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Cultural appropriation and the memory: the case of "Jesus' fritter"

REGIANE MIRANDA DE OLIVEIRA NAKAGAWA

Recôncavo da Bahia Federal University (UFRB) – Santo Amaro, Bahia, Brazil.
E-mail: regianemo@ufrb.edu.br
ORCID: 0000-0002-2039-7610

FÁBIO SADAO NAKAGAWA

Bahia Federal University (UFBA) – Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.
E-mail: fabiosadao@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-2296-5810

THAÍS FERNANDA SALVES DE BRITO

Recôncavo da Bahia Federal University (UFRB) – Santo Amaro, Bahia, Brazil.
E-mail: thaisbrito@ufrb.edu.br
ORCID: 0000-0001-5700-9338

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Abstract

Based on the concepts of cultural memory and binary culture, as proposed by the cultural semiotician Iuri Lotman, this article discusses the idea of cultural appropriation through the attempt of transforming acarajé into "Jesus' fritter" as a symbol and cultural text. For this purpose, this article intends to elucidate how the cultural appropriation process implies on a dispute for memory. Therefore, it discusses how certain religious segments related to evangelical Christianity or Brazilian neo-Charismatic Movement aims to impose the erasing of the cultural text memory by stealing one sign over another. As a result, this study identified how the semiotic mechanism works in order to simulate an alleged emptying of history and of meanings of a sign to try to forge another religious guidance to it.

Keywords
Cultural appropriation; Cultural memory; Cultural racism.

Introduction

Increasingly, the debate on cultural appropriation gains space in different spheres of arts and communication. As William (2020) points out, it is impossible to talk about this theme without considering that appropriation is one of the manners through which structural and systemic racism becomes concrete in society. Hence, the conditions for the cultural and symbolic production of "racially identified" groups (Almeida, 2022, p.51) are created so that they are systematically erased and, consequently, the subjects related to them are as well.

Furthermore, according to that author (William, 2020), any phenomenon related to appropriation necessarily implies on an unbalanced relationship between distinct cultures where the hegemonic one incorporates or takes over the traces of the subaltern collectivity in a process that empties its existing meanings and imposes others. It is not only about the "distortion of meanings" but also about "disputing the symbolic genocide of a people" (William, 2020, p. 49) which, in Brazil, targeted the African and native cultures. There is, therefore, an attempt of erasing the "origin of cultural components" through which it is possible to "reconstruct identities" (William, 2020, p. 120) and to constitute a collectivity's sense of belonging, making appropriation an important instrument of power.

In this overview, the presence of two aspects that cannot be separated from any approach on appropriation is noted: the unilateral action of a culture in relation to another and resignification. In addition to them, and beyond the matter of origin, we would like to mention another mechanism that we believe should be considered: the cultural memory since appropriation happens through an attempt by a collectivity to impose the erasing of the other's memory and, consequently, the negotiations and meanings that the latter is able to originate.

In agreement with the cultural semiotician Iuri Lotman (1996, 1998, 2000), we locate memory not only due to its capacity to store and transmit information, but mostly because of the manner it amplifies and expands meaning as well as generates new texts in a culture. According to this line of reasoning, when attempting to erase the memory of a culture in an appropriation process, according to Lotman (1996, 1998, 2000), there is simultaneously the resistance imposed to the same memory that subsists in the own language systems. As Kilomba points out, it is not about "romanticizing oppression", but it is about grasping how much that is put "aside" by power structures is "a space of loss and privation" as well as a "space of resistance and possibility" (Kilomba, 2019, p. 68).

On one hand, this discussion inserts itself in a broader perspective, referring to what Huyssen (2014, 2000) indicates as the resuming of interest for memory, occurring mostly in the second half of the 20th century, partly due to questioning fomented by decolonization and the need to retell the history of those who were, historically under conditions of subalternity and exploitation. This interest was, then, followed by tensions and disputes for memory as well as for forgetting, particularly regarding the "historical traumas" (Huyssen, 2000, p. 17) lived by a specific nation. As the author states, the "globalization of memory" (Huyssen, 2000) involves a series of contradictions, given that, despite the interest for memory be a "global phenomenon", the "*political* place of memory practices is still national and not post-national or global" (Huyssen, 2000, p. 17). This can be understood because of the dimension of memory itself as it is reported to a specific collectivity and, therefore, is always local.

Thus, having Lotman's semiotic thinking and Tartu-Moscow School as the conducting line, we are interested in discussing how memory places itself as a central matter to understand the functioning of appropriation processes. Along his work, Lotman situates culture as language, text and memory, aspects that cannot be dissociated from any attempt to understand how the imposition of meanings through the "exploration of elements of a culture" (William, 2020, p. 53) occurs by cultural extortion, which may gain materiality through different forms of language configuration. This debate inevitably involves the semiotic dimension of cultures as well as the inseparable bond between culture and communication once

it approaches the relations between different sign arrangements and the complexity that characterizes the production of meanings among different cultural spheres.

Therefore, to continue the discussion, we base ourselves on the cultural typology proposed by Lotman as a way to elucidate how the subjection imposed by one culture on the other can be understood according to the functioning of cultures/ binary structures that specifically aim to impose forgetting of memory. Particularly, we will focus on a very specific form of appropriation functioning which simulates the transformation of a text in a certain culture into a type of a recipient of the meaning imposed by another. That is an attempt to make it a non-text to articulate the process of the stolen speech as proposed by Barthes (1978).

According to our perspective, this mechanism explains how a culture tries to substitute meanings linked to existing cultural texts in order to promote its hollowing and, consequently, to replace the memory related to certain sign arrangements.

In order to empirically debate the appropriation phenomenon, we will discuss a case that has already become an icon of this phenomenon and was cited by William (2020) when reported by the press media[1]: "Jesus' fritter" which was coined by acarajé sellers in Bahia, Brazil, linked to neo-charismatic Brazilian religions or to evangelical Christianity, as named by Spyer (2020).

The reasons for the diversity of the neo-charismatic segment (Spyer, 2020) as well as their specificities are not the discussion aim of our study. Instead, we are interested in demonstrating how certain actions of these groups are consistent with the binary logic, and also how they act on the appropriation process and, consequently, on the imposition of the forgetting of the Afro-descendant populations' memory. Due to the fact that tensions among distinct memories occur mainly in the local environment, as mentioned above and in agreement with Huyseen (2020), the appropriation phenomenon can be equally seen as a force field imposed by a religious segment which is more and more economically powerful on the other, and that in turn offers an important indication on the religious, political and ideological tensions presently found in the country.

