shirt. In another interview, Nascimento do Passo stated [my translation]:

From then on, this [what his wearing at the interview] was the outfit Nascimento do Passo wore every time he left his home. Of course, as I made money performing and teaching classes, I made other outfits that I could use on different occasions — or do you think I would wear the same outfit for a birthday party and a funeral? They had to be different, although the ones I invented look a bit alike... [laughs...]. (Nascimento do Passo, interviewed in 1998)

[Daquele momento em diante, essa [a roupa que ele estava vestindo durante a entrevista] foi a roupa que Nascimento do Passo vestiu toda vez que ele saiu de casa. Claro que quando eu fui fazendo dinheiro me apresentando ou dando aulas, eu fiz outras roupas que eu pudesse usar em diferentes ocasiões — ou você acha que eu usei a mesma roupa pra um aniversário e um funeral? Elas tinham que ser diferentes, apesar de que as que eu inventei se pareciam um pouco umas com as outras.]

Nascimento do Passo justifies the choice for the shirt tied around the waist and the baggy pair of pants, usually made of satin, on the grounds that they were more comfortable for dancing frevo. In my view, his uses of the third person when talking about himself, placing himself as an observer of the tradition he created, demonstrates that it is almost as if he cannot believe the widespread impact of his own creation. According to Nascimento do Passo, his outfit also had to represent the joyfulness of Carnival, and its colorfulness is the best representation of this light-heartedness [my translation]:

Why do we wear only black when people die? Because we are sad, but if we are happy, we should wear as many colors as we can, and the frevo is all about joy. Speaking of joy, it took a long time, but now, everybody knows who Nascimento do Passo is, and I am happy

about that... Look how many colors I am wearing right now [laughs]. (Nascimento do Passo, interviewed in 1998)

[Por que nós só vestimos preto quando as pessoas morrem? Porque estamos triste, mas se estamos felizes, a gente tem que vestir quanto mais cores a gente puder, e frevo é só alegria. Falando nisso, demorou muito tempo, mas agora, todo mundo sabe quem é Nascimento do Passo, e eu tou feliz com isso... Olha quantas cores eu tou vestindo agora.]

The frevo outfit created by Nascimento do Passo has become one of the main symbols of today's authentic frevo (Figure 3-7). Even before performing a step, a frevo dancer will be recognized first by the outfit he is wearing. During Carnival, people from Pernambuco profit from frevo costumes which represent symbols of their state and are sold to tourists from all over the world. In the dance world, not only Nascimento do Passo's students, but many of Pernambuco's popular dance companies proudly wear variations of that outfit, which is essential to the preservation of the tradition. Unfortunately, they do not always recognize the importance of Nascimento do Passo's invention and its symbolic value.

Coruja: The Image of All Northeastern Rhythms

During the same period in which Nascimento do Passo was participating in frevo contests, another popular dancer became known for his virtuosity as a frevo dancer. It was by the nickname Coruja (owl) that most people from Pernambuco identified Arnaldo Francisco das Neves (Figure 3-8). Coruja do Pandeiro (Coruja of the Tambourine), Coruja do Passo (Coruja of the Step), or simply Coruja, are all nicknames that came into use when Neves was a street vendor and carried an owl on his shoulder to pump up the sale of plastic table cloths in the Mercado de São José (the largest street market in Recife).

In his life story, what is unique about him is that he has come to represent all northeastern rhythms which were influential in his style of frevo dancing. The diversity of his artistic talents represent the diversity found through out the state of Pernambuco itself and was recognized in the frevo contests in which he participated. As one of the first contributors to Pernambuco's

diverse contemporary music and dance scene, Coruja's blend of the urban streets traditions of Recife with those from the interior brought together the sound of *xaxado*,³⁹ the influence of Lampião and Maria Bonita,⁴⁰ the music of Luiz Gonzaga,⁴¹ and Jackson do Pandeiro,⁴² thereby contributing to the hybridity of frevo.

Coruja's path proves that frevo may have started in the streets of Recife, but it has incorporated elements of the entire state of Pernambuco. Knowing Coruja's background is essential to understanding the importance of his contribution to the history of frevo. As a *pandeiro* (tambourine) player, born in the state of Paraíba but having lived in Pernambuco since age 12, Coruja resided in the lower class neighborhoods of Casa Amarela, Nova Descoberta and Alto do Mandú. According to Coruja, his friendships with Jackson do Pandeiro and Amaurílio Nicéias, who first met him as a street vendor, were instrumental in getting him jobs on the TV program *A Taba se Diverte*, and at radio broadcasts Rádio Clube and Rádio Jornal. In his interview with the *Diário de Pernambuco* on March 23, 1990 Coruja stated [my translation]:

I was hired by the Rádio Clube and stayed there for 3 years. Around 1955, I went to Rádio Jornal. Since I was already friends with Jackson do Pandeiro, I often replaced him when he was traveling for shows. I spent five years on the radio and then went on TV Jornal, after being taken there by Amaurílio Nicéias. (*Diário de Pernambuco*, 1990)

[Fui contratado para a Rádio Clube, onde fiquei três anos. Por volta de 1955, fui para a Rádio Jornal. Como já era amigo de Jackson do Pandeiro, sempre o substituí, quando ele viajava pra fazer shows. Foram cinco anos na rádio e fui para a TV Jornal, levado por Amaurílio Nicéias.]

³⁹ *Xaxado* is a dance tradition from the interior of the northeast.

⁴⁰ Lampião and Maria Bonita were considered outlaws who besides fighting for their own rights in the backlands of the Northeast, became known for dancing *xaxado*.

⁴¹ Luiz Gonzaga is the most famous musician from the Northeast. He is credited for having created and spread a rhythm called *baião* throughout Brazil, later also known as *forró*.

⁴² Jackson do Pandeiro is considered one of the best tambourine players of all times, also credited with spreading the music of the interior of the Northeast in Brazil.

Coruja started his artistic life as a tambourine player in Felinho's Conjunto Regional, where he played tambourine in the opening of the Rádio Tamandaré. Later, because his experience as a street vendor in the urban center of Recife, he participated in Carnivals for many years, and was attracted to frevo, founding the first frevo school in Pernambuco at his house. In his school, hundreds of kids learned what he use to call the "swing," "ginga," and "turbulence," of frevo. At the time, he was recognized as the greatest frevo dancer in Pernambuco and was invited to integrate frevo dancing into the first "Vôo do Frevo"⁴³ of the prestigious upper class Clube Internacional do Recife. He was also the principal teacher at the Sociedade Folclórica Nordestina in Santo Amaro (*Diário de Pernambuco*, 1987).

In the newspaper *Jornal do Comércio* on February 22nd 1981, Coruja commented on the importance of frevo reaching the school system of Pernambuco, and on the importance of spreading and preserving this dance tradition. Considering Pernambuco's Carnival as "o melhor do mundo inteiro" (the best of the entire world), he was proud of participating in the first "Vôo do Frevo" (Flight of Frevo), and of having danced accompanying the orchestras of famous frevo composers Nelson Ferreira and José Menezes in the city of Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁴ Another highlight of his career was the opportunity to travel to Brasília as part of "The Show of Brasília," directed by Walter de Oliveira. This show introduced the northeastern popular traditions *bumba-meu-boi* and *caboclinhos* to the nation's capital, while also bringing Coruja and his company (Coruja e seus Tangarás), along with a frevo orchestra, led by composer Nelson Ferreira, to the attention of a wider audience.

⁴³ The Vôo do Frevo was a flight organized by people of the middle and upper classes who were members of the Clube Internacional do Recife. In this flight, they would visit a foreign country and take Frevo as their 'present' to the country visited.

⁴⁴ Up to today, the expression "acompanhar" (to follow) is used by frevo dancers as they refer to their performances with the orchestras.

The fact that Coruja's participation in TV documentaries helped spread frevo throughout Brazil, and is also mentioned in his newspaper interviews as one of the highlights and most cherished parts of his career. As he received homage from the members of the Brazilian Assistance League, LBA (Legião Brasileira de Assistência), in a program dedicated to seniors assisted by that association, he mentioned being touched by seeing people over 90 years old dancing frevo like children. On that occasion he asked Carnival lovers to continue to "play" Carnival, to perform the steps and to represent the frevo of Pernambuco with elegance and peace (*Jornal do Comércio*, 1981).

Coruja's financial survival as a popular artist was due to his ability to create diversity in his work. From his first performances as a frevo dancer, Coruja continued to preserve frevo but always complained about the lack of support from local institutions. Although he had glaucoma in his left eye, and was almost blind by the last days of his life (even after surgery), he maintained the same enthusiasm for the Carnival in Pernambuco. As a survival strategy, he directed several groups simultaneously, and thereby shared his knowledge and expertise among the different groups he founded, creating a true legacy of followers, including his ten sons. His groups (Coruja e sua Orquestra, Coruja e seus Tangarás, Coruja e seus Passistas, and Forró dos Tangarás) played and danced all northeastern rhythms, possibly initiating the attempts to stage northeastern popular traditions that would become the subject of study for dance companies of Pernambuco. However, unlike Nascimento do Passo, Coruja did not consciously attempt to formalize his dancing. Unconsciously, as part of his survival strategies, he used his experience as a tambourine player to link the musical traditions of the interior of the state, such as *baião* and *forró*, with the urban tradition of frevo.

During his career he wished he had recorded a CD that was to be produced by Luiz Gonzaga, who, to use Coruja's expression, was "taken by God" before Coruja himself was. Coruja deeply desired to make a CD symbolizing a trip throughout the Northeast, featuring the rhythms of *xaxado*, *forró* and the *marabaixo* from the northern state of Macapá⁴⁵ (Diário de Pernambuco, 1990)

Versatility became the distinctive factor of this popular artist. Oral tradition shows that the frevo steps he created linked rural and urban cultures, the backlands and the city. By transforming the frevo steps performed on the streets into performances, Coruja facilitated communication between popular tradition and the media, linking the many different social worlds present during Carnival on the crowded streets of Recife.

The musical group Coruja e seus Tangarás, that he founded, animated street parties and clubs during the 1960s, many times accompanying the famous tambourine player Jackson do Pandeiro. The group participated in national TV programs such as Sílvio Santos and Chacrinha, and traveled throughout many Brazilian states following Luiz Gonzaga in the *Projeto Pixinguinha*.⁴⁶ They also became known in Europe and in the U.S. through TV documentaries produced by foreigner scholars. Speaking about his group, Coruja stated [my translation]:

In 1960, when the TV station opened up I started slowly to put together a small ensemble, preparing the choreography. At that time I was already friends with Luiz Gonzaga. I showed him the choreography of the *xaxado*, and Gonzaga, who had met a group of *cangaceiros*⁴⁷ in the city of Exú, showed me how the authentic dance was done. However

⁴⁵ The *marabaixo* is a rhythm that, according to Coruja [my translation], "is different from *ciranda*, resembles the *carimbó* but is danced in a big circle."

