

## TWO BROTHERS: DEVOTION AND BAHIAN IDENTITY IN THE CARURU OF SAINTS COSMAS AND DAMIAN

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DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,  
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

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### ABSTRACT

Based on the documentary *Two Brothers*, the article discusses the caruru of Saints Cosmas and Damian held by the Valverde family at the Soteropolitano, a Bahian restaurant located in São Paulo. By analyzing the ritual aspects of this celebration, as well as the discourses of those in charge of holding it, I seek to highlight its capacity to affirm a Bahian identity in a context of migration.

**KEYWORDS**  
Religion; Bahia;  
Ritual; Gift;  
Identity.

### A CONSTANT RESIGNIFICATION

Of the manifestations that appeared in the extensive web of the syncretism between Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian religiosity – woven through impositions, resistances, adaptations, reinventions, deaths, and rebirths – the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian particularly reveals both the endurance and transformation of a religious archetype. From martyr doctors with the gift of healing, in the first centuries of Christianity;

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1. This article is part of my post-doctoral research *I make my own time: ethnography of intimate music making*, developed at the Department of Anthropology of the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). I would like to thank the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) for granting me the scholarship (2019/27545-3) that made this work possible.

through their recognition, especially in Portugal, as the patron saints of the doctors; syncretized, in Brazil, with the orisha Ibeji of the Yoruba Candomblé (the nkisi Vunji, in Bantu Candomblé<sup>2</sup>), a dual child deity who protects children; until acquiring, in turn, the affectionate nickname of “child saints”, here are, roughly, the trajectories of the archetype of the twins until its consolidation as an important religious expression<sup>3</sup>.

Besides a resignification at a macro-historical level, it is worth noting that the vitality of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Brazil resides in the highly diversified character of the celebrations in their honor held throughout the country on September 27<sup>th</sup><sup>4</sup>, both in relation to spaces (churches, Candomblé and Umbanda centers, streets, houses) and formats (handing out candies, caruru<sup>5</sup> offering, drumming, prayer chains etc.). This diversity of engagement with the party can be seen in the articles by Freitas (2019) and Nascimento (2014), who discuss, respectively, Saints Cosmas and Damian’s day in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Cachoeira:

The party may vary [...] depending on who is giving it. Candies are placed in small plastic bags on a table or in small disposable dishes. The candies are purchased or made at home and given to children or adults on the street or at home; in the morning or at night; with or without a card. When the bags of candies are delivered, they can be distributed from the front door of the house or on the street, or even going by car or on foot. For those who love the party mess up, the best choice may be the least planned just shout “candies served!” and wait for the children to come. Others, however, would prefer something a little more organized, and in this case, the card is the best option (Freitas 2019, 4).

There is the Catholic Cosmas and Damian party, that is, the one with prayer and candles; the Catholic person who eats caruru (in this one the Catholic saint eats caruru); the one of Candomblé in which a devotee makes a voodoo offering before making an offering to the saints and children under Catholic prayers. At one point there is the Umbanda party, where the cult is shared with Crispins, Crispinians and other “children” entities”; there is the one who no longer eats caruru, does not get candies and toys, but has a lifetime “light.” Their devotee, who had been responsible for making a caruru for seven consecutive years, make sure of keeping her candle light burning, replacing it once every seven days, among many other possible varieties (Nascimento 2014, 5).

2. For a better understanding of the different Candomblé “nations”, see Lima (1976). For a correlation table of the Catholic saints and the Candomblé deities, see Silva (2005, 94).

3. An excellent discussion of the cult of twin deities in Brazil and Africa is provided by Lima (2005). For an overview of the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Brazil and Portugal, see Dias (2014).

4. The Catholic liturgical calendar (General Roman Calendar), in its last revision, in 1969, assigned September 26 to the saints Cosmas and Damian, while September 27 was assigned to Saint Vincent de Paul. However, the vast majority of the population continues to celebrate the twin saints on their original date.