Moreover, it is essential to point out that the discussion proposed here absolutely does not deplete the understanding formulated by Lotman on the diversity and complexity of interchanges that characterize the functioning of cultures. Even though it is not the core of this study, it cannot be forgotten that, despite the appropriation processes and the resistance that equally distinguishes the functioning of memory, there are innumerable other cultural phenomena essentially characterized by the dialogue between the Afro-diasporic sphere and other spheres. That results in a configuration of semiotically heterogeneous cultural arrangements, distinct from those placed in a relation, but that would never exist without the interchange among them. In this case, contrary to what happens in appropriation, it is not about the attempt to impose a memory over the other, but about the expansion and complexity of the mnemonic device of culture as well as its creative procedures. Far from being excluding, both processes subsist synchronically in culture so that understanding what characterizes and, at the same time, distinguishes one from the other becomes a great challenge.

Configuration of culture typology by space

One of the main focuses of semiotic understanding proposed by Lotman (1996, 1998, 1999, 2000) refers to the expansion capacity of a culture through translation processes and untranslatability among different cultural spheres. These interchanges result in the constitution of a "semiotically heterogeneous"

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1 We particularly reported a post on the collective network *Jornalistas Livres*, aired on February 22, 2023, where all these manifestations were named as appropriation and cultural and structural racism. That post directly makes reference to an article published on *Folha de S. Paulo*, on February 19, 2023, about the parade of evangelic groups during Carnaval.

text "with many extracts" (Lotman, 1996, p.80)[2], which emerges among different codes and languages, capable of generating new meanings in the culture or promoting resignification of the existing ones. However, although it was not the focus of his research, Lotman did acknowledge the existence of cultural phenomena based on domination relations, understood as a type of culture that has a very specific functioning mode.

This perspective is related to the typological approach of culture through which, according to Lotman, it would be possible to "describe the several types of culture as specific language types" (1981, p.101), either through the relation among culture, sign and signicity or based on the complex hierarchy among distinct codes that compose a certain cultural sphere. Among his writings that describe the typology of culture, in the article "Sobre el metalenguaje de las descripciones tipológicas de la cultura" (Lotman, 1998, p. 93), published in 1969, the semiotician aims to produce a description metalanguage of the culture based on the spatial properties, inspired by studies developed in topological mathematics.

It is an epistemological strategy that intends to prevent the elaboration of the meta-description system of a culture be contaminated by the concept of development from a specific collectivity or a particular context. Thus, it would be possible to ensure a certain independence among the language of typology elaboration and the distinct numerous cultural spheres, aiming to perceive and understand the cultural types through "common universals of human culture" (Lotman, 1998, p.96)[3]. Soon, there would be "the spatial structure of the world table" on one side, and "the spatial models such as the description metalanguage of types of culture" on the other side (Lotman, 1998, p. 98)[4]. One would not be generated through the other as topological correspondences would establish between them because "a relation of homeomorphism emerges between the metalinguistic structures and the object structure" (Lotman, 1998, p.98)[5].

One of the fundamental characterizations of the spatial models for the analysis of types of culture is based on the dynamics of spatial division that, in the semiotic view, will be always made by the functioning of the boundary. Based on the mathematical group theory, the proposed semiotic or cultural boundary (Lotman, 1996) is a bi-functional mechanism that sometimes promotes the predominance of space continuity, sometimes provides the predominance of continuity in space, allowing it to work completely or fragmented.

In studies on culture, the boundary considered basic or elementary is the one that "divides the space of culture in two distinct parts" (Lotman, 1998, p. 102)[6]. Through it, there is one of the simplest types of spatial limitation, which presents itself as a group consisting of a number of points whose elements do not exist or act on the unlimited area, defining it as its domain in the confining area. The configuration for the limitation of spatiality will necessarily distinguish, separate and oppose two fields: the former perceived as interior, within, here; the latter seen as exterior, outside, there.

Besides the property of division, another resource of spatial modeling that collaborates to the typological elaboration of culture by spatial logic is orientation, which comes into effect from a specific point of view. In the case of circumscription of a particular spatiality, which allows the articulation of interior/exterior binary opposition, the primeval orientations are consolidated by the perspective inwards as well as from outwards. Lotman named such dispositions "straight orientation" (Lotman, 1998, p.103) or

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2 In the original: "*de muchos estratos y semióticamente heterogéneo*".

3 In the original: "*(...) [los] universales comunes de la cultura de la humanidad*".

4 In the original: "*La estructura espacial del cuadro del mundo*" e "*los modelos espaciales como metalenguaje de descripción de los tipos de cultura*".

5 In the original: "*(...)entre las estructuras metalingüisticas y la estructura del objeto surge una relación de homeomorfismo*".

6 In the original: "*(...) divide el espacio de cultura em dos partes diferentes*".

"direct" (1998, p. 105), and "inverted orientation" (1998, p. 103), respectively.

Regarding the straight or direct orientation, the cultural boundary is used mainly as a segregation mechanism instead of an interface. Lotman (1999, 2013) identified this type, which makes the straight orientation extreme, as binary culture. A model of cultural development is built in it, allowing that a specific order be established as the only possible form of cultural organization, and, therefore, promoting the mechanism of cultural appropriation as an attempt to impose the erasing of memory of other types of culture.

On the other hand, in the inverted orientation, there is a coincidence between the composing traces of the text and the external semiotic space so that the functioning of the boundary is explained as an interchange mechanism among different spheres. This is what will characterize the ternary cultures. Lotman named this typology to indicate the constitution of spheres where the excluded third principle is included due to the boundary from which the semiotic heterogeneity of certain texts results, consisting of codes belonging to specific traditions. In this case, differently from what happens to binary cultures, there is an expansion and diversification of the cultural memory, where the erasing, far from being a superimposition strategy of one culture over the other, becomes a functioning mechanism of the culture intelligence itself.