⁴⁶ The Projeto Pixinguinha is a cultural event created by the FUNARTE (Fundação Nacional de Arte — National Foundation for the Arts) in 1977. The event is named after the one of the most important Brazilian composers Alfredo da Rocha Viana, nicknamed Pixinguinha, who died in 1973.

⁴⁷ *Cangaceiros* were outlaws of the Brazilian backlands. Besides, their criminal activity, they became associated with *xaxado*, a music and dance tradition of the people of the interior.

the ensemble did not yet have a date set to perform it for the first time (*Diário de Pernambuco*, 1990).

[Em 1960, quando a TV foi inaugurada, comecei a formar um conjunto devagarinho, preparando a coreografia. Por essa época, já tinha amizade com Luiz Gonzaga. Mostrei para ele a coreografia do xaxado, e Gonzaga, que havia conhecido um bando de cangaceiros em Exú, mostrou-me a dança autêntica. Só que o conjunto ainda não tinha data certa pra estréia.]

While reading the book *Seleta Brasileira*, Coruja found the name for his music and dance ensemble, and soon the group started playing and performing the music and dance of *xaxado*, the dance of the *cangaceiros*, as he referred to it [my translation]:

It was there [in the book *Seleta Brasileira*] that I found the dance of the Tangarás, from the family of Chico Santo. Because I was known as Coruja do Pandeiro, Amaurílio Nicéias baptized the group “Coruja e seus Tangarás.” We started on Floriza Rossi’s TV program, “A Tarde é Nossa,” and were a total hit! There were countless phone calls and cars in front of the TV station. (*Diário de Pernambuco*, 1990)

[Nela (na cartilha *Seleta Brasileira*) eu descobri a dança dos Tangarás da família de Chico Santo. E Amaurílio Nicéias batizou o grupo de Coruja e seus Tangarás, já que eu era o Coruja do Pandeiro. Estreamos no programa de Floriza Rossi, A Tarde é Nossa. Sucesso Total. Foram inúmeros telefonemas e carros na frente da televisão.]

Although the trajectory of the group was characterized by success, scant financial resources characterized the group’s existence. Nevertheless, Coruja’s death in 1994 left a legacy for the state of Pernambuco; his group, Coruja e seus Tangarás, was firmly established as one of the best *forró* bands in Brazil. Formed by ten musicians and singers, all of them Coruja’s sons, they played tambourine, accordion, drums, *zabumba*,⁴⁸ electric piano, bass, guitar, sax and triangle. In July of 1996, the band distributed their first CD, in which the members paid homage to their father for having invested his entire life in promoting the culture of Pernambuco.

The life of this multi-talented popular artist illustrates his contribution to the formalization of frevo by the creation of his performance ensembles as well as his own frevo school.

⁴⁸ *Zabumbas* are large bass drums played with a stick and the hands, traditional of the interior of the Brazilian Northeast.

Incorporating his background as a *xaxado* dancer characterized Coruja's unique way of performing and teaching frevo. More research on his style of dancing frevo is necessary to prove the influence of *xaxado*, a dance of the interior of the state, in today's urban frevo. However, his importance in the formalization process is not restricted to the creation of his ensemble and of a frevo school. Coruja and Nascimento do Passo are mentioned by André Madureira, director of the Balé Popular do Recife, who recognizes these two dancers as the main frevo teachers and source of his research for his own dance company [my translation]: "The popular *passistas* Nascimento do Passo and Coruja were the ones who passed on the basic notions of frevo so that the dancers of the Balé Popular do Recife could follow their own paths developing and creating steps of their own" (Oliveira 1993, 151). [Foram os passistas populares Nascimento do Passo e Coruja os que transmitiram-lhes as noções básicas para que os dançarinos do grupo seguissem desenvolvendo e aperfeiçoando os passos por conta própria.]

The contribution of Nascimento do Passo and Coruja in teaching the dancers from the Balé Popular do Recife will be discussed in the following chapter as we trace the course of frevo from the popular to the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco. My field work in July 2006 in the city of Recife will be used to illustrate the presence of these artists in the two distinct interconnected frevo worlds of street and theatre in Pernambuco.

OFICINA DE FREVO – Prof. Nascimento do Passo
Os 10 Mandamentos do Desenvolvimento da Lei do Passo
Autor: Mestre Nascimento do Passo

Frevo: Música. Passo: "A DANÇA DO FREVO" é um exercício para desenvolver os sentidos.

1. Passo, Dança do Frevo desenvolve a visão e audição.
2. A Dança do Frevo desenvolve o tato e o paladar.
3. O Passo desenvolve o olfato e o raciocínio.
4. Através da Dança do Frevo você tem mais intuição lógica, da realidade da vida.
5. Dançando o Frevo aprende-se a ter mais amor, mais carinho, mais afeto.
6. Quem faz o Passo, aprende a receber tudo com mais amor, mais afeto.
7. Quem Dança o Frevo desenvolve sabiamente mais, muito mais o ajuste mental.
8. A Dança do Frevo e o Passo ajudam a despoluir, descongestionar e desobstruir a mente de quem dança o Frevo.
9. Dançar o Frevo dá vida longa. Aprender a dançar frevo, é aprender a ter mais energia.

FREVO NÃO É CARNAVAL. FREVO É TERAPIA.

Rua Purpurina, nº 428 – Vila Madalena – São Paulo/SP
Teatro Brincantes – Antônio Carlos Nóbrega

Figure 3-1 The Ten Commandments of Frevo by Nascimento do Passo. Source: Nascimento do Passo's Booklet "Projeto 50 Anos de Frevo no Pé." Photo courtesy of Juliana Azoubel



Figure 3-2 Passista Bruno Henrique performing a frevo step that for the people of Pernambuco resembles a Russian dance. Photo courtesy of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges



Figure 3-3 Capoeira outfits. Photo courtesy of the Quilombo Center in Chicago, IL



Figure 3-4 Frevo costumes of today. Source: “Frevo.” *Conjunto de Frevo*. Atlas Universal Interativo. Coleção Recreio. Ed. Abril.
www.terrabrasileira.net/folclore/regioes/5ritmos/frevo.html



Figure 3-5 Maracatu Costumes. Source: “Maracatu de Baque Virado ou Nação.” Dona Santa, Rainha do Maracatu Nação Elefante. Source: Arquivo Katarina Real, Iconografia da FJN. Rocha Lima, Cláudia M. de Assis
<http://www.fundaj.gov.br/notitia/servlet/newstorm.ns.presentation.NavigationServlet?publicationCode=16&pageCode=679&textCode=5092>



Figure 3-6 Caboclinhos Costumes by Balé Popular do Recife. Source: *Danças Populares Brasileiras*. Photo by Romulo Fialdini



Figure 3-7 Nascimento do Passo wearing one of his frevo costumes. Source: www.municipios.pe.gov.br/municipio/Nascimento_Passo.asp



Figure 3-8 Coruja. Source: Jornal do Comércio, 1883.

CHAPTER 4

FREVO TODAY: FROM THE POPULAR TO THE CONTEMPORARY

In Pernambuco and beyond, dancers and choreographers from diverse backgrounds are staging frevo. Dance training, ideology and socio-economic conditions lead many dancers to experiment with different types of dancing, thereby influencing the staging process of frevo. This illustrates Nascimento do Passo's philosophy as well as the notion that individual expression is the core element for choreographic innovations in frevo today.

In this chapter, I will illustrate the development of Nascimento do Passo's teaching methods, and his philosophy of individual expression. I will emphasize his influence on Recife's municipal frevo school (today Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges), the tension between his philosophy and the one adopted by the school administrators of today and how that tension has influenced the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco. I chose to investigate the methodology applied at this school, since I consider it an important site for the development of frevo. It was there, when the school was still named Escola Municipal de Frevo, that Nascimento do Passo officially started putting his method of teaching frevo into practice.

In July 2006, at the IV Mostra de Dança do Recife, a dance festival held in the Teatro do Parque, I first watched the performance of the young dancers from the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges. In an attempt to analyze the staging process of Nascimento do Passo's work, I planned to videotape the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges' performance and to speak with Nascimento do Passo, since I had not seen him since 1998. On that evening, I watched "Recifervendo," a frevo piece that I never expected to see performed by Nascimento do Passo's students.

In different sections of the piece, frevo movements were choreographed to slow frevo music,⁴⁹ which is by itself an innovation, and the dancers were placed in a structured stage formation, incorporating a different movement vocabulary than the one used by Nascimento do Passo. At the time, as I thought about Nascimento do Passo's methodology and the performance style of his dancers, and I wondered about the reason behind the change I observed. Nascimento do Passo never emphasized the synchronization of the dancers or their symmetrical placement on stage, both important elements in "Recifervendo."⁵⁰ It was not until the next day, when I visited the frevo school and spoke with the new director Bárbara Heliodora and the school choreographer Alexandre Macêdo that I was informed that Nascimento do Passo was no longer teaching there.

[Object 4-1 Video of the piece "Recifervendo"\(98,299kb, .mpg\)](#)

With the absence of Nascimento do Passo at the school my study took a new direction, forcing me to compare past and present teaching of the school. The choreographer Alexandre Macêdo had been a member of the Balé Popular do Recife and of the Balé Brincantes, two of the local dance companies known for staging popular traditional dances in Pernambuco. His participation in these groups explained the style of the piece performed on stage, since both groups focused on staging popular traditional dances into theatre settings. On the day I visited the school, I gathered information from an informal conversation with several of the young performers I had watched in the dance festival. Frevo dancer Deyvson Vicente describes Macêdo's working method [my translation]:

⁴⁹ "Recifervendo" was choreographed to Antônio Nóbrega's version of the frevo Vassourinhas composed by Joana Batista and Matias da Rocha in 1909. In this version, Vassourinhas is recorded as a waltz, played by the *rabeca*, mixing erudite and popular culture.

⁵⁰ The piece "Recifervendo" was choreographed by Alexandre Macêdo, former choreographer of the Balé Brincantes.

Alexandre [Macêdo] lets us improvise, but only during rehearsals. He tells us that we have eight counts to work with, and each group creates a little piece; later he puts everything together. In this way, I think he extracts the best out of each one of us. (Interview with Deyvson Vicente August 18, 2006)

[Alexandre deixa a gente criar, mas só durante os ensaios. Ele diz pra a gente que a gente tem oito tempos pra trabalhar, e cada grupo cria uma combinaçãozinha, depois ele junta tudo. Dessa forma, eu acho que ele extrai o melhor de cada um.]