5. As shown by Oliveira e Casqueiro (2008, 58-59), the word caruru can be understood in several ways: “a religious ritual, a festive meal ritual, an emblematic dish of Bahian cuisine of African origin, food of saints, and the set of meals that, along with caruru, corresponds to the menu of the mentioned rituals.”

In this article, I turn my attention to one of those countless reinterpretations of the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian: the one made by Julio Valverde and Deborah Valverde's family (figure 1) at the Soteropolitano restaurant, in São Paulo. The issues discussed here, which involves from ritual aspects of the party to the affirmation of a Bahian identity, are based on the testimonies shown in the documentary *Two Brothers*, produced by me with the support of the Laboratory of Image and Sound in Anthropology (LISA) of the University of São Paulo<sup>6</sup>.



**FIGURA 1**  
Deborah Valverde  
and Julio Valverde  
(Picture by Javam  
Ferreira Alves).

### **THE SOTEROPOLITANO RESTAURANT AND THE CARURU**

Julio Valverde is a composer and cook who was born in Salvador, Bahia, in 1944 and has been living in São Paulo since 1986. He had a very close contact with music from an early age: his mother and grandmother were pianists, and his father was an opera lover. Besides the classical music repertoire, the *batucadas* [drum circles] made by the street carnival group in the Tororó neighborhood played a significant role in Julio's musical training, since at those times he was able get acquainted with musical genres such as samba, chula and ijexá, which would become the raw material for his future work as a composer.

Julio's mother, Neusa de Góes Valverde, was a neighbor and friend of Mariá de Almeida. Despite the breakup of his parents' marriage during his teen-age years, which resulted in Neusa's move to Rio de Janeiro, Julio stayed in Salvador with his father, Adálio de Lima Valverde. During that time, Julio continued to come to Almeida's family home and developed strong bonds of friendship with Mariá.

6. The film is available at the following link: <https://youtu.be/SZNaGc4kVNg>

In 1968, Julio went to live in Europe, driven by the need of “taking risk.” Back to Brazil in 1971, he enjoyed a period of greater stability: he got married to Deborah, Mariá’s daughter, and had three children (Guilherme, Ricardo, and Juliana). In 1983, he got a degree in Architecture from the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) – a mere formality, as he had already been working as a model maker and draftsman in renowned architecture companies such as the ones led by Assis Reis and Yoshiakira Katsuki, in addition to having led the construction project of the scale model of Salvador.

In 1986, after working for two years as the manager of the housing development of Caraíba Metais in the district of Pilar (Jaguarari-BA), he convinced his family to move to São Paulo. About this crucial moment, it is worth noting Julio’s own words, which reveal his restless personality:

I had always been moving. I had always been leaving my comfort zone. For example, when I was working down in Caraíba Metais, I was snuggling into a comfortable position. I had everything, a car, a house, and a very good salary. I spent two years there and had nothing left to do, I had already experienced everything possible. And there came a time when I said: “I gotta go.” I dropped everything and came here [*laughs*]. And my colleagues said: “Are you crazy? Are you going to put it all behind?” And I did (Julio Valverde, interview).

In his first years in the new city, Julio worked as an architect for the São Paulo Metropolitan Planning Company (EMPLASA), for the Environmental Company of the State of São Paulo (CETESB), and for the Environmental Bureau. At about the same period, he got into the habit of organizing gastronomic meetings in his house, in which he prepared traditional dishes of Bahia for the family and friends. From then on, he decided to give up his career as an architect to found his own restaurant, the Soteropolitano, which would represent a turning point in his path:

I always say that I used to be paid quite well as an employee, but I don’t make money with the Soteropolitano. I earn very little. But now I am much happier; in fact, I used to be constantly worried in my workplace. I was earning a lot of money, but I was often sick. I felt so bad on that virtually unhealthy environment. So I thought: “I will begin to suffer from depression and begin to spend money with health problems.” So I made this happen and the Soteropolitano came to be my life. I have to say that I’ve always been breaking off commitments, but I’ve never broken away with the Soteropolitano. I found myself in it (Julio Valverde, interview).