Binary cultures and erasing

In his last scientific productions, in the beginning of the 1990s, Lotman mentions a type of culture based on the binary logic or binary model (Lotman, 2022, p.108), named culture of binary structure (Lotman, 1999, p. 22) or binary cultural system (Lotman, 1999, p. 231). It is a type that seems to be the most extreme level of culture with straight or direct orientation, becoming mostly excluding.

If it were possible for a certain culture to orient itself outwards without the possibility of axis inversion, there would be the impairment of one of the two functions of the semiotic boundary, exactly the one that promotes the space for translation and information exchange between the interior and exterior, keeping only its functioning as a disjunction space in operation. Therefore, in the case of a binary culture, the Aristotelian non-contradiction logic or the law of the excluded third principle is built (Aristotle, 2002; Mora, 2001). In this case, the existence of the interface relation among opposites is not possible because it violates operations and the maintenance of identity relation built only among the elements that belong to a certain group.

The binary culture had already been envisioned by Lotman in the previously cited text, related to the process of meta-description of culture when, at that time, the author noticed the functioning of what he named proper culture. It is a type which presents itself as a single universal ordination mode to elaborate a meta-description and understanding of the whole and any cultural development (Lotman, 1998, p. 93). Based on this perspective, other modalities of cultural organization are fatally perceived as lacking any structuring principle and, therefore, not belonging to the universe of culture, so that they are recognized as non-culture, non-organized and specially as without proper culture.

Such culture forges an almost self-sufficient totality, aiming never to function as part of a whole. It is the reason that proper culture falsely conceives anything that is not under the domain of its cultural organization logic as disorganized at the same time that it re-signifies the opposing interior/exterior binary relation through the production of organized/non-organized logic. In addition, it is understood that the side considered uncontrolled is unable to provide any type of information (this proposition is also untrue as it will be shown later on in the explanation about the functioning of cultural appropriation process). As the exterior is characterized as the nature of chaos, it needs to be fought so that the ideally organized world can broaden its acting boundaries, avoiding the risk of suffering disorders and disturbances.

Thus, the struggle against everything opposing to proper or binary culture promotes the

extermination of what is considered noise source as well as what is an ordination promise of what is believed to be disordered. Under the optics of proper culture, the perception of something as non-organized is a prejudgment to disqualify and justify the attack against the other, and, thus, defy or rearrange the sign production of the other cultural sphere. Confronting the sign arrangements of what is seen as adversary is a way to destroy or redo its information, built and stored through signs, codes and arrangements among languages and that, therefore, constitutes its non-hereditary memory.

Despite using other references, Mbembe has a similar line of thinking when pointing out a remarkable trace of "our time" (2020, p. 76), that is: the separation between "I" and the "other", or between the "similar" ones and the "dissimilar" ones from whom the "enemy desire" (2020, p. 77) and, consequently, violence and hate speech occur. Such is the functioning of current liberal democracies, which subsist by the continuous reinvention of an enemy to dread and hate, who must be constantly substituted (the immigrant, the terrorist, the LGBTQIAPN+ population, and so on), even as a way to ensure the survival of the capitalist system. Likewise, the colonial entrepreneurship, primarily characterized by segregation, differentiation and annihilation of the other, turn itself to a

> [...] permanent work of separation - on one side, my living body and, on the other, all these body-things that surround it; on one side, my human flesh, from which all these other meat-things and eaten-meats exist for me; on one side, I, woven by excellence and zero ground of orientation to the world and, on the other, the others with whom I can never fully merge, who I can bring to me, but with whom I can never truly keep relations of reciprocity or mutual implication (Mbembe, 2020, p. 82)[7].

In this context, it can be perceived that colonialism and racism derived from it are materialized forms of the typology of binary culture. Thus, memory, which is understood as an "ability that allows us to form an identity awareness in a personal level as well as in a collective one" (Assman, 2016, p. 116), places itself as the central target to be attacked, since imposing its erasing is equally a symbolic attempt to annihilate a certain collectivity. Therefore, more and more, the political dimension of memory cannot be disregarded because ensuring it is equally a way to guarantee the survival of those that historically were most vulnerable.

Lotman (1996) also pointed out that cultural memory is articulated by the diachronic perspective as well as the synchronic one. The former, namely informative memory, is manifested by the passing of time along texts configured in distinct times and contexts. In this type of memory, reiteration, maintenance and perpetuation of certain composing traces and codification and configuration modes of a certain culture are kept, allowing us to recognize its regularities, despite constant updates. The memory, by time logic, refers to the longevity of the whole and any culture when making some information that was codified as constant and durable in the long run. Therefore, articulated by traces of little variability along time, informative memory turn itself mostly to the idea of past, cultural heritage and tradition, once the common perception through cultural texts and among them is constituted of elements that perpetuate themselves.

The materialization of informative memory through cultural texts can be seen as a type of institution as Assman indicates (2016) when referring to cultural memory. In order to secure its perenniality, its mnemonic configuration needs to be "objectified and embedded into symbolic forms" (Assman, 2016, p. 118), characterized by a type of relatively stable organization that necessarily enables its transmission.

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7 In the original: *"[...] trabalho permanente de separação – de um lado, meu corpo vivo e, do outro, todos esses corpos-coisas que o rodeiam; de um lado, minha carne humana, em função da qual todas essas outras carnes-coisas e carnes-comidas existem para mim; de um lado, eu, tecido por excelência e marco zero de orientação para o mundo e, de outro, os outros, com quem nunca posso me fundir completamente, os quais posso fazer vir a mim, mas com quem nunca posso verdadeiramente manter relações de reciprocidade ou de implicação mútua" (Mbembe, 2020, p. 82).*

In the dialogue with Huyseen (2014, p. 159) this memory "embedded in artifacts such as fiction, theater, cinema, but also in monuments, sculpture, painting and architecture" plays a central role in the process that constitutes and/or transforms what is understood as public memory which is also political itself.