The freedom and ability to improvise and create during rehearsals, but not during performances, distinguish Macêdo's choreographic philosophy from Nascimento do Passo's. Heliodora attributed the change I had witnessed to the methods that are currently being taught at the school: "What we do here is a street frevo that we make happen on stage." [O que a gente faz aqui é o frevo de rua que a gente faz acontecer no palco]. Her statement revealed an eagerness to make a distinction between "street frevo" and "stage frevo," a topic I decided to investigate further.

Although she classified the frevo they performed as "street frevo," there was a deliberate formalization of frevo in the piece. To what extent was frevo being modified in order to be staged? Several elements showed the difference between the dancers of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges of today and the dancers directed by Nascimento do Passo in the past. In Nascimento do Passo's method, frevo dancers followed a specific routine during class and rehearsals, but at the time of performance, they were free to create and improvise as people do during Carnival. In Macêdo's, the opposite happened: during the choreographic process, students were encouraged to improvise to create the only final product that was to be performed on stage. Once set, the choreography was to be performed with minimal improvisation.

When I attended a frevo class in the same school, I found Mestre João Pequeno (the oldest capoeira master alive), and two other *capoeiristas* watching the young frevo dancers. That was a

unique opportunity, not only to investigate the contemporary development of frevo as a formal dance technique, but also to analyze the changes in frevo as compared to capoeira. Although *capoeiras* influenced the beginning of frevo, the two traditions, frevo and capoeira, have followed different paths, and today are considered two distinct styles (capoeira also being considered a combination of dance and martial art).

Mestre João Pequeno served as a living representation of the influence of capoeira in frevo. As he watched the performance of frevo students and found himself acquainted with some of the moves, he simplified the discussion stating [my translation], “capoeira and frevo are so much alike, but we do not use the umbrella in capoeira.” (Capoeira e frevo são muito parecidos, mas a gente não usa a sombrinha na capoeira). Making the discussion of the topic much less important than physical movement, upon my insistence, he moved to the music of frevo, showing his spontaneity and familiarity with the vocabulary of the style and giving “kinesthetic explanations” to many of my questions. This was, without a doubt, one of the most touching moments of my research, as I witnessed a live example of almost a century of tradition.

[Object 4-2 Video of Mestre João Pequeno dancing frevo\(10,257kb, .mpg\)](#)

Mestre João Pequeno is not alone in claiming the connection of both traditions. Following Freyre, Valdemar de Oliveira finds the spirit of capoeira in frevo [my translation]:

I find the spirit of capoeira... in what Gilberto Freyre has called “the physical and even artistic expression of young virile energy.” Without intending to discover in them the unjustified and forgotten, reacting victoriously to the marginalization imposed by the social environment, I am not able, in considering the *passistas* [frevo dancers], to get rid of the masculine figure of the capoeira... (Oliveira 1985, 100 -102)

[Encontro o espírito da capoeira... aquilo a que Gilberto Freyre chamou “a expressão física e até artística da energia moça e virile.” Sem neles pretender descobrir, apenas, injustiçados e esquecidos, reagindo vitoriosamente, à marginalização imposta pelo meio social, não consigo ao considerar os passistas, desvencilhar-me da figura máscula do Capoeira...]

Clearly, Freyre and Oliveira believed that an essential part of *capoeira*'s "masculinity" carried over into frevo. Nascimento do Passo and other frevo dancers agree with that, in spite of the fact that today frevo female dancers are more common than male dancers in Pernambuco. As the style was formalized and taught in the dance schools, it became the emblem of professional dance companies, and the male presence in the dance diminished. Although frevo continues to be the pride of all people born in Pernambuco, the male presence in frevo often represents a small part of a predominantly feminine universe, inhibiting males from taking frevo classes. For instance, today, most middle-class teenagers attend capoeira classes as a sign of status and masculinity, and while it is acceptable to dance frevo during Carnival, they would refuse to attend formal frevo dance classes.

In my experience, when frevo solos are spontaneously performed during Carnival, they are performed by professional dancers, or people who have been exposed to frevo as a dance technique. However, it is rare to find a non professional performing intricate frevo steps, although most men born in Pernambuco would claim to know how to dance frevo. Today, contrary to capoeira, the intricacy of frevo steps is mostly associated with professional dancers and not with common people on the streets.

Also inspired by the reaction of Mestre João Pequeno toward frevo, I analyzed the formalization of frevo steps comparing that process with the creation of the capoeira schools in Brazil (capoeira angola and capoeira regional).⁵¹ According to Mago, a *capoeirista* from Recife, today there are three styles of playing capoeira: capoeira angola, capoeira regional, and "stage

⁵¹ In 1932, Manoel Machado, also known as mestre Bimba, opened the first Academia de *capoeira* in Bahia. His new style, *Capoeira Regional*, was based on physical fitness and discipline, and was inspired by other fighting arts, changing the movements of the traditional *capoeira* to a standing position. Vicente Pastinha, known as mestre Pastinha, opened an academy in 1941 to preserve and teach the traditional form of *capoeira*, the *Capoeira Angola*, which stressed the purity of the style, based in flexibility, strength, floor techniques and a special attitude called *malícia* (malice or trickery).

capoeira.”⁵² My experience working with capoeira Mestre Jelon Vieira⁵³ at the University of Florida, and in Bahia, has shown me part of the transformation of *capoeira* as it is staged.

The capoeira performed by the *capoeiristas* of Master Jelon’s dance company, Dance Brazil, represents a stage adaptation of capoeira regional, an example of the “stage capoeira” or the “capoeira atual.” The *capoeiristas* who belong to more traditional groups in Brazil aim to find their own way of playing, but the ones who are exposed to modern capoeira classes are required to learn their masters’ version of the formalization process capoeira has undergone. This process in the modern capoeira classes is similar to the methodology applied in today’s frevo schools and constitutes one of the core elements of a staged frevo performance. The difference between the styles taught in the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges and the style taught by Nascimento do Passo also illustrates a similar process.

Geared to a specific kind of audience, staged dance performance intends to fulfill certain expectations, usually based on the dancers’ technique and virtuosity. Alexandre Macêdo summarized the difference between Nascimento do Passo’s method and the new method applied at the school [my translation]:

The type of work done by Nascimento do Passo was not intended to be staged. But since I started teaching here [in the school], I began thinking about frevo as not only “street frevo” but as “stage frevo.” For “stage frevo” we need another vocabulary. Even in class, we think a lot more about the body than he did, because I have a degree in physical education. Since I started teaching here, there were certain things missing that I considered important. For example, he had a warm up sequence, but I did not find that enough to prepare the student’s body for the stage. (Interview with Alexandre Macêdo, July 16, 2006)

[O trabalho que Nascimento do Passo fez antes dagente não tinha intenção de palco. Mas desde que eu comecei a ensinar aqui, eu comecei a pensar sobre frevo não como um “frevo de rua,” e no “frevo de palco” a gente precisa outro vocabulário. Até nas aulas a gente pensa muito mais no corpo do que ele fazia, porque eu tenho formação em educação física.

⁵² In her *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995), Browning calls the modern capoeira, *Capoeira Atual*.

⁵³ Mestre Jelon Vieira is the founder of the Capoeira Brazil Foundation and the artistic director of Dance Brazil, a contemporary dance company that has its movement vocabulary inspired in *capoeira* and Afro-Brazilian traditions.

Desde que eu comecei a ensinar aqui, eu sinto falta de algumas coisas que eu considero importante. Por exemplo, ele tinha uma sequência de aquecimento, que eu não achava suficiente pra preparar o corpo do aluno para o palco]

Macêdo's opinion reflects his recognition of the difference between the two methodologies: the former prepared the students to dance frevo in the streets, and the latter prepares the students to dance frevo on stage. However, considering Nascimento do Passo's teaching philosophy, it is important to recognize that he always emphasized a difference between his pedagogical methods, based in his street experience, from the frevo performed and staged for tourists by popular dance companies in hotels, tourist events, and small improvised stages. One of Nascimento do Passo's goals as he spread frevo was to make and maintain this distinction [my translation]:

...the people from the tourist agencies always want to showcase us to the tourists, as if it were Carnival. Outside of Pernambuco, people speak only about our Carnival. They do not talk about the beauty of the dance [frevo]! They do not mention that the dance [frevo] has a method, that frevo is an art form, is energy, that it is something of Pernambuco. They say: go *passista*, jump, jump, jump, jump! They make the conductors, musicians and *passistas* crazy, asking us to pretend that it is Carnival, right there in the port. (Nascimento do Passo cited by Oliveira 1993, cover page)

[...as pessoas das agências de turismo ficam querendo apresentar a gente pros turistas, como se fosse Carnaval. Só falam pro turista, lá fora, do carnaval pernambucano. Eles não falam da beleza da dança [frevo]! Eles não falam que a dança [frevo] tem uma didática, que a dança é uma arte, é energia, é pique, é coisa pernambucana. Não falam disso não. Quando vêm aqui é: Vai, passista, pula, pula, pula, pula! E agonia os maestros, os músicos, agonia os passistas querendo que a gente faça aquela encenação, que finja que é Carnaval, ali no Porto.]

Besides the difference encountered between Nascimento do Passo's method and Macêdo's choreographic approach, several different styles exist in Pernambuco's dance companies. Heliodora mentioned the importance of individual expression and innovation within the tradition as she stated [my translation]:

Each person has a different style, since frevo was never really codified. Nobody ever said that frevo has a certain number of steps, as in other dances like classical ballet. Frevo is

something that is being created every day; every day a new step is created; our students, for example, create new steps every day. (Interview with Bárbara Heliodora July 16, 2006)

[Cada pessoa tem um estilo diferente, já que o frevo não foi realmente codificado. Ninguém nunca disse que frevo tinha uma quantidade “x” de passos como em outras danças como o balé clássico. Frevo é algo que tá sendo criado todo dia, todo dia um passo novo é criado; nossos alunos por exemplo, eles criam passos novos todos os dias.]