The inauguration of the Soteropolitano, in November 1995, was attended by Mariá de Almeida. Her presence was especially significant, for even though she was suffering a deteriorating cancer, she found the strength to bake a celebratory cake for the occasion. As reported by Deborah, the

events that took place during this period were crucial for the awakening of her and Julio's religiosity:

Julio and I used to tell her that we didn't believe in God. And I said that she had to convince me that God really exists. And she said: "Come on guys, you don't believe in God! I brought these [sculptures of] Saints Cosmas and Damian, the patron saints of our food in the Catholic Church, and the *erês*, who are entities who eat the food of the orishas in Candomblé<sup>7</sup>." In the other restaurant<sup>8</sup> there was a little window that looked like a stained-glass, where she asked us to place the sculptures and light a seven-day candle for each one of them once a week. But we didn't care about it. So she did it by herself and went to Salvador. That was in November. In December her health problem worsened. I remember that I went to Salvador on December 10<sup>th</sup>. I stayed there until the 22<sup>nd</sup> and came back to São Paulo to join my children for the New Year's Eve. All my siblings were there except me. Her health was really impaired and she didn't want to have visitors anymore. She then asked my cousin Zé to send for me. He called me and said that he had bought a plane ticket and that he would pick me up at the airport. When I arrived at the hospital on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, my mother was on IV and lying down, but lucid. When she saw me, she took hold of my hand and said: "daughter, you are here, now it's ready." I said: "Ready for what, Mom?" "You were the only one missing here with me. Didn't you want me to prove that God exists?" "Mom, that's all behind me now, it was my rebellious days." "But I want to tell you that I asked Saints Cosmas and Damian to bring you back, and they brought you back to me. Now you are here with me, and everybody is here with me." The next day she asked the priest who blessed [the sculptures of] Saints Cosmas and Damian to do a mass just for her and her family. She died that same day [...]. And they became our gods. And Julio's too, because he lights this candle and now, he feels closer to them than me. He buys the candle every week and asks for it to be lit [...]. It makes us feel good (Deborah Valverde, interview).

Deborah reports that it was Mariá who suggested the Soteropolitano to give a caruru party in honor of their patron saints. This fact is even more relevant when we take into account that Julio Valverde had never organized a caruru party before:

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7. There are many definitions of *erê*: "a trance state different from the orisha state, a state in which unpredictable reactions and behavior of a certain infantile nature predominate" (Luhning 1993, 95); "an infantile quality of the orisha and an interpreter of the saint" (Goldman 1984, 123), necessary for the orisha to speak and the *filho de santo* [Candomblé devotee] to hear; and, still, as it happens in Umbanda, infantile entities that make the connection between the individual and the orisha. It is precisely the infantile aspect of the *erê* state that is responsible for its frequent association with the orisha Ibeji and, consequently, with Saints Cosmas and Damian.

8. From 1995 to 2012, the Soteropolitano operated in Vila Madalena neighborhood. In 2013, the restaurant moved to Vila Romana neighborhood, where it was located until 2020. In 2021, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on restaurant operations, Julio Valverde had to break the rental contract with the owner of the space where the restaurant was located and started cooking in his own home, with the logistical support of his family to sell his dishes on the basis of food delivery format.

I didn't use to celebrate this party at home, I had never done that before. I used to go the other people's houses, to eat [laughs]. Of course, I used to organize cooking events in my house, I always did, but not with this objective of celebrating Saints Cosmas and Damian's day. Because I used to join it, somehow, and I never had this interest. And there was always someone close to me taking the lead, and that was enough for me (Julio Valverde, interview).

Therefore, Mariá's generosity and great endeavor, as shown in her gesture of baking a cake for the inauguration of the Soteropolitano; her role in entrusting Saints Cosmas and Damian as the restaurant's protectors; her suggestion of giving a caruru party every September 27<sup>th</sup>; the feeling that the twin saints made it possible the family reunion before her death; and, finally, Julio and Deborah's desire to make a tribute to Mariá and the saints were the fundamental reasons – but not the only ones, as we shall see – for the continuity of the Soteropolitano's caruru party of Saints Cosmas and Damian, which in 2020 reached its 25<sup>th</sup> edition.