On the other hand, as Huyssen (2014) points out, the prominence that memory has currently achieved made erasing commonly seen as a form of negligence. This is partly due to the misconception of the belief related to the fact that ensuring memory requires some deliberate effort, including from public spheres whereas forgetting "just happens" (Huyssen, 2014, p. 157) spontaneously. However, in the scope of rigidly binary cultures such as, for instance, Nazi state-controlled cultures in the 20th century, Lotman detected erasing as a mnemonic mechanism destined to delete actions. Procedures, signs and speeches, i.e., textual arrangements that somehow did not meet the ideology of the existing order (Lotman, 2000, p. 175). By binary logic, forgetting is related to the capacity to exclude texts considered unacceptable, and that to exclusion can also reach destruction level (of materials), and, therefore, penetrating the extermination logic. As Huyssen points out, it is a "fascist erasing policy" (20143, p. 156) exposed distinctly, according to him, by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

Forgetting, in the sense of erasing or modifying texts from other cultures, provides the proper culture to act against memories and, therefore, the traditions form the same cultural spheres. It becomes a machine to hate other's stories as indicated by Mbembe (2020) because it aims to interrupt diachronic routes composed by the frequency and recovery of certain traces, signs and cultural arrangements constituted throughout time. It is a manner to generate noise in codified information by the other and, consequently, their identities with the only intention to erase their trail.

Contrary and complementary to informative memory the creative memory articulate itself by the predominance of synchronic perspective, that is, by time spatialization in culture, which allows to tune in and continue its different parts (past, present and future). This memory is manifested in the scope of its own information attributes whose originality or novelty trace is only recognized in contrast with the existing ones. In other words, there is an inter-relationship between the present and the past through the sign configurations to emphasize and revel the continuous process of updating of the whole and any cultural sphere, which always needs to produce the unexpected against a background, which is already expected. In agreement with this perspective, Assman indicates that "even in the cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such, but it is found in symbols that are represented in oral myths or in writings, performed in feasts as they continually illuminate a changing present" (2016, p. 121).

That is why, in creative memory, the information with temporalities and, therefore, distinct durabilities, coexist in others and, sometimes, in unusual arrangements. Similarly, it is possible to notice the movement of culture projection to the future, in a continuous process of information production and re-signification to avoid entropy.

Still regarding forgetting, Lotman points out that "forgetting as an element of memory and erasing as a means of memory destruction" (2000, p. 175)[8] cannot be confused. More specifically, in the later, "one of the acutest means of social struggle in the sphere of culture is the demand of mandatory erasing of certain aspects of historic experience" (Lotman, 2000, p. 175)[9]. This happens in the scope of typology of binary cultures where amnesia works as a weapon of the proper culture against the ones considered non-culture, mainly to fight their memories. When utilized to exterminate or change others' texts, this mechanism does not only attempt to supply the constitution of continuity of a certain cultural legacy but also to jeopardize the future of permanency of cultural spheres that were considered adversary. Thereby, a conversion program of certain texts in non-texts is practiced in order to make them semiotically

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8 In the original: *"el olvido como elemento de la memoria y el olvido como medio de destrucción de la misma"*.

9 In the original: *"una de las formas más agudas de la lucha social en la esfera de la cultura es la exigencia del olvido obligatorio de determinados aspectos de la experiencia histórica"*.

inoperative and, therefore, ensure the preservation of those that are supposed to be perpetuated. That is why Lotman (2022, p. 108) states that in a "rigidly binary model" there is the prevalence of the "classic form, 'if you are not with us, you are against us'" or, as Mbembe (2020, p. 77) says, when reporting to "hostility policies", it is about the "desire of the enemy, the desire of apartheid (segregation and enclave) and the extermination fantasy".

However, we cannot lose sight that forgetting equally constitutes an action mechanism of the creative memory. Through exchange with its surroundings, a system has the ability to expel or exclude certain texts or their fragments, once the creation process of new sign arrangements may result in "semantic incompatibility" (Lotman, 2000, p. 175)[10]. Thus, some cultural texts – and the memory that materialize them – can become incompatible with a particular context, or, yet, as Huyssen (2016, p 160) points out, many times, a given "forgetting mode" is necessary so that collectivities can demand specific claims in different spheres – cultural, legal, social, etc. – aiming at certain common objective, once "the memory policy cannot abstract from forgetting". Therefore, the process of social/collective self-awareness implies on the orientation to a specific type of memory in order to define what must be "remembered" and what must be "forgotten" in the same way that "each text contributes not only to the recollection, but also to forgetting" (Lotman, 2000, p. 174)[11].

It should be noted that, in both cases, forgetting – either as a destruction of memory or as its intelligent mechanism -, must be always considered by the perspective of a given cultural sphere or, yet, according to a specific typology. As Huyssen (2014, p 158) states, "forgetting needs to be located in a field of terms and phenomena as silence, disarticulation, evasion, erasing, wearing, repression – all which reveal an aspect of strategies that are as complex as the memory itself. Capturing such strategy contributes a lot to the understanding about a certain cultural environment and the relationship that it establishes with others that, in binary culture, is essentially related to an erasing attempt and repression. Later on, we will approach another functioning mode of the semiotic mechanism of forgetting, which does not eliminate what is from another culture, but re-orders it with the intention of injecting a simulated history in it.

As Lotman (2000, p. 175) points out, "culture, at its core, is oriented against forgetting. It wins converting forgetting into a memory mechanism" [12] or, yet, it can be said that "forgetting effectively creates memory" (Huyssen, 2016, p. 157) because what is expelled by a certain sphere does not disappear in the semiotic space and/or semi sphere, but remains in a latent state and, through the action of the semiotic boundary, can burst into culture again (Lotman, 1999).

Because memory subsists in the language systems themselves, allowing somehow its institution, soon its perpetuation occurs in the presence of certain codes due to the "constant character of its fundamental structural elements" (Lotman, 2000, p. 174) [13]. Thus, regarding the operationalized interchanges by the boundary between distinct cultural spheres through which there is the expansion of memory, the "recollection of precedent states" (Lotman, 2000, p, 174) [14] is kept in the self-awareness of the systems.

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10 In the original: "incompatibilidad semántica".

11 In the original: "cada texto contribuye no sólo a la recordación, sino también para al olvido".

12 In the original: "la cultura, por su esencia, está dirigida contra el olvido. Ella lo vence, convirtiéndolo en uno de los mecanismos de la memoria".

13 In the original: "el carácter constante de sus elementos estructurales fundamentales".

14 In the original: "el recuerdo de los estados precedentes".

Memory, binary logic and cultural appropriation

In agreement with Lotman's perspective, we situated the cultural appropriation processes as a characteristic action of the logic of binary cultures, whose focus becomes the imposition of forgetting over the memory related to its non-culture by a proper culture. Consequently, discussing extortion implies, above all, discussing racial discrimination by other cultures.