According to Heliodora, the new technique emphasizes improvisational skills and the individual expression of frevo dancers. Using terminology common to capoeira, Mago stated, “It’s all about one’s body, some people dance a more traditional frevo, with more swing, more *ginga*, more *malícia*.⁵⁴ But while Heliodora states that, some people think that what the school is doing now is not frevo. Heliodora explained that Nascimento do Passo’s frevo and the new frevo of the school differ in teaching style, and in the preparation of the students’ body prior to dancing frevo [my translation]:

It is the same frevo, but now we are more careful, we do half an hour of stretching before each class, so they do not hurt their joints. Before, there was nothing like this; they started with frevo and danced frevo throughout the class. But frevo is something that requires a lot of work from one’s body; if one does not stretch before class, the knees will be damaged. Don’t you think? (Interview with Bárbara Heliodora, July 16, 2006)

[É o mesmo frevo, mas agora a gente tá, a gente tem meia hora de alongamento antes de cada aula, pra que as articulações não doam. Antes, não tinha nada disso, eles começavam com frevo e dançavam frevo a aula toda. Mas frevo é um negócio que requer muito trabalho do corpo, se a pessoa não alonga antes da aula, o joelho vai ser prejudicado. Você não acha?]

In Nascimento do Passo’s teaching, the first part of the class is used for relaxation and stretching, but his background as a street dancer led him to view frevo steps as ideal for warming up, instead of using specific stretching exercises. However, according to the new director, using only the frevo steps is not enough to prepare the dancers for their performances [my translation]:

“Especially if you intend to perform in dance festivals, you need to be ready to dance ‘the stage

⁵⁴ The Portuguese word *malícia* does not translate to the word “malice,” but refers to the ability to fool — to “psych out” and mentally disarm an opponent, just as slaves fooled their masters. It is an important part of the *capoeira angola*’s philosophy, which teaches the student to be on guard and to be ready for fighting.

frevo,' which requires a lot more work.” (Especialmente se você pretende dançar em festival de dança, tem que estar pronto pra dançar o frevo de palco, que requer muito mais trabalho). Once more, Heliadora was borrowing concepts from the teaching methods of formal dance training present in modern dance.

Since modern dance has established itself as a dance technique, the concern for proper warm up of the dancer's body has been widely spread, especially since most of the modern dancers and choreographers come from classical ballet-structured routines. Professional modern dancers have learned ways to warm up their bodies according to the needs of the stage. The repetition and execution of certain movements — which usually fits much more the demands of the choreographer than the dancers themselves — require the dancers' body to be ready to execute them. Most modern and contemporary teachers and choreographers have developed their own way to warm up the dancers' bodies based on their own teaching approach.

According to Heliadora, the stage frevo that is performed in theatres and dance festivals is geared towards a specific audience at a specific event, whereas the “street frevo” is performed during Carnival by the “povo.”⁵⁵ Therefore a formal warm up would not be necessary. Considering this distinction, Nascimento do Passo's frevo would fall in between these two categories. He has always been a firm believer in the formalization of the style, and thought a warm-up sequence to be necessary for his dancers. However, because of his experience as a street dancer and his lack of knowledge of modern dance, he never believed that a dancer must perform a certain sequence other than frevo steps to be ready to dance frevo. For Nascimento do Passo, frevo itself, when taught through his method, was enough to prepare the dancers to perform.

⁵⁵ The word “povo” is used here to describe the people who are enjoying Carnival, who do not have any dance training, including tourists.

The *capoeirista* Mago mentioned a frevo dancer from Recife, Luciano, who currently works with the nationally known musician/dancer Antônio Nóbrega and performs a type of frevo that reminds him of capoeira. Raising the question of authenticity, Mago described that particular dancer's style as a "more authentic frevo." What is considered an "authentic frevo?" How can "street frevo" be separated from "stage frevo," and based on this division, in which category can Nascimento do Passo's frevo be placed? How has the codification of frevo steps contributed to this distinction?

When the popular artists Nascimento do Passo and Coruja created schools or performed frevo, they became pioneers in the codification of frevo steps and planted the first seeds for the staging of frevo. In addition to their contribution to the formalization of frevo, Nascimento do Passo and Coruja also participated in one of the first attempts to stage popular dance in Pernambuco indirectly — in the *Movimento Armorial* — thereby contributing to the idea of "authentic frevo" which spread throughout the population. Nascimento do Passo and Coruja taught the first steps of frevo to the Balé Popular Recife, the popular dance company which was created as a result of the *Movimento Armorial*, and first staged popular dance in Pernambuco.

Movimento Armorial and Frevo

The *Movimento Armorial* had its first involvement with dance through the creation of the Armorial Balé in 1977. Suassuna asked André Madureira to create a dance group to preserve the popular dance traditions of the Northeast. This group was first named Grupo Circense de Dança Popular and later Balé Popular do Recife (Recife Popular Ballet). According to director Madureira, Suassuna never considered the Balé Popular do Recife genuinely Armorial. However, it is imperative to recognize its contribution to the process of staging popular traditions, including frevo.

To date, the Balé Popular do Recife has cataloged more than 500 dance steps, besides creating new movements, as a way to preserve, spread, and document the northeastern popular dance traditions. The group has its own movement vocabulary and has inspired the founding of other professional dance companies, including the Maracatu Nação Pernambuco, Companhia Trapiá de Dança, Balé Brincantes, Companhia Trajetos, and Companhia de Arte da Cidade Alta de Olinda.

With the help of the dancer Walmir Chagas, who drew pictures and created names for dance steps, Madureira documented the dance steps found in several folk traditions of the Northeast. Among others traditions such as the *bumba-meu-boi*, *maracatu*, *caboclinhos*, *coco*, *xaxado*, and *ciranda*, the frevo was studied and then taught to the first generation of the Balé Popular do Recife. The steps found in these traditions are vast and diverse, and tend to be linked to a specific ethnic group that performs the traditions. As such, the steps have become representative of these ethnic groups. For instance, the steps of *maracatu* strongly represent Afro-Brazilian influence in Pernambuco, whereas the steps of *caboclinhos* represent indigenous heritage.

In the case of the Balé Popular do Recife's research, the dancers found that by mixing two steps of one tradition they could create a third step that they taught to other dancers. The fusion of these steps was innovative and contributed to the unique dance vocabulary found in the performances of the Balé Popular do Recife. Madureira has stated: "This is the reason why if you compare the steps of *bumba-meu-boi*⁵⁶ that the Balé [Balé Popular do Recife] performs today with those of the traditional *bumba-meu-boi*, you will notice a great difference" (Oliveira de 1993, 151) [Essa é a razão pela qual se você comparar os passos *do bumba-meu-boi* que o Balé

⁵⁶ The *bumba-meu-boi* was one of the first Northeastern popular traditions staged by the Balé Popular do Recife.

(Balé Popular do Recife) dança hoje com os passos do *bumba-meu-boi* autêntico você vai notar uma grande diferença.]

This hybridity has always been an important element in frevo, since traditionally frevo tends to combine elements from different ethnic groups. The dancers of the Balé Popular do Recife concluded that frevo was the most all-encompassing of all the dances, not only due to the plasticity of each movement, but because the steps of frevo combined characteristics of other traditions. I would argue that other factors also made frevo the key dance style in the movement vocabulary and in shaping the performances and the physical preparation of the dancers from the Balé Popular do Recife. For instance, the origins of the Balé Popular do Recife as a dance group developed by middle class artists from the urban center of Recife.

At the time of the founding of the dance company, frevo was a familiar style to the dancers, much so than any other popular tradition, sure they were familiar with it from Carnival. They were already “inside” the tradition by the time the company was established. Other popular dances, on the contrary, were located far from their range of experience. In order to learn the steps of the *maracatu*, for example, the dancers had to travel to the outlying areas of Recife, where this tradition was practiced. Their unfamiliarity with the dance vocabulary found in *maracatu*, in contrast to their familiarity with frevo, most likely influenced their decision to use frevo as the core dance style for their training.

The non-religious and non-ethnic association of frevo may also have facilitated that process. There is no affiliation with religious beliefs in the staging of frevo. This also facilitates the understanding and teaching of that tradition. The staging of other traditions are often associated with a religious or ethnic group, often requiring permission on the part of the people

involved to stage them. For example, many choreographers have been criticized for staging the dances associated with the Afro-Brazilian practice of *candomblé*.⁵⁷

Several popular traditions are performed using a combination of dance, music and drama, such as *bumba-meu-boi* and the *cavalo marinho*, therefore requiring knowledge outside of Recife's popular dances. While the Balé Popular also staged these traditions, in this company, dancers were taught through the method of cataloguing steps and exploring the main ideas of these traditions, instead of their individual storylines or dramatic features. The method of cataloguing steps was also based on Nascimento do Passo and Coruja's way of teaching frevo, who named and taught frevo steps and taught them to the Balé Popular do Recife.

However, the frevo staged by the Balé Popular do Recife has characteristics of its own, and according to the director André Madureira, it is adapted from the dance lessons he took with Nascimento do Passo and Coruja. After learning the basic steps, he adapted them to the style he was creating for his company, a style also influenced by combining elements from many other popular traditions. Speaking about the importance of frevo for the Balé Popular do Recife, Madureira states [my translation]:

The vocabulary of frevo, when talking about steps, is the most complete.... So today in frevo we have, not counting new inventions and the variations of the steps, some 90 steps. Actually, frevo has always been the strength of the Balé Popular do Recife. The Balé always tried to develop its technique based on frevo. Also, the rhythm is very catchy, very exciting, for both the dancers and the audience. So, it is clearly a theatrical trick to finish our show with frevo. (Madureira, cited in Oliveira 1993, 151-152)

[O manancial de Frevo em relação a passos, ele é o mais completo... Então hoje, no frevo, a gente tem, fora as recriações e as variações dos passos, a gente tem noventa passos de frevo. Quer dizer, e depois, o frevo sempre foi o forte do Balé. O Balé sempre procurou desenvolver a sua técnica de dança em cima do frevo. E depois o ritmo, ele é muito

⁵⁷ Candomblé is a religious practice that developed specially in Pernambuco and Bahia with West African belief system involving a pantheon of deities (orixás and voduns), mostly associated with nature gods, resembling *Santería* in Cuba.

involvente, muito empolgante, tanto pra quem dança como pra quem assiste. Então já é uma artimanha cênica, terminar o espetáculo com o frevo.]

By acknowledging the strong influence of frevo as a technique in the Balé Popular do Recife and the group's influence on other popular dance companies, it is safe to recognize the enormous influence of frevo on the dance scene of Pernambuco. My research into the state's contemporary dance scene reinforces this influence. Contemporary dance companies feature dancers experienced in the popular dance traditions of Pernambuco, many of them former members of the Balé Popular do Recife. For this reason, these dancers tend to incorporate frevo steps in their movement either consciously or unconsciously. As examples of this transition from the streets to the stage, and the frevo influence on the contemporary dance scene, I examined two dance groups: the Balé Brasília, a dance company best known as the youth ensemble of the Balé Popular do Recife, and the dance company of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges, originally the Escola Municipal de Frevo, founded by Nascimento do Passo.