## RITUAL

Outside the Candomblé centers, which usually follow strict rules for the preparation of the offerings to Ibeji and other orishas, the caruru in Bahia allows for some variation in the food items offered by the host (one exception is the okra stew which names the party and is a staple). Based on the traditional caruru, Julio Valverde created his own version of the dish, made of twelve items: “the caruru itself, *vatapá*, *xinxim de galinha*, black-eyed peas, *acarajé*, rice, palm oil *farofa*, sugarcane, coconut, popcorn, fried plantains and *rapadura*” (Julio Valverde, interview).

Preparing a caruru for a large number of people is a demanding job in terms of physical, logistical, and financial effort. According to Julio,

It's a real hard work due to the quantity. It's a quantity for 220 people, that's why it's really hard to do it. I have to buy things in advance and get ready to start working the day before. I have to select things; everything has to be duly noted to avoid last-minute surprises and the need to go running off like a madman. Since our caruru has twelve items, I need to have everything well planned. I make a table of the food items and next to it I place a list of all the ingredients that I use. Many ingredients are used in the same items – dried shrimp, for example, is used in with caruru, *vatapá*, *xinxim de galinha*, and black-eyed peas. So I need to buy the correct amount for the servings of each of these items. Sugarcane, rapadura, fried plantains... there are things that must be prepared on the day and others that can be prepared in advance. I also have to provide okra, and cutting 15 kilos of okra is hard, it requires a lot of people. So people come to help us cut the okra, and this is the hardest part. The shrimp and peanuts must be crushed in a blender. To make the *xinxim de*



*galinha*, I must buy the chicken in advance so I can season it. I chop the chicken to make it easier to eat, to avoid using a knife, since the cutlery is just a fork. Everything must be carefully considered. On the day of the party, I make the caruru and the *vatapá* [...]. And there is also the question of money management, because I go to the grocery store to buy the food items depending on the weekend's income. So all of this has to be timed to avoid problems (Julio Valverde, interview).

On the day of the party, Deborah takes the lead in tidying up the restaurant (tables are removed and chairs placed against the walls); buying candies and preparing gifts to be offered to the children; decorating the environment with balloons and ribbons; and preparing an altar to Saints Cosmas and Damian, with candles, flowers, candies, and the caruru dish itself. The caruru party begins as soon as the doors open promptly at 8 p.m., as described by Julio:

We follow a certain ritual: we first serve seven children sitting on a rug, each one of them with their own bowl. In Bahia, the caruru is served in a bowl, and the seven children who pass by on the street are brought into the house and they eat using their own fingers. Here we can't do this, it's another culture, but we perform this ritual with the children and continue serving them with the plates and cutlery. Deborah delivers a talk about the party and after that I serve the adults. Then we make a circle and sing samba. Everybody dances, it's a great party (Julio Valverde, interview).

Julio's mention of the word "ritual" is especially significant. In *The Ritual Process* (1974), Victor Turner sets forth the difference between life-crisis rites, which change the status of an individual upwards in a society, and calendrical rites, often linked to religious parties, such as September 27<sup>th</sup>, as it is highlighted in this article<sup>9</sup>. For Julio Valverde, this date goes beyond the religious aspect, since it is considered, simultaneously, as the founding moment of his restaurant and the renewal of a cycle: "It seems like New Year's Day. For us, the new year begins on September 27<sup>th</sup>" (Julio Valverde, interview).