Kilomba states that racism distinguishes itself by the concomitant presence of three characteristics: "the difference construction and the construction of difference" (2019, p. 75), the hierarchy established by a given system of values and power relations that constitute themselves in different spheres: social, economic, political, historic and cultural.

The first aspect reports itself to the individuation mechanism through which a collectivity establishes the distinction between I and the other. As Sueli Carneiro points out (2023), for black subjects, the color stands out over the individual or any other identity trace such as gender, profession or socio-economic class. It is a raciality device (Carneiro, p. 122), where the "construction of the other, as threat and danger" implies on the complete destitution of their humanity condition. On the other hand, Oyĕwùmí (2021) emphasizes that, in the West, the supremacy of the sight among the other senses, and the tendency of the eye to establish distinctions implies, beforehand, on a mechanism of differentiation between blacks and whites, as well as between female and male bodies. Therefore, the dissimilar, under the patriarchal whiteness, is considered just a body subjected to all type of violence, differently from the thinking subject that distinguishes white men.

By binary logic, the other does not place themselves as a piece of information – that may become part of the I in processes of translation and untranslability -, but as something unpossessed of its own organization, which should be kept from a distance, fought and/or annihilated. This is how appropriation functions, imposing forgetting over non-culture as a manner to deny its possibility of existence. According to Kilomba (2019, p.78),

> Whenever I am placed as "other" - be it the unwanted "other", the intrusive "other", the dangerous "other", the violent "other", the passionate "other", the dirty "other", the desirable "other" or the exotic "other" - I am inevitably experiencing racism, because I am being forced to become the impersonation of what the white subject does not want to be recognized with. I become the "Other" of whiteness, not the self - and I am, therefore, denied the right to exist as an equal[15].

In turn, the hierarchy of values is directly related to the historic constitution of white supremacy in relation to blacks and, consequently, to their distinct cultural environments. Regarding that, Sueli Carneiro points out that, if the condition of a "black subject" implies on "the denial of the condition of a subject on their own" (2023, p. 129) by the other, the complexity and correlation between the distinct identities that constitute human individuality is reserved to the whites, or, yet, according to Mbembe (202, p. 83), those considered "authentic humans".

Concurrently, this hierarchization, determined by racism, targets not only humans, but as Santos states, "it happens against all lives" (2023, p. 82) that directly or indirectly have relationships with black bodies. It will get to the point that, as the author exemplifies, "colonialism will start dictating which of our mangoes are bad and start selling other types, such as Thompson, Palmer" (Santos, 2023, p.81).

This hierarchy of values equally bonds itself to the specificity of articulation of the mnemonic device in which not only what must be remembered and what must be forgotten is established, but also

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15 In the original: *"Toda vez que sou colocada como "outra" – seja a "outra" indesejada, a "outra" intrusa, a "outra" perigosa, a "outra" violenta, a "outra" passional, seja a "outra" suja, a "outra" desejável ou a "outra" exótica – estou inevitavelmente experienciando o racismo, pois estou sendo forçada a me tornar a personificação daquilo com o que o sujeito branco não quer ser reconhecido. Eu me torno a/o "Outra/o" da branquitude, não o eu – e, portanto, a mim é negado o direito de existir como igual".*

how the recording of information happens through certain codes and at the disposition of what must be remembered, which unavoidably results in the establishment of an order of values, considering what a given cultural sphere considers more or less relevant. As Lotman observes (2000, p.174),

> The long length of texts forms a hierarchy within culture, usually identified with the hierarchy of values [...] This can correspond to a hierarchy of materials in which texts are recorded, and a hierarchy of places and forms of their preservation[16]

In every appropriation process, there is, by the culture that acts binarily, the selection and capture of meaningful textual arrangements for the memory of the other in which there is an attempt to impose forgetting. According to William (202), this occurs in the process of change, depuration and hollowing of senses and the determining of others, which correspond to a new order of values where the long duration of existing mnemonic symbols are disregarded.

Lotman claims that such signs "possess the capacity to contrite in themselves, keep and reconstruct the *remembrance* of their precedent contexts"[17] (Lotman, 1998, p. 156). However, this does not imply in the fact that only them function as a storage of constant information, once memory equally assumes a "regeneration mechanism" [18] (Lotman, 1998, p.157) of the existing senses, which is operationalized by translation processes and untranslability that take place in the boundary.

The cultural texts brought by African peoples who were slaved suffered a deep amplification and re-signification when in Brazilian soil because they evidently correlated themselves to the reconfiguration of a series of values as the sense presented and embedded into others related to the "cultural resistance of historically subordinated groups" (William, 2020, p. 133). In this scope, memory places itself, as Gonzales (1984, p. 226) points out, as "the unknowing that knows this place of registrations that restitutes a story that has not been written". In turn, it has its own tricks in the confrontation with awareness forms that aim to conceal it because, as we have mentioned before, memory report itself to specific groups. This perspective is equally related to spiral and ancestral times defined by Martins (2021), which characterize themselves by distinct temporalities that, in correlation, begin to subsist synchronically in culture without canceling each other, since:

> Ancestry is cleaved by a curved, recurring, ringed time; a spiral time, which returns, restores and transforms as well, and on which everything focuses. An ontologically experienced time with contiguous and simultaneous movements of retroaction, prospection and reversibility, dilation, expansion and containment, contraction and relaxation, synchrony of instances composed of present, past and future (Martins, 2021, p. 63)[19].

It is about an inherent action to the functioning of cultural memory, differently from what happens with appropriation where binary logic simply aims to destroy the traces that continually build and redefine the symbols as well as the values of the other's culture along time.