Balé Brasília: Transforming Popular Dance

Most of the popular dance companies in Pernambuco were founded by former members of the Balé Popular do Recife, and they tend to follow the same pedagogical model established by that company. An offshoot of the Balé Popular do Recife, the Balé Brasília, was founded on September 27, 1991 with the show *O Baile do Menino Deus* (The Baby Jesus Ball). At the time, the group was formed by dancers from 12 to 19 years of age, who aspired to become professional dancers in the Balé Popular do Recife. The group has presented many shows in and out of Pernambuco, including the remake of the Balé Popular do Recife show, *Oh! Linda Olinda* (Oh Beautiful Olinda), in 1992; the show of celebration of 15 years of a Balé Popular do Recife, *O Romance da Nau Catarineta* (The Romance of the Nau Catarineta); and the show *As Presepadas do Dr. Munganga* (The Tricks of Dr. Munganga), which opened in 1993. Originally envisaged as

an amateur group associated with and dependent on the Balé Popular do Recife, in 2002 the Balé Brasília became an independent group and began to be included in the professional dance world.

The group started with the creation of a dance method to teach northeastern popular dance traditions to students aspiring to become professional dancers. This method was first developed by members of the Balé Popular do Recife in their attempt to enact typical folkloric expressions, such as the *reisado*, *caboclinhos*, *frevo*, *maracatu*, *bumba-meu-boi*,⁵⁸ etc, for their movement vocabulary for new shows. The method consists of fusing of all these dances and adapting the steps to fit the demands of the stage. Similar to the Balé Popular do Recife, this group emphasizes frevo as its core dance for the learning of other dance styles. Frevo is present in almost every class of the Balé Brasília, and is often combined with one or two other styles of northeastern popular traditions.

Directed by the dancer Deca Madureira, one of the sons of the Balé Popular do Recife's director, the Balé Brasília differed from the Balé Popular do Recife in its dance philosophy. The Balé Popular do Recife gears its methodology towards staging popular dance traditions for tourist performances by codifying traditional dances. Breaking from that model, the Balé Brasília focuses on interpreting popular dance traditions by mixing them with contemporary dance practices. This is evident from the way dance classes were taught, including the warm up — in which I taught *Pilates*⁵⁹ and contemporary dance techniques, and another dancer, Breno taught yoga. Looking back to those days, I find it ironic that for the dancers, including myself,

⁵⁸ *Reisado*, *caboclinhos* and *maracatu* are Northeastern popular traditions that are linked to religious and identity expressions.

⁵⁹ Pilates is a system of body stretching and strengthening that has been widely used in the dancer's world to prepare dancers for the demands of the stage, prevent injuries and rehabilitating dancers' body.

things “just happened” that way, contemporary ideas were just blended with traditional dance, in a process similar to the way people made frevo steps “just happen” in the streets.

According to Deca, the Balé Brasília needed to be different from the Balé Popular do Recife in order to find its place in the dance scene of Pernambuco. As he informed me [my translation], “People are tired of seeing the same thing over and over” [referring to the shows of the Balé Popular do Recife] (As pessoas estão cansadas de ver as mesmas coisas sempre.) His statement reflected a concern for finding a place in the job market, and his ideology toward innovation was that the Balé Popular do Recife had established itself by codifying the steps of northeastern popular traditions and that the Balé Brasília needed to break away from that model.

Similar to the Balé Popular do Recife, the Balé Brasília had two main target audiences: tourist events, and shows in theatres. However, by 2002, tourist events had diminished due to the country’s precarious economic situation. According to Deca, “Before, the Balé Brasília used to be much more sought after,” (Antigamente o Balé Brasília era muito mais procurado), since theatrical events made efforts to showcase contemporary dance companies that were newly established. The Balé Brasília attempted to mix both worlds of contemporary and popular dance traditions with the intent of increasing its dancers’ marketability.

For as much as the new philosophy helped the group achieve success, the lack of payment by theatre producers often stopped rehearsals. The financial struggle made difficult for the group to establish itself in the dance scene of the state, since most of its members came from poor financial background, and when they were not paid for a show, the next set of rehearsals lost half of the cast, or the show was cancelled outright. Most of the dancers lived far from rehearsal space, which made transportation an issue. These financial issues made it impossible for the dancers to dedicate themselves to the professional demands of the Balé Brasília.

When I visited Recife in 2006, Deca had moved to São Paulo, following his brother Ângelo Madureira, who, along with his partner, Ana Catarina Vieira, had founded the Escola Brasileira de São Paulo.⁶⁰ In Recife, the Balé Brasileira is still active, but under different direction and a different approach. However, the pioneering nature of this group should be recognized. The Balé Brasileira made one of the first attempts to blend popular and contemporary dance to create a new teaching method and movement aesthetic. This new method influenced the dance scene of Pernambuco, transforming the philosophy of many other dance schools, companies, and choreographers, seen clearly in the approach taken by the directors of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges.

The Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges Today

It is impossible to ignore the political dimensions of theatre and dance. As frevo is being staged and consolidated as a method, the support (or lack of support in most cases), of governmental authorities determine the path followed by artists. In the specific case of today's frevo, the constant struggle for financial support has shaped the way frevo has developed. As Oliveira has stated in her analysis of the transformation of the popular dance styles to stage shows in Pernambuco, it is important to consider that [my translation]:

The theatrical approach of dance has at least two dimensions: one is aesthetic and the other is political, and they are closely connected. The political dimension of dance spectacles is clearly revealed by the strength and conviction of the dancers who want to be professional, and are able to overcome all obstacles to realize their goal. (Oliveira 1993, 190)

[As realizações cênicas de dança têm pelo menos duas dimensões: uma estética e outra política, que existem intimamente relacionadas. A dimensão política dos espetáculos de dança também se revela do ímpeto e da garra dos dançarinos que querem e conseguem superar tantos obstáculos para a plena realização dos mesmos.]

⁶⁰ The Escola Brasileira de São Paulo has taken as its source of inspiration the method Brasileira of the Balé Brasileira do Recife.

The Escola Municipal de Frevo was founded on March 6, 1996 by Nascimento do Passo, but by 1999 the school had its name changed by the government to Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges. Since the date of its foundation, the school has contributed to social inclusion of the underprivileged through dance by training hundreds of frevo dancers each year. Today, the school holds free frevo classes for more than 300 students a year, and sponsors a dance company formed by its 30 best students between the ages of 13 and 25. When Nascimento do Passo stopped teaching in 2003, the school has since been run by the municipal government; its employee Bárbara Heliadora directs the school, and choreographer Alexandre Macêdo, also employed by the municipal government, is responsible for the frevo classes and the dance company choreography.

When I visited the school, the informal interviews and my participation in frevo classes contributed to my understanding of the philosophical ideals held by the school director and choreographer. They were following rules imposed by the city government, which justified the new methodology applied as part of their administration. At the same time, Nascimento do Passo's teaching techniques continue to influence the students and the way they think about frevo. Despite his influence on dancers' technique, the school methodology is now more geared toward contemporary ideas, which added another element for my investigation.

As seen on stages and in other formal dance settings in Pernambuco — this frevo school has been transformed into a common ground for research to trace the development of frevo. Yet, there is a tension between frevo teachers and choreographers, since formalization pulls frevo in one direction, toward European training and aesthetics, and its historical roots pull it to another, to its Afro-Brazilian heritage.

During my second visit, I filmed and interviewed several students in a class in which I participated. During class, about 11 dancers between six and eighteen years of age performed frevo steps. They had no hesitation in showing their expertise, even in front of the camera. The dancers' joy was contagious, and their spontaneity became an inspiration to my work.

After class was over, they questioned why I was there and why I wanted to videotape them. When I explained the reasons for my visit, they spontaneously volunteered to speak, which made the interview process much easier than I had anticipated. I had purposely not formulated any specific questions that day. I wanted to hear what they had to say about frevo; I wanted their spontaneity to lead our discussion in a manner similar to the way frevo performances unfold. While they showed a great deal of pride in their knowledge, they respected me as their teacher, which reminded me of Nascimento do Passo's philosophy, since I am older than they are, and Nascimento do Passo always stressed the hierarchy of age in the dance world.

I was acutely aware of the precarious financial condition in which they lived, since I knew that the school was funded by the city government and most of these young dancers were living in the slums surrounding it. During the interviews I asked about their future, questioning their thoughts and desire about becoming professional dancers. They soon corrected me saying, "Dancers no, *passistas*," as they emphasized the difference the title made in their lives. As Nascimento do Passo always insisted they attended frevo classes to become *passistas*,⁶¹ not to become any other kind of professional dancer. They also demonstrated their eagerness to teach and spread frevo (Figure 4-1).

However, due to Pernambuco's socio-economic reality, the difficulty of surviving as a popular dancer is only equal to the difficulty of surviving as a frevo dancer, especially

⁶¹ In this case, the word *passista* is referring to someone who is highly trained in the frevo technique, someone who masters all frevo steps, as the word *capoeirista* defines the capoeira player.

considering that the audiences for frevo performances tend to be limited to Carnival or the seasonal tourist industry. Their passion led them to specialize in frevo, but encouraged by teachers, choreographers, and the mentality present in the dance scene of today, they believed that mastering a diversity of styles could help their dance technique, improve their frevo performance and their job prospects. Thus, while they saw themselves mainly as *passistas*, they were pragmatic about their need for mastering diverse styles (Figure 4-2).

Their statements reflected the new philosophy that has emerged since Nascimento do Passo left the school. The idea of constructing this new technique for stage performances, plus increased exposure to dance festivals has motivated students to seek out different dance styles. As Bruno Henrique stated [my translation], “As dancers we should learn not only frevo but other dance styles of our culture such as *maracatu*, *coco*, *caboclinhos*, as well as jazz, ballet, and contemporary dance.” [Como dançarinos nós temos que aprender não só o frevo mas outras danças da nossa cultura como *maracatu*, *coco*, *caboclinhos*, como também jazz, ballet e dança contemporânea]. In addition to the demands of entering the job market, the cultural diversity characteristic of Pernambuco seemed to raise dancers’ interest in increasing their dance vocabulary. Another dancer, Werison Fidelis stated [my translation]:

In particular, I love classical ballet and contemporary dance, and it is hard to say which one I like best. When somebody asks which style I like the most, I prefer to say that I have lots of sons and daughters, and as a father I can not say which one I like best.