Another important point about the ritual is the dialectic between *repetition* and *variation*. For Schechner (2003, 27), the very concept of *performance* presupposes repetition, considering that the artistic, ritual or everyday performances are "'restored behaviors', 'twice-behaved behaviors,' performed actions that people train for and rehearse." In that sense, even the *happening*, the art of chance and spontaneity, as well as everyday activities like cooking, getting dressed, taking a walk and talking to a friend, are performances built from previously exercised behaviors. Repetition,

9. Turner (1974, 202) points out that it is common, in calendrical rites, the temporary reversal of social status. As we will see, this statement is in consonance with the role played by children in Ibeji's parties and in Saints Cosmas and Damian's caruru.

therefore, is what allows Julio Valverde to expose so clearly the sequence of events that make up the structure of his caruru (the act of serving the seven children; Deborah's speech; the distribution of dishes to the adults; the samba playing), duly respected in the caruru parties of 2018 and 2019, when I had the opportunity to make the footage that would serve as the basis of *Two Brothers* documentary. Moreover, the idea of repetition make it is possible to establish an identity connection between the caruru of the Soteropolitano and the existing model in Julio Valverde's memory, created from his former experiences as a caruru participant in Bahia.

However, as Roach (1995, 46) points out, "the paradox of the restoration of behavior resides in the phenomenon of repetition itself: no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice; they must be reinvented or recreated at each appearance." Moreover, in his conception of ritual as a search for understanding the world, Jennings (1982, 114) attributes a fundamental role to variation: "if there were no variation in the ritual performance, we would have to conclude that there is here neither search nor discovery but only transmission and illustration of knowledge gained elsewhere and otherwise." Thus, the continuity of the cult of the twin saints as a structure updated in each conjuncture (Sahlins 1990) is found in its capacity to reflect the idiosyncrasies of the locality where it is practiced; to adapt to the countless life's eventualities, which can change drastically from one year to another (in that sense, the year of 2020 is paradigmatic); and to keep being meaningful for the individuals who attend it and, especially, organize it. As Nascimento (2014, 11) points out,

There is not *one* Cosmas and Damian. There is not *one* Ibeji. There is not *one* caruru ritual under rules and certain precepts for the cult of the twin brothers. Manifestations are diverse, the cult is a tangle of many influences, the ritual reinvents itself and remodels itself in multiple ways to fit the reality of each context, of each devotee. Everything is moved by a living faith accompanied by what is presented as a fundamental part: the caruru and the children (*italics mine*).

Although Turner (2012), under the influence of Arnold van Gennep, has at first associated the concept of *liminality* (a period of vulnerability and suspension of the social status of an individual) to the rites of passage, he comes to include, by using the term *liminoid*, the artistic and leisure activities of contemporary societies as examples of *anti-structure*, the momentary suspension of the social roles normally exercised by individuals in their society life. In these liminal or liminoid states, it makes room for the development of a *communitas*, the feeling of solidarity among the members of the group participating in the ritual, which can occur both in a normative way, imposed by the coordinating body



of the ritual, and spontaneously, through the sincere transmission of human warmth (Schechner 2012, 68). The last one appears to be the case with the Soteropolitano's caruru, since this party enables certain people to reach a *flow* state (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), the total involvement with the action performed:

It's a very favorable atmosphere for socializing, for exchange. It's an amazing day. People are open, free, things happen naturally. It's a great party. My feeling of tiredness disappears, because at some point I'm already overwhelmed and, when the party begins, I feel relaxed. It's fantastic for the people who come and for us. It's a happy day (Julio Valverde, interview).

In his classic study on Ibeji ceremonies in Candomblé centers, René Ribeiro (1957) highlights the capacity of these celebrations to transform everyday power relations. Using a center in Recife with an authoritarian leadership as an example, the author provides a very clear illustration of the anti-structural power of the ritual:

The cult of Ibeji party is the only occasion, in the group of authoritarian leadership, in which the operating rigid controls are broken and a reversal of roles [...] helps easing tensions, what otherwise could lead to direct forms of aggression amongst the participants and the complete rupture of the group. Moreover, this is a moment when the group works non-structurally, without the rigid definition or with each of the members playing their usual roles. Then, they all join in a transcendent goal, which is to provide amusement and pleasure to the children, wiping out the former emphatic lines of subordination and ascendancy in the willful confusion then established (Ribeiro 1957, 140-141).