According to Lotman, another aspect that equally cannot be disregarded in the relation that is established among the mnemonic devices and the values related to them refers to the materials or

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16 In the original: *"La larga duración de los textos forma dentro de la cultura una jerarquía, habitualmente identificada con la jerarquía de los valores [...] A esto puede corresponder una jerarquía de los materiales en que se registran los textos, y una jerarquía de los lugares y modos de su conservación".*

17 In the original: *"poseen la capacidad de concentrar en sí, conservar y reconstruir el recuerdo de sus contextos precedentes".*

18 In the original: *"mecanismo de regeneración".*

19 In the original: *"A ancestralidade é clivada por um tempo curvo, recorrente, anelado; um tempo espiralar, que retorna, restabelece e também transforma, e que em tudo incide. Um tempo ontologicamente experimentado como movimentos contíguos e simultâneos de retroação, prospecção e reversibilidades, dilatação, expansão e contenção, contração e descontração, sincronia de instâncias compostas de presente, passado e futuro"(Martins, 2021, p. 63).*

codes through which the texts are built. Particularly, the binary logic equally acts through the depreciation of certain codification systems and super appreciation of others – that is, those related to the proper culture -, from which the disregard or consideration of memory and values related to some sign orderings happen equally. As Taylor explains, the colonizers despised the practices of indigenous performances in America, which "efficiently transmitted collective memories, values and belief systems" (2013, p. 76). The recognition of the written alphabet as the only language capable to produce knowledge and memory, made it be used as "a known weapon of the colonial arsenal" in which the oral record of the original peoples' performances aimed, mostly, their extinction. In this case, "the 'preservation' was used as an erasing" (Taylor, 2013, p. 77), given the existing distinction between the "repertoire performed through practices" (Taylor, 2013, p. 72) and what, according to the alphabetic culture, is understood as archive.

Finally, the third aspect regards power. Resuming the discussion proposed by William, the processes of cultural appropriation cannot be dissociated from the colonial heritage and the slavery past since "from slavery violence, all the black cultural heritages were hollowed. The colonizer appropriated the slaves' culture as a manner to annihilate them" (2020, p. 35). Under the same perspective, Mbembe states that one of the striking features of colonialism is related to the "propensity to accommodate the destruction of its objects" (2020, p. 81), starting from the original peoples and, posteriorly, to the slaved subjects so that none of them could be easily substituted. The binary culture allows us to understand how the action of power occurs under the semiotic perspective, where the boundary is not a dialogue and interchange mechanism, but only a mechanism of limitation, separation and destruction.

The appropriation from this process implies in a type of specific cultural domination, marked by the imposition of forgetting of a memory from a culture seen as subordinate under a certain perspective, in intermediations that articulate themselves through distinct forms or imposition and inculcation of new sign arrangements. Regarding that, Lotman recognizes that there are periods aimed at memory expansion, enhanced by interchanges among different spheres, whereas others are characterized exactly by its retraction, based on the dominance of cultures that act according to the binary logic. Thus,

> periods of historical regression (the clearest example is the Nazi state cultures of the 20th century), when imposing extremely mythologized schemas of history on the community, demand that society peremptorily forget texts that do not allow themselves to be organized in such manner. If social organizations, in their heyday, create flexible and dynamic models that offer broad possibilities for collective memory and are accommodated to its expansion, social decadence is generally accompanied by an ankylosis of the mechanism of collective memory and an increasing tendency to reduce its volume (Lotman, 2000, p. 175-176)[20].

Following our line of reasoning, and considering that appropriation occurs based on the uses of language, we are interested in pointing out how this process can be understood facing the materiality of certain cultural texts in which the stolen speech, as defined by Barthes (1978), places itself as a specific type of expropriation. This is what we will discuss next.

Cultural appropriation and stolen speech

As we pointed out in the beginning of this article, our contribution to the discussion will be done through a case already denominated as an appropriation to demonstrate how extortion occurs through the erasing of memory. This is the case of "Jesus fritters" which, besides being a cultural text related to

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20 In the original: *"Las épocas de regresión histórica (el meas claro ejemplo son las culturas estatales nazistas en el siglo XX), al imponerle a la colectividad esquemas extremadamente mitologizados de la historia, exigen perentoriamente de la sociedad el olvido de los textos que no se dejan organizar de tal manera. Si las organizaciones sociales en el período de auge crean modelos flexibles y dinámicos, que dan amplias posibilidades para la memoria colectiva y están acomodados a la ampliación de la misma, el ocaso social, por regla general, se acompaña de un anquilosamiento del mecanismo de la memoria colectiva y una tendencia creciente a la reducción del volumen de la misma".*

the Afro-Brazilian tradition, was a victim of appropriation by the evangelical Christianity or Brazilian neo-charismatic churches.

According to Spyer (2020), discussing about this segment involves not only considering its constituting diversity, which encompasses different dimensions, but also its contradictions, which combine solidarity for people under extreme social and economic vulnerability as well as their power of institutional action, "equivalent to large multinational companies" (Spyer, 2020, p. 192). According to the population census of 2022, almost 40% of the interviewees declared to be evangelical Christians, making this group extremely expressive.

It is not our focus to present a broader contextualization of this phenomenon or indicate its causes and possible origins – which, effectively, is out of the scope of this article -, but to bring out a discussion on the situations in which evangelical Christianity acts according to binary logic, i.e., when it acts as a business or a belief that, more specifically,

> [...] it has to do with the size of this social stratum, its capacity for articulation and coordination, the media infrastructure that evangelicals from various denominations have been building up, and the power that evangelical leaders have nowadays to influence opinions via the media, via actions in the artistic and cultural milieu, and to interfere in the management of the State via the financing and promotion of campaigns by pastors (or candidates aligned with these churches) for public office (Spyer, 2020, p. 191)[21].

Somehow it is also about a form of power action of a specific religion, which imposes its view and its belief over cultural texts linked to other beliefs, belonging to different manifestations of culture.

In 1928, Manuel Querino, an intellectual from Santo Amaro-BA, Brazil, edited a small book on "the main foods that Africans abundantly use" and that, even presently, are prepared by their descendants (Querino, 2011, p.35). Acarajé is the second dish on the list. The ingredients and the techniques are carefully described there as well as how to serve it. Years later, Raul Lody (2019) returns to Querino and includes two important elements in the description of acarajé: the presence of specialist women in the making of sacred recipes – the iabás – and the socializing and ritualistic character of eating it in the Candomblé houses.

Acarajé is a sacred and ritualistic food related to the mythological universe of Candomblé where the orixá Iansã teaches her daughters the recipe and how to sell them so that they themselves can make a living. Therefore, it is offered to orixás Iansã and Xangô, her mythological husband. In 2005, the profession of acarajé Baianas was registered by the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) as a Brazilian intangible heritage.