[Particularmente, eu amo ballet clássico, contemporâneo, e é difícil dizer qual o que eu gosto mais. Quando alguém pergunta, de que estilo eu gosto mais, eu prefiro dizer que eu tenho um monte de filhos e filhas, e como pai eu não posso dizer de qual eu gosto mais.]

The perspectives of these young *passistas*, Bruno Henrique and Werison Fidelis, guided my investigation into the elements that constitute stage frevo. While assessing how much other styles have affected or changed frevo, Bruno Henrique also stated [my translation]:

It is not a question of change; they [the other styles of dancing] help. Because during the time of Nascimento do Passo, the frevo he taught was purely improvised. But since today we are members of the school's dance company, we dance in theatres, not only in the streets.... Because people think that frevo is something danced in a crowd, but that is not entirely right, frevo can be choreographed. And since we dance on stage, we need the posture that only ballet and jazz can give us, especially since we are all so loose (as he drops his shoulders down).

[Não é uma questão de mudar, eles [os outros estilos de dança] ajudam. Porque no tempo de Nascimento do Passo, o frevo que ele ensinava era muito solto. Mas já que hoje nós somos membros da companhia de dança da escola, a gente dança em teatros, não nas ruas... porque as pessoas pensam que frevo é só aquela multidão, mas não, frevo pode ser coreografado. E já que a gente dança no palco, a gente precisa da postura que só o ballet clássico e o jazz pode dar pra a gente, especialmente já que a gente é assim tão solto (ao mexer com os ombros).]

Bruno Henrique's understanding was contrary to the freedom emphasized by Nascimento do Passo's methodology. For this young dancer, performing with a more upright trained posture was a pre-requisite for the stage (Figure 4-3). In his comments, he favored European ballet aesthetics over local tradition, which is based more on Afro-Brazilian aesthetics. Frevo is being shaped by the concepts of beauty and aesthetic structures emphasized in the ballet world. The African origins and influence on the style are subtly being denied even by the frevo dancers of Pernambuco.

The constant influence of other dance styles may have contributed to the development of these dancers' technique towards a contemporary direction. The performance of Werison Fidelis's piece in the IV Mostra de Dança do Recife, and his acquaintance with contemporary dance concepts illustrate this development. In the festival, Werison performed with a chair as a prop. His piece may have suffered for lack of originality, had Werison Fidelis not surprised the audience with the virtuosity of his performance. When asked about his acquaintance with the contemporary dance world, Werison proudly told me [my translation]:

I started as a *passista*, but the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges opened my eyes, showed me that there are many ways to go, such as classical ballet, contemporary dance, jazz, etc... That is when I decided to go to the Balé Bolshoi. They asked me for a

video of a dance piece. It could have been something I had performed before, but I decided to create something new, and that was when I created the “chair dance.” I sent it [the video of the piece] there [to the dance festival], they selected me, and that was it.

[Eu comecei como passista, mas a Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges abriu meus olhos, me mostrou que tem muitos caminhos pra ir, como ballet clássico, contemporâneo, jazz, etc... Foi quando eu decidi ir pro Ballet Bolshoi. Eles me pediram um vídeo de uma coreografia. Podia ter sido qualquer coisa que eu já tivesse dançado antes, mas eu decidi criar uma coisa nova, foi quando eu criei a “dança da cadeira”. Eu mandei pra lá (IV Mostra de Dança do Recife), eles me selecionaram, e foi isso.]

Werison explained that his intention in that piece was to show the audience that a dancer is not limited to the stage [my translation]: “Sometimes people think that dancing in the theatre really means just dancing in the theatre, on that dance floor. I wanted to show that it can be different, that the stage is only an extension of the creativity of each dancer, each choreographer.” (Às vezes as pessoas pensam que dançar no teatro realmente significa dançar no teatro, no linóleo. Eu queria mostrar que é diferente, que o palco é só uma extensão da criatividade do bailarino, do coreógrafo.) Werison Fidelis’s piece exemplifies a contemporary way of working with props. The use he makes of the chair and the technical strength he shows in his dancing adds another face to the contemporary dance scene.

However, I believe his ability could have resulted from his training as a frevo dancer and his practice using the frevo umbrella. After watching the performance and interviewing Werison, I concluded that his piece is an example of the constant exchange of dance styles present in Pernambuco’s current dance scene. On the one hand, dancers are being trained and influenced by the popular traditions of the state, and end up joining the contemporary dance scene (as in the case of Werison); on the other, popular dance traditions are being influenced by contemporary ideas (as in the staging of frevo and the different performances of dancers trained in contemporary technique).

Hundreds of dancers circulate from the popular to the formal and to contemporary dance training on a daily basis in Pernambuco as Werison Fidelis does. The *passistas* of the past are now the contemporary dancers of the present. Their dance training, comprising the conscious or unconscious blending of frevo with other dance techniques, serves as the foundation for a hybrid style of dance technique that Pernambuco is exporting to the world, allowing frevo to cross boundaries and to go beyond its local folkloric roots and regional expression.

The Contemporary Dance Scene: Frevo Beyond its Folkloric Expression

The insistence by “traditionalist” dancers and choreographers on separating the popular and contemporary dance of frevo does not stop the theatres and streets of Pernambuco from functioning as melting pots for these dance styles. The celebration of 100 years of frevo also symbolizes the establishment of a new mentality toward dance in Pernambuco. While schools, popular dance companies, the media, and official institutions celebrate the frevo centennial based on the idea of an “authentic frevo,” the contemporary dance scene approaches the celebration differently. It breaks away from the clichés that have surrounded the subject and explores new forms of staging the tradition.

Since I started to write this work in February 2007, the month and year of the official anniversary of frevo, numerous dance shows have been breaking away from the “authentic” frevo. Throughout the state, several issues are relevant to the analysis of frevo as a dance style. It would be impossible to investigate all of Pernambuco’s dance companies and choreographers who have created works based on the renewed interest in frevo. For the purpose of this study, the electronic material available guided my investigation. The article “Uma Investigação Sobre o Frevo,” by Recife-based dancer and journalist Valéria Vicente caught my attention, providing the focus of my investigation. Vicente has stated [my translation]:

The issued surrounding the use of popular dance or social dance in the contemporary dance scene is one of the subjects that has been haunting me. Maybe because in Recife, where I was raised, a great variety of these dances are performed all year long in the everyday course of public events; or perhaps because I have been noticing that the information provided by these dances constitutes part of my own body language such that ignoring them will not allow them to go away.... (Vicente 2006)

[A questão do uso das danças populares ou danças sociais na cena de dança contemporânea é um desses assuntos que me perseguem. Talvez porque no Recife, onde me criei, uma grande variedade dessas danças se reveza durante o ano no cotidiano dos eventos públicos; talvez porque venho percebendo que as informações dessas danças compõem minha corporalidade de tal forma que ignorá-las não as retira da cena...]

Like many dancers from Pernambuco, Valéria Vicente first trained in popular dances and then, by being exposed to contemporary dance, finds herself reflecting on the influence of popular dance in her dance vocabulary. Along with other five dancers — Leda Santos, Calixto Neto, Marcelo Sena, Iane Costa, and Jaflis Nascimento (Nascimento do Passo's son) — Vicente researched frevo and concluded that it has a specific body language that profoundly contributes to the creation of movements in contemporary dance pieces. These dancers have observed that the process of staging frevo in Recife has been characterized by synchronizing movements and the use of traditional stage settings (dancers positioned toward the audience and rarely demonstrating movement innovations).

These formally trained dancers view frevo and its large repertoire of steps, body dynamics and individual creation, as sources of inspiration. And through their choreography, they have created different movements in which they shift their body weight by moving naturally and allowing the steps to happen as a consequence of natural movement. This research in the mechanics of body movement is intended to show that frevo and its body language constitutes a unique dance style, since it combines several techniques, thereby creating cultural and social legacy. As Jaflis Nascimento says in the same article, “Frevo is the plasticity of Pernambuco,” referring to the way the dance became a cultural symbol for the state and defines its people.

This new generation of dancers (many of them former frevo dancers) view frevo as something that goes beyond its folkloric expression, representative of an artistic legacy, and technique in constant development. When speaking about the pedagogy surrounding the frevo dance style, Vicente stated [my translation]:

The pedagogical organization of the teaching of frevo was structured through cataloguing steps, baptizing and defining their form. Therefore, frevo is learned through its basic steps: *ponta-de-pé-calcanhar*, *tesoura*, *saci-pererê*, *trocadilho*... Considering that teaching method influences the perception of the dance, and its forms of scenic approach, it is of interest to note that the division of frevo into steps was a specific choice, and although anchored in many social aspects, as seen in the facts of its context of the origin and development — this approach should not be the only one to determine it. Dividing frevo into steps is just one way of comprehending it, but we cannot avoid noticing that this way of approaching the tradition is linked to a specific socio-political view of frevo. (Vicente 2006)

[Também a organização pedagógica do ensino do Frevo foi estruturada através da catalogação de passos, batizados e definidos em sua forma. Assim, aprende-se Frevo através de seus passos básicos: *ponta-de-pé-calcanhar*, *tesoura*, *saci-pererê*, *trocadilho*... Pensando que a forma de transmissão indica percepções sobre a dança e formas de abordagens cênicas, talvez seja interessante notar que a divisão do Frevo em passos foi uma opção e, apesar de ancorada em vários aspectos, fatos e situações do surgimento e desenvolvimento do Frevo, essa abordagem não precisa ser vista como a única ou a que define melhor o que ele é. A divisão do frevo em passos é apenas uma das formas de compreendê-lo; e não podemos deixar de notar que a forma de abordar o movimento está ligada a pensamentos norteadores.]

Another part of this research focuses on the relationship between frevo and violence. How are we to understand the origin of frevo, knowing that its elements, once characterized by violence and social struggle, have now become symbols of joy and virtuosity? Vicente argues that one possible approach to the subject is to return to the past and recognize the Afro-Brazilian influence in the body movement of the frevo dancer. The article suggests that [my translation], “One way of finding the real origin of frevo was to ‘desembranquecê-lo,’ [to exclude its white elements], in order to temporarily escape from the transformations caused by its stylization for the stage or from the attempts to make it beautiful according to European aesthetics.” Vicente and this group of dancers believed that when frevo was staged [my translation]:

...it became easier to perform, and as we see ourselves dancing we realize that it was the 'white Iberian' eye, with its traditional perception of beauty, that made frevo danced in a more upright position, with closed legs, with less 'ginga' and less 'malícia,' and, when performed on stage, to be more synchronized. (Vicente, 2006)

[...ficou mais fácil dançá-lo. E ao nos vermos dançar, pudemos ver que foi o olhar branco-ibérico e uma percepção clássica do belo, que deixou o frevo mais ereto, com pernas fechadas, com menos ginga e malícia, padronizado, e em sua execução no palco, sincronizado.]