This feature of the Ibeji party, in which the children are "favored, spoiled, and tolerated in their particular ways of conduct" (Ribeiro 1957, 142) is also noticed in the Soteropolitano's caruru. In a very symbolic way, the seven children who open the ceremony are the only ones, besides the saints, to deserve the honor of eating in clay bowls, while the other participants' food is served in disposable plates. Further, the children are the ones who play the protagonists' role in the party:

[They] sing and dance! There are some amazing children, who really come into tune. For example, my granddaughter Bianca, Israel's [Kislansky] daughter, and other friends' children of us get together and make their own party. Mainly on this day, it is their day, the children's day (Julio Valverde, interview).

As previously mentioned by Deborah, the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian celebrated in the Soteropolitano is not restricted to September 27<sup>th</sup>. Before the closing of the restaurant's physical space, the two brothers' sculptures used to be permanently displayed in a prominent place, always accompanied by a pair of seven-day candles and glasses of soda. However, although Saints Cosmas and Damian have never denied

protection to the Soteropolitano – considering the longevity of the restaurant –, having two children as patron saints of a business enterprise stirs certain consequences:

In 2007, Roberto Mendes invited Julio to play in a *trio elétrico* [a vehicle with a stage for music performance] – it was Julio’s dream – because they did some *trios elétricos* in honor of the chula. We stayed in his house in Santo Amaro and I told him that I had never thrown the *búzios* [divinatory shells] [...]. And he took me to his *mãe de santo* [Candomblé priestess]. When she threw the *búzios* she told me that I was Iansã’s daughter and Julio was Xangô’s son. What she said next got me suspicious: “Do you have a business there in São Paulo with Cosmas and Damian as the patron saints?” I said: “Yes, how do you know that?” “Hahaha, that business will never work, because Cosmas and Damian are children, sometimes they give, sometimes they don’t, they play with you all the time. Do you celebrate a party for them?” Then she turned to Julio: “You are a son of Xangô, you have to display the St Jerome.” He is the saint corresponding to Julio, because Julio is Xangô in the syncretism – “display St Jerome next to Cosmas and Damian and things will get better.” And can you believe it? The business started to flourish! [laughs] (Deborah Valverde, interview).

Although the entertainment, even the child one, is not opposed to seriousness – just as the caruru samba is not opposed to the sacredness of ritual (Iyanaga 2010) –, the search for profit required by the capitalist society is not on the child’s horizon of concern (Villegas 2014, 139). In any case, if on the one hand, this childlike nature of the Soteropolitano may cause problems for the business management – “the financial crisis is permanent,” says Julio –, on the other hand it allows a fundamental part of the Saints Cosmas and Damian celebration to be fully performed: the act of giving.

## GIFT

The rhizomatic, polysemic, and multi-faceted character of the cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian pointed out by Nascimento (2014) is not seen only in the comparison between different forms of celebration. In a single party, as the one promoted by the Soteropolitano, the motivations, expectations, and meanings of each person attending the event may be tangled in a complex web.

Julio and Deborah cannot say whether Mariá’s request to offer the caruru came from a promise between her and the saints. In popular Catholicism, making a promise is a contract through which the devotee asks his or her patron saint (or one specialized in a specific cause) to resolve an adversity. When presenting the case, the faithful one promises that if he or she obtains the grace a reward will be given to the saint. It can take many forms, such as a physical effort, a cash donation, a party to honor the saint patron, production of former vows, and so on (Gonçalves 2019). In

that sense, we could characterize the Catholic promise as a relationship composed by the acts of *requesting*, *promising*, *receiving* and *giving back*.

A devotee might be making good on that promise for a long time after the grace obtained; In the same way, it is common that the devotion to the saint and the making good on a promise be passed on from parents to children (Jesus 2006). In the case of Julio and Deborah, the continuous celebration of the caruru of Saints Cosmas and Damian can be understood as an *obligation* that must be performed even in exceptional times such as the Covid-19 pandemic; as a *tribute* to Mariá for her efforts in the inaugurating process of the Soteropolitano; and, of course, as a sincere *devotion* to the twin saints.