It is noted that, under the semiotic perspective, that we have an informational arrangement codified by distinct sign systems such as Afro, Brazilian and black cultures as well as the spheres of religion, politics and economy. Therefore, acarajé, whose name was codified by Yoruba language (*acará*/ fire cake and *jé*/ to eat), caused a broad debate in the scope of cultural appropriation because the conflict among religions occurs exactly through its symbolic dimension, in the constitution of the sign and as a cultural text.

One of the reasons for the request to register the profession of Baianas of Acarajé is due to the emergence of a social fact – the growth of neo-charismatic churches in Brazil – and the rise, throughout the 2000s, of selling places of "Jesus fritters" in the city of Salvador and in the countryside of the state of Bahia, that is, there was a new category of snack sellers – not a Baiana of Acarajé anymore – without any

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21 In the original: "*[...] tem a ver com o tamanho desse estrato social, sua capacidade de articulação e co-ordenação, a infraestrutura de mídia que evangélicos de diversas denominações vêm constituindo, e com o poder que líderes evangélicos têm hoje de influenciar opiniões via meios de comunicação, via atuações no meio artístico e cultural, e de interferir na gestão do Estado via financiamento e promoção de campa-nhas de pastores (ou de candidatos alinhados com essas igrejas) a cargos públicos*" (Spyer, 2020, p. 191).

affiliations to African religions and their cosmologies. Thus, people adept to evangelical Christianity or new-Charismatic Christians started selling this food, disconnecting it from Candomblé.

Moreover, the sellers denied wearing the typical Baianas of Acarajé's costumes, also referred as crioula's clothes, an attire commonly worn in ritual practiced in Candomblé houses. In this situation, a municipal decree effective in 2015 in the capital of Bahia established that the selling of acarajé involves some rules such as "typical attire according to the tradition of Afro-Brazilian culture", i.e., the wearing of Baiana's clothes (smock, skirt and wrap) as in Candomblé ceremonies[22].

In the field research carried out with thirty evangelic Baianas in the city of Salvador during 2011-2012, Vagner José Rocha Santos identified the existence of "processes of appropriation and resignification that resulted in the emergence of products such as "Jesus fritters" as a "manner that neo-Charismatics found to 'purify' the Afro-Brazilian symbols" (Santos, 2013, p. 62). According to the researcher, one of the factors for the rise of "Jesus fritters" or "Lord's fritters" was the incorporation of this delicacy to the evangelical religious practices as a way to disqualify and dissociate them from Afro-Brazilian religions (Santos, 2013, p. 68). For that, the Afro-Brazilian religions needed to be considered the enemy and everything that came from them were negatively valued. However, their symbols can be considered positively by neo-Charismatics "since they get new meanings, and if being referred to as an element whose origin is connected to God" (Santos, 2013, p. 70).

In another article, published in 2015, Santos calls the attention to the hollowing of the term acarajé by its renaming as Jesus' fritter or Lord's fritter as well as to the emergence of term evangelical Baiana of Acarajé, because both

> [...] denote a legitimization practice of a socio-religious identity - opposed to the one of Candomblé followers, in a process of struggle for representations that aim to define the existence of a group that is recognized by neo-Charismatics (Santos, 2015 p. 11)[23].

In 2014, when carrying out his ethnographic research, Lígia Évora detected the existence of some Baianas de acarajé in the city of Salvador who, when converting themselves into any neo-charismatic religion, had to develop a "re-signification process of the delicacy" because they could not abdicate their profession as it was an important income source, despite being "demonized by them" (Évora, 2015, p. 41). This process included, for instance, the renaming of the delicacy into "Jesus fritters or Jesus acarajé", the "denial to wear the [typical Baiana's] attire" (Évora, 2015, p.44) and the inclusion of evangelical leaflets and messages on the trays to "suppress the connection of the fritter to the African religions" (Évora, 2015, p. 41). In an attempt to understand the social relationship of Baianas of Acarajé in the city of São Félix, region of Recôncavo Baiano, BA, Brazil, with their consumers, Reina also verified the existence of what he named "the tray invasion by followers of neo-Charismatic churches" (Reina, 2020, p.263), by "Jesus Baianas" who needed to sell acarajé as a financial livelihood. Interviewing some of these Baianas, it was noted that even being criticized by their religious "sisters" for selling food that they valued negatively, there was an incentive "by the pastors who saw this activity as a way to increase their tithes" (Reina, 2020, p. 263)

Transforming acarajé into "Jesus fritters" was similar to provoking a type of consubstantiation, something common to the Catholic-Christian model that transmutes bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, materializing the symbolic presence of the Christian God. Thus, the pagan character of Iansã

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22 Decree Number 26.804 from December 1st, 2015. Retrieved August 22, 2024 from https://leismunici-pais.com.br/a/ba/s/salvador/decreto/2015/2681/26804/decreto-n-26804-2015-dispoe-sobre-a-localiza-cao-e-funcionamento-do-comercio-informal-exercido-pelas-baianas-e-baianos-do-acaraje-e-do-mingau--em-logradouros-publicos-e-da-outras-providencias

23 In the original: *"[...] denotam uma prática de legitimação de uma identidade sócio-religiosa – oposta a das baianas adeptas do candomblé, num processo de luta de representações que objetivam a definição da existência de um grupo que seja reconhecido pelos neopentecostais"* (Santos, 2015 p. 11).

food is lifted and it is made into a snack or a type of food sanctified by its own church, hollowing the former religious meaning.

When commenting on this type of appropriation, Father Rodney states that "this strategy has long been used to make Afro-Brazilian culture palatable: erasing the black traces, the origin or any other element subject to rejection, mainly by those that somehow refer to religious heritage. Its name: Racism" (Rodney, 2017)[24]. Again, the cultural appropriation is associated to the erasing of history that, in this case, occurs against the memory of Afro-Brazilian culture.

As we had discussed, the proper culture, the one that places itself as the most capable to order the world, perceives the other non-cultures, which is a form to depreciate them in their own capacities of self-organization. Therefore, any arrangement proposed by other cultures will be understood as a disarrangement or defective or noisy information, justifying its rejection or adjustment.