This ideology of authenticity linked to racial identity recognizes two different types of frevo, one frevo linked to the Afro-Brazilian heritage, performed more spontaneously, with less rigid movements, and another performed more upright, in a more synchronized way, following stage structures that would fit European concepts of beauty. However, by returning to the roots of frevo, we have a different interpretation of the process of formalization which took place whenever frevo was staged or taught in schools as a formal dance technique. This historical perception recognizes the presence of the Afro-Brazilian heritage in the origin of the style, since it brings a different understanding of the process of formalization. Instead of preserving frevo, the staging process can be considered a negation of its roots, because it imposes European ideas of formalization.

Here the dancers/choreographers justify ideas about authenticity in the investigation of the historical roots of frevo movements, which they envision as related to social struggle, not only to the African-based aesthetic. Considering that frevo as a folkloric expression is a constant in Pernambuco up to today, and that it has a considerable influence on the dance scene, how can we reconcile its African origins with its place in "modern" dance?

The research above mentioned resulted in the stage production *Fervo* in September 2006 in Recife. In *Fervo*, the history of frevo is told in several pieces, from a contemporary perspective. Assuming that frevo started in a context of social tension, the show returns to the past to explain the present of the tradition. This is a very innovative approach and contrasts with

the traditional way the anniversary of 100 years of frevo has been celebrated. In this show, frevo has encounters with rock, hip-hop, *roda de pogo*,⁶² and even the waltz, tracing its social history and breaking away from the traditional institutional folkloric celebration of the style (Figure 4-4). The choreography is not based exclusively in the movements originating from frevo, but in the social context in which frevo started — the post-slavery abolition period, and the subsequent repression of Afro-Brazilian culture. Following the whitening ideas prevalent in the nineteenth century, and later in frevo's history, the expression of joy symbolically overcomes suffering, and pain is transformed into pleasure. The codification of the steps fits the ideals of whitening characteristic in the evolution of the style. According to Vicente [my translation]:

The questions that cause us fear are historically constructed. The legacy of slavery is not only part of the slaves who were beaten, but are also part of the master who beat them. The way the city of Recife deals with this today is the same as it was 100 years ago. The violence of today's social problems, exist in people's bodies, but this is not recognized. (Vicente, 2006)

[As questões que nos afligem são historicamente construídas. A herança da escravidão não está somente no escravo que apanhava, mas também no senhor que batia. A forma como o Recife lida com isso nas relações sociais parece ser a mesma de 100 anos atrás. Existe, nos problemas sociais de hoje, uma violência no corpo das pessoas, mas que não está assumida.]

In *Fervo*, newspapers are thrown on the stage floor to symbolize the information the group researched in the public archives of Recife. The newspapers are part of the stage scenery to

⁶² *Pogo* dance is one of the most important elements of a punk show in Brazil. The dance consists of the moments of joy and energy, when punks and the surfers hug each other. The verb “Pogar” translates to the verb “to dance” in a punk context: to dance to a hard sound, full of energy. The entire body vibrates and the dancer tends to jump, to run, “kicking the world.” The *roda de pogo* is a natural evolution of the *pogo*, with the participants intuitively dancing towards the same direction, but only in circles. It seems to be natural to move counterclockwise. It is also common to find the participants smiling, symbolizing the freedom of a punk party.

reveal that the printed material about violence in turn-of-the-century Recife is similar to that of today, when Recife was beset with numerous social conflicts, filling up the pages of the newspapers with stories of deaths, torture and the search for “criminals” by the police, which recalls the shocking media coverage of today.

As the show begins, dancers yell out the events printed in the newspaper to show that an overdose of news can also be violent. According to Vicente, “The press is part of the society. As in any artistic expression, it is a very interesting place to find and comprehend the social structure. In *Fervo* we show this role as played by the press.” As she explains the creation process of the show she points out the importance of the artists’ collaboration and individual expression [my translation]:

Today, this is the only way I see for the show not to fall into preconceived notions. It is true that we are able to leave the “comfort zone,” for being more familiar to us. But as soon as the cast members take on their creative roles, the movements are ‘defended’ with more authority and the audience can clearly see the process suffered by the living body, and not just one sculpted by technique. (Vicente, 2006)

[Atualmente esta é a única opção que eu enxergo para que o espetáculo não seja uma imagem pré-criada. É verdade que saímos de um lugar mais seguro, por ser mais conhecido. Mas assim que o elenco assume seu papel criador, as movimentações são ‘defendidas’ com mais propriedade e, principalmente, o público pode ver o processo do corpo vivo, e não apenas esculpido por uma técnica.]

Vicente used the individual expression of the cast to its full potential. She highlights the interpretive skills of dancer Leda Santos, the versatility and improvisational qualities of Jaflis Nascimento, the spontaneity of Iane Costa, and the delicacy and precision of Calixto Neto, as essential elements in choreographic process. She states that as the “boiling sensation” characteristic of frevo cannot happen in the streets without the participation of the crowd, this piece could never have happened without the contribution of the dancers (Figure 4-5).

The Deconstruction of Frevo

Part of the strength of the show, similar to a frevo performance, comes from its music, an original soundtrack composed by Silvério Pessoa, Yuri Queiroga and the band Coletivo DerrubaJazz. The soundtrack, like the show itself, is a non-linear trip through frevo, composed by samples, electronic effects, noises, voices, the tambourine, trumpet and trombone. According to Silvério Pessoa⁶³ [my translation]:

We tried to retain the themes, aiming to make the audience feel a specific way, either through the tension, emotion, or through the steps of the dancers. I was particularly motivated by the gestures, the language of their [the dancers] eyes and of their hands in perfect counterpoint with the soundtrack. I would call the track a “deconstruction” of the traditional concept of frevo — as is the choreography. (Pessoa, in Vicente 2006, “Do Frevo ao Fervo”)

[Procuramos deixar os temas objetivando emocionar, seja na tensão, seja na emoção, ou nos passos dos dançarinos. Algo que particularmente me estimulou bastante foram os gestos, a linguagem dos olhos e das mãos em perfeito contraponto rítmico com a trilha. Eu chamaria a trilha uma "desconstrução" do conceito tradicional de frevo — assim como é a coreografia.]

A “deconstruction of the traditional concept of frevo” is the expression used by Pessoa to describe the show *Fervo*. As Pessoa refers to the “traditional concept of frevo,” he addresses the way the audience is used to watching frevo being performed, either in theatrical settings, as a formalized tradition, or in the streets of Carnival as a folkloric expression, following an agreed upon notion of authenticity, not its actual origin.

Even in conceptualizing the tradition according to contemporary standards, it is important to recognize the popular artists like Nascimento do Passo and Coruja, who worked toward the codification of frevo steps and the staging of the tradition. Although these popular artists were

⁶³ In the 1990s, the musician and composer Silvério Pessoa became known as the lead singer of the band Cascabulho, since then, he is been known for mixing the sound of traditional music, such as the ones by popular artists Jackson do Pandeiro (*coco*), with urban sounds such as Hip Hop and electronic music. Originally from the Zona da Mata, he is also known for bringing the sounds of popular music traditions such as *cavalo-marinho*, *bumba-meu-boi*, etc, to the urban center of Recife.

unconsciously influenced by European aesthetics and the concept of beauty as they passed on the tradition and in the construction of the “authentic frevo,” it is important to understand that no dance style can be deconstructed without having been previously formalized or codified. For instance, modern dance originated from classical ballet, a technique that had been constructed for years, and later transformed according to the dancers’ needs for self-expression. When we consider this deconstruction process in relation to more than just the technical dance aspects of frevo, we can conclude that staging process of frevo – with its focus on individual expression and spontaneous creation – is a reflection of fundamental changes in Pernambuco’s society at large motivated by the actions of popular artists.



Figure 4-1 Female and male passista. Photo courtesy of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges



Figure 4-2 Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges Dance Company. Photo courtesy of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges



Figure 4-3 Passista Bruno Henrique performing one of the frevo steps, the Carpado. Photo courtesy of the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges



Figure 4-4 Fervo in “Do Frevo ao Fervo” Photo by Andre Dib. Source: http://www.overmundo.com.br/imprime_overblog/do-frevo-ao-fervo-1



Figure 4-5 Frevo in “Do Frevo ao Frevo.” Photo by Andre Dib Source
http://www.overmundo.com.br/imprime_overblog/do-frevo-ao-frevo-1



Figure 4-6 Teatro Santa Isabel in Recife, one of the main sites for staging frevo. Photo by
 Jamildo Melo. Source:
<http://jc.uol.com.br/blogs/blogdejamildo/2007/04/07/index.php>

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

In a broader sense, this work has sought to demonstrate that while the participation of popular dancers, such as Nascimento do Passo and Coruja, contributed to the emphasis on individual expression and to the formalization of the steps that influenced the popular and contemporary dance companies of Pernambuco, they began the process of staging frevo. In previous works, the origin of frevo was attributed only to the movements of the *capoeiras* in front of the marching bands in the Carnival of Pernambuco in the early twentieth century, but when I compared this information to my own experience as a frevo dancer, and the opinions of people interviewed in this work, the development of frevo steps was still controversial.

I found that oral tradition and the assumptions of scholars that the *capoeiras*' weapons and defense movements were replaced by the use of umbrellas ⁶⁴ and by the intricacy of frevo steps were insufficient explanations for the development of frevo. When investigating the “authentic” frevo staged today in Pernambuco by popular dance companies, and the frevo pieces created by contemporary choreographers, I found that, the historical roots of the tradition were not simply connected to the practice of capoeira, but were also influenced by the ideology of the dominant class in Pernambuco, mostly composed of people of white or European descent. This fact explained the differences between the frevo steps of today and the movements of capoeira, as well as the different paths frevo and capoeira have followed.

Capoeira has gone from being repressed by the authorities to achieving high social status and prestige. The practice of capoeira today is widespread among middle-class young people who attend capoeira classes for physical fitness in different parts of Brazil and all over the world. Frevo has achieved the status of being a symbol of identity for Pernambuco, as the main dance

⁶⁴ Frevo umbrellas are considered, to this day, one of the main symbols of the tradition.

tradition in Recife's Carnival, but has remained largely a regional symbol. Through the process of formalization, the creation of the schools of capoeira angola and regional, capoeira has carved out a place for itself in gyms inside Brazil and around the world. This has promoted the acceptance of the style by people other than Afro-Brazilians. The importance of that process is the affirmation of Afro-Brazilian identity within Brazilian culture. Although, modified and adapted to the standards of the dominant class, capoeira remained representative of Afro-Brazilian culture within Brazil, and mostly retains Afro-Brazilian aesthetics.

Frevo, on the contrary, has been considered "more inclusive," a tradition that represents a "mix of races." But in reality, this concept is used to reinforce the ideology that denies the strong African influence in Pernambuco. Today, the dancing of frevo and the practice of capoeira constitute two different worlds, the former symbolizing the mixed population of Recife's urban center, with the latter representing a national Afro-Brazilian culture. The two traditions have developed independently in Pernambuco, reinforcing the tendency of the society of Pernambuco to separate cultural traditions linked to African heritage. In Pernambuco, Afro-Brazilian traditions have been looked down upon, as in the example of the *maracatu*,⁶⁵ which was never considered an appropriate symbol of collective state identity, since its musical aesthetics and symbols are more strictly tied to African heritage.

The presence of leaders of the regionalist movements in the organization of frevo contests serves to locate the process of formalization of frevo within a broader ideology that was being led by the government during the 1950s. The regionalist ideas of the time perpetuated through

⁶⁵ *Maracatus* are Recife's Carnival groups that have their roots on the colonial institution of the "king of the Congo," in which blacks were allowed to crown symbolic kings and queens of their African "nations" and organize processions with African-style music and dance.

frevo contests were developed by the same people, who were their organizers and judges, and who later planted the seeds for the *Movimento Armorial* during the 1970s.

The participation of popular artists in these contests was crucial to the institutionalization of frevo as a popular tradition, representing a way to bring frevo from the streets to the stages. Shaped by the ideology of the time, these contests served to showcase the dancers' talent and allowed popular dancers such as Nascimento do Passo and Coruja to affirm the importance of frevo. In these contests, they established their own style of dancing frevo, a style that they later taught to professional dancers, and which is now used as inspiration for the new contemporary creations. Today, their lifetime dedication to frevo, marked by their struggles and achievements as frevo dancers, symbolize the attempt of the people to preserve their tradition.

Along with the inspiration of popular artists in preserving frevo, the variety of popular dance traditions present in Pernambuco (*frevo, maracatu, coco, ciranda, caboclinhos, xaxado*, among others affected by regionalist movements) led me to investigate the influence of these popular dance traditions on the development of today's frevo. Only a very small portion of the population in Pernambuco gave value to popular traditions until the *Movimento Armorial* in the 1970s. When the writer Ariano Suassuna attempted to mix elements of popular and erudite culture in the *Movimento Armorial*, he tried to revitalize the traditions of Pernambuco, striking up a sense of state pride. In the dance scene, these ideas motivated the formalization of popular dance traditions as stage forms, the founding of dance companies, and the creation of teaching methods.

As I analyzed the contemporary dance scene of Pernambuco, I noticed that the impact of frevo was stronger than that of other popular dance traditions. Although the frevo steps of today have been influenced by other popular dance traditions, no other tradition had as much of an

impact on the contemporary dance scene in Pernambuco as frevo. This fact links the process of formalization to frevo which, in turn, proves the important contribution of frevo contests and popular artists in this process.

During frevo contests, popular dancers were judged by the state's elite — the same elite that followed the dictates of European culture, emphasizing the *frevo de bloco*,⁶⁶ while overlooking popular Afro-Brazilian elements present in the *frevo de rua* (street frevo). Through time, this difference became more marked, and frevo steps, which originated in street frevo, have been “cleaned up” to fit the standards of the European aesthetics. Popular dancers such as Nascimento do Passo and Coruja unconsciously served to intermediate this process. As they started teaching frevo in public schools, performed for the state media, and taught dancers of the Balé Popular do Recife, they contributed to a process of formalization that has paved the way of frevo from the street to the contemporary dance scene.

At the same time, they contributed to the construction of the idea of “authentic frevo,” paving the way for frevo steps into theatre and dance companies of the state and beyond. As they codified frevo steps, teaching hundreds of dancers the steps of their individual styles, they consolidated the material that is now being researched by contemporary dancers and choreographers. While the participation of popular artists in frevo contests contributed to the formalization of the tradition and motivated the unique style found in Pernambuco's contemporary dance scene, their improvisation and innovation have been at the core of inspiration since frevo's beginning.

This process exemplifies how the concept of authenticity is embedded in the culture of Pernambuco. As illustrated by the interviews in this work, “the authentic frevo” has always been

⁶⁶ *Frevo de bloco* is a type of singing frevo influenced by European culture

an important topic of discourse. Frevo's music and dance style were established by its unique characteristics. People in Pernambuco today have a sense of ownership of what is considered to be the "authentic frevo." What few of them are able to recognize is how this idea of "authenticity" has been shaped by the dominant ideology. The historical and socio-economic realities of the contemporary dance scene of this northeastern state and its influence inside and outside Brazil, thus presented a unique opportunity to link past and present, and to analyze the impact of frevo. The understanding of historically constructed concepts furthers the analyses of the development of frevo as a dance tradition and explains its transformation through time.

After the development of nationalist and regionalist movements, the creation of samba was addressed to the Afro-Brazilian community, and the creation of frevo to the mixed population of the urban center of Recife. Today, frevo represents to the state of Pernambuco what samba represents to Brazil: a symbol of collective cultural identity. Distinct from the formation of samba schools, which remained largely linked to black origins, frevo gradually adhered to the "whitening" concepts strongly embedded in the society of Pernambuco, disguised by the symbolic representation of Recife's "mixed" population. Although today frevo is praised as a symbol of identity for Pernambuco, the elite adapted frevo to their Eurocentric perspective, not because it was symbolic of regionalist "mestiçagem," but as something exciting, culturally marginal and hard to ignore.

The celebration of the "centennial of frevo," is a particularly appropriate moment for the investigation of historically constructed concepts embedded in the contemporary dance scene. While staging other popular dance styles, dance companies have lost the enacting of popular traditions, and staging frevo, I argue, has led them to a return to their historical roots. This process happens because when contemporary dancers research frevo, they value its core element:

individual expression. Frevo, the dance which developed from the spontaneous movements of the common people and *capoeiras* in the nineteenth century is present in the spontaneous creations of the contemporary dancer of today's Pernambuco. Contemporary dance pieces accentuate a shift in the interpretations of this dance tradition, and in the understanding of its roots by dancers, choreographers and members of the society.

Frevo is not viewed only as a symbol of cultural identity of Pernambuco. With the new creations, contemporary choreographers separate frevo from the elements that constitute the “authenticity” of the tradition, always emphasized by the popular dance companies, and explore historical aspects of the tradition on stage. The movements that were once formalized for preservation of the dance are now reinterpreted to explain the connection between frevo and the society. The colors of Carnival, represented in the frevo costumes and once symbolic of the “authentic frevo,” are replaced largely by the individual expression of the dancers.

Through contemporary ideas, the stages of Pernambuco become the scenario for the return of frevo to its original roots: one of individual expression and resistance. The tension between contemporary choreographers and popular artists regarding how to preserve the tradition, as the one I encountered in the Escola Municipal de Frevo Maestro Fernando Borges, for instance, favors new choreographic creations therefore contributing to the inclusion of more dancers in the job market. I view formalization as one of the tools for the development of the tradition.

The same reasons that made frevo the key dance in establishing the movement vocabulary of the Balé Popular do Recife during the 1970s has transformed frevo into the core element for contemporary dance in Pernambuco. When contemporary dance choreographers choose frevo as a source of inspiration for their creations, they are exploring a style that is hybrid in its nature, for combining characteristics of other dance traditions, and a style that has been embedded in the

body of their dancers. The previous contact of the dancers with the style either through participation in Carnival or in popular dance companies, creates a degree of familiarity that facilitates a more intuitive process of interpretation.

The non-religious aspects of frevo also facilitates the finding of a common style of movement among dancers, although, I argue that the close association of the style with the Afro-Brazilian heritage motivates a link between frevo dancers and the religiosity present in the Afro-Brazilian tradition. If the secret for preservation of Afro-Brazilian religion in Brazil is syncretism, its ability to absorb Catholic or other religions, rather than being displaced by other forms, the absorption of other dance styles in frevo can be seen as a key survival strategy for the preservation of the tradition. The dynamic movements of frevo are representative of its environment and have been shaped according to concepts embedded in the society of Pernambuco, but the pedagogy created by popular artists such as Nascimento do Passo and Coruja demonstrate their agency in response to the dominant ideology.

In 2007, as the frevo vocabulary is found embodied in the dancers in Pernambuco and the concept of “authenticity” is investigated and replaced by questions related to the historical roots of the tradition. More “ginga” and “malícia” take the steps of frevo from the streets to the theaters of Pernambuco. As they are exposed to the new interpretations of the dance style, the audience in Pernambuco encounters a new frevo. Shows like “Fervo,” which emphasize the repressed issues of class and race embedded in this dynamic yet traditional dance style shows this new frevo, one less disguised by the “whitening” ideology of the dominant class and validated by the influence of popular artists, who have dedicated their lives to preserve the tradition.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Juliana Amelia Paes Azoubel was born in 1976 and grew up between the cities of Recife and Olinda, in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil. She attended the Academia Santa Gertrudes, the Contato High School and the Law School at the Universidade Católica de Pernambuco. Dancing since childhood in Brazil, she has performed with several Brazilian Dance companies, and is the founder and director of the Companhia Olindança.

Since 1996, she has been the main dancer and teacher for the University of Florida World Music Ensemble Jacaré Brazil. While in Gainesville, she has performed with the UF Diversity Artist Project (Urban Bush Women), the UF Agbedidi African Ensemble, Dance Alive! Dance Brazil, and has taught at the Santa Fé Community Education Project, the Unified Training Center and the UF Leisure Courses. She has also taught and performed in American College Dance Festivals, and in several dance companies and dance studios around the US, including the Quilombo Center in Chicago. Her dance experience led her to work in Theatre and to specialize in Pilates. Ms. Azoubel is a Stott Pilates certified instructor and has been teaching this exercise method for dancers and non dancers alike.

Ms. Azoubel holds a BFA in dance from the University of Florida, where she began her research experience while participating in the UF Journal of Undergraduate Research through her work “The Cote D’Ivoire Mask Tradition From the Viewpoint of Dance Ethnology: Dancing the Gap Between Spirits and Human Worlds.” From 2005 to 2007, she received an assistantship from the Center for Latin American Studies, the Center for World Arts, and the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Florida, where she has been teaching World Dance and Intercultural Performance, and Fundamentals of Dance. She has founded and directed the UF Brazilian Dance Ensemble Jacaré Dançante.