We are not before a process of semiotic translation between spheres, based on the dialogue between the different ones, but in the presence of a type of appropriation through stealing, kidnapping and deformation of signs and their meanings. This allows a certain culture to feed itself of information from the another to take advantage of its memory at the same time it tries to erase it.

The usurping of existing sign arrangements, used as a mechanism of power and ideological imposition, was identified by Barthes in his research on the functioning mode of myth or stolen speech or modern myth. Published in the book *Mythologies* in 1957, that study examined the distinct productions of the mass culture that appropriated themselves of other signs to insert new concepts in order to guide how they should be read, understood, and consumed.

In this process, the deformation of primeval meanings from any type of sign, through the ideological overlapping of other meanings, occur with the intention of utilizing the previous meanings as resources to favor the performance of the sign that steals. It is a second semiological system that, therefore, depends on the existence of a previous one, which consists of a sign, an image, a speech, a text or an essay. In the myth or stolen speech, the previous arrangement, made up by its own materiality at the expression level as well as its meanings at the content level, is reduced to the condition of pure sequestering sign so that it can be filled by another meaning. This is the intention of the speech that steals: it transforms a certain text in "hollow form" because its activity is predatory and, when becoming a form, "it empties and impoverishes itself, and history vanishes" (Barthes, 1978, p. 199).

In the case of the sanctified food, under the evangelical Christianity's point of view, acarajé can be provided and consumed by their followers as long as it succeeds to suspend the process of signification produced by the religious memory of Candomblé. For that, another meaning is forged to act as ante-meanings through the same sign, aiming to erase somehow the great temporality that there is in acarajé as a text of culture. As Barthes says, they are cultural arrangements, "cut into half", exactly at the level of meaning, so that the "memory, the non-existence" is withdrawn from them (Barthes, 1978, p.44). This is nothing but a form of alienation and, at the same time, of violence imposed by binary logic.

Final considerations

When proposing the re-reading of a cultural text related to Afro-descendent populations, in an attempt to explain how appropriation can be understood by the imposition of erasing due to the binary action of evangelical Christianity, we tried to expand the discussion on the topic, introducing new perspectives of analysis. It is, in our view, an eminently semiotic problem (Machado, 2020) as it involves questions directly related to the scope of worries in the field, related to how the production of meanings occurs to the processes of re-signification and the functioning of non-hereditary cultural memory.

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24 It should be noted that Father Rodney and Rodney William are names used by the same author in different publications. Because the former refers to his position held in Candomblé, we kept both references.

Through a typological approach, it is possible to understand some constants in the future of cultures such as it occurs in the binary logic through which there is the recognition of the dominating role played by some codification systems, establishing the direction of a certain type of memory and of erasing.

This line of study allows to unveil how power and colonialism directly act on the mnemonic symbols of a culture considered subordinate when seen by (binary) perspective. However, this does not occur without resistance.

In agreement with Huyssen' thinking (2014) and, as we previously pointed out, because forgetting also produces memory, then, we should bear in mind that the attempt to impose forgetting on the acarajé cultural text by creating another textual arrangement – "Jesus' fritter" – generates, at the same time, a memory related to this phenomenon. That amplifies the longer duration of the mnemonic dimension of the former, or, still, constitutes one of its spirals that, according to Martins (2021), characterize ancestral temporality.

As power does not subsist dissociated from the forms that confront it; therefore, it can be said that the forgetting imposed on acarajé contributes to broaden its memory even more, which is equally crossed by force fields that presently place themselves in certain spheres of the religious field in our country.

Since memory is recorded in language systems and, considering the diversity of typologies that compose the semiotic space, it cannot be forgotten that, despite the attempts to extort certain mnemonic symbols, they subsist in the semiotic space of relations in dialogue with other spheres. As Lotman states, culture opposes to forgetting. This aspect allows us to consider not only about the processes of memory dispute but also the policies of memory formulation because, as Huyseen points out, the perennity of cultural memory embedded in external objects and/or cultural texts is, partly, responsible for the "transformation of the public memory itself" (2014, p. 159). Therefore, it is understood that the own mechanisms of memory functioning set obstacles to forgetting to which cultural texts related to Afro-descendent populations and native populations are constantly subjected.

Thus, it can be said that the extortion attempts tend to contribute to expand the meanings related to memory as the resistance mechanism of these cultures in the same way they explain their importance and, mostly, why it is such a disputed force field in current times where the anti-colonial debate has been strengthening.

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Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa has a PhD in Communication and Semiotics from PUC São Paulo. She completed a post-doctoral internship at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA/USP) (Fapesp grant) and at the Complutense University of Madrid. Professor at the Center for Cultures, Languages and Applied Technologies (Cecult) of UFRB and professor in the Graduate Program in Communication of the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (PPGCOM/UFRB) and the Multidisciplinary Graduate Program in Culture and Society from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). In this article, she contributed to the research design, development of the theoretical discussion on culture memory, cultural appropriation, cultural typology, analysis of "Jesus' fritter" case, manuscript writing, and text revision.

Fábio Sadao Nakagawa has a PhD in Communication and Semiotics from PUC São Paulo. He has completed a post-doctoral internship at the Complutense University of Madrid. Professor in the Department of Communication of the School of Communication of the Federal University of Bahia (FACOM/UFBA) and professor of the Graduate Program in Contemporary Communication and Culture of UFBA and the Multidisciplinary Graduate Program in Culture and Society of UFBA. In this article, he contributed to the research design, development of the theoretical discussion on culture memory, cultural appropriation, cultural typology, analysis of "Jesus' fritter" case, manuscript writing, and text revision.

Thaís Fernanda Salves de Brito is a professor at the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia. She holds a Doctor's degree in Social Anthropology (FFLCH-USP) and a master's degree in Social Sciences (PUC/SP 2001). She has completed a postdoctoral internship in Social Anthropology (FFLCH-USP). She is a professor in the Graduate Program in Archaeology and Heritage of UFRB, coordinates the Mesclas Research Group and the Massapê Patrimonial Education Program. In this article, she contributed to the theoretical discussion of acarajé as a sacred and ritualistic symbol, explaining its recognition as cultural heritage due to the Baianas of Acarajé's struggle and religions of African origin, besides writing of the manuscript and reviewing the text.