Following the tradition of the caruru party held in Bahia, in the Soteropolitano restaurant the meal is served free of charge to the guests, including the candies and gifts for the children. This gesture can be understood from the paradigm of the *gift* proposed by Mauss (2003), in which a both voluntary and obligatory relationship of *giving*, *receiving* and *giving back* is established. As explained by Aldeia (2014, 175),

In *praxis*, the moments of gift intermix completely. In giving, I receive. In receiving, I repay. In repaying, I give. This does not mean that interest in itself is the major factor in the gift [...]. Of course, there is an interest, but reducing to it the whole gift is to simplify the point; it is to remove it from the gift in order to place it on the market. To give and receive is not the same as to give *in order to* receive, just as it is not the same as to give in order to receive the satisfaction of giving and to give in order to be repaid in the form of an asset or service.

Thus, the offering of the caruru to saints Cosmas and Damian in the Soteropolitano takes place in a spiral in which the will to give, the fulfillment of Mariá's request, the gratitude for the protection of the divinities, and the expectation of continuing to receive it are superimposed. The party, therefore, does not mark especially a moment of asking for or thanking for; it is a moment of "asking-thanking for" (Menezes 2004).

Although most of the participants in the Soteropolitano's caruru are family members, friends and close customers, the party is open to the public and it is very common to find people who visit the Soteropolitano only on this day. The presence of these occasional participants, and the fact that the party is dedicated especially to the children, demonstrates that there is no expectation of a retribution for the gift in the basis of the principle of equivalence, as it happens in the market economy. It is precisely this gap between the offering of caruru and what is expected of a restaurant (the food business) that raised questions in the mind of some customers not

so used to the playful atmosphere of the Soteropolitano, being gift one of its characteristics. As Julio explains,

There are people who don't believe that I offer free food. "How can you offer free food in a party?" This is an infernal stuff for certain people, they don't accept that. It's impossible [...]. They just can't get it into their heads. Because they only think in terms of business, trade, profit [...]. So they don't admit that, they don't get it (Julio Valverde, interview).

Godbout (1998) points out that, despite the material pressures suffered by individuals in capitalist society, from the struggle for survival to the accumulation of wealth, no one lives only on his salary or profit; in that sense, the gift, by calling into question the excessive importance of the *homo oeconomicus*, is at the root of a new sociological understanding:

Why does someone give something? If we admit the above, the answer is simple: to connect to life and make circulate things in a living system, to break the circle of loneliness, to feel that you are not alone and that you belong to something bigger, particularly humanity, every time you give something to a stranger, a stranger who lives on the other side of the planet, who you will never see [...]. The gift is what circulates in the service of the social bond, what brings it to light, what feeds it. From the gifts-giving family and friends to donating during a major natural disaster, giving to street beggars, the blood donation, it is fundamentally to feel this communication, to break the isolation, to feel your own identity (Godbout 1998, n.p.).

Godbout's mention of identity is especially significant because, in the case of Julio and Deborah, the Saints Cosmas and Damian's party led to new insights of oneself both in the individual (the late discovery of religiosity, for instance) and in the social dimensions.

### **BAHIAN IDENTITY**

It is well known that the attempt to reconstruct cultural elements of the homeland is one of the most effective ways for the migrant to constitute "a home away from home" (Lara 2005, 14). In the case of the Valverde family, even before the foundation of the Soteropolitano, there had already been a concern of not breaking the bonds with Bahia:

In our first year in São Paulo, Julio decided to hold a St John's feast on our street. It was freezing, the kids had never been to a St John's feast here. We were the only ones celebrating it, nobody else came to the street. Then he decided to go with the kids knocking from door to door to invite the neighbors and tell them that it was a tradition in Bahia, especially in the countryside, but in Salvador it is celebrated too. And this feast was a success, because we played St John's music in the garage. Then every year the neighbors asked him to make this party (Deborah Valverde, interview).

The success of the street party moved Julio, years later, to repeat it at the Soteropolitano. However, the different context (his house is located in a quiet street in the area of Jaguaré neighborhood, while the restaurant's first location was in the busiest part of Vila Madalena) made the idea unsuccessful:

I tried to celebrate St John's feast a few times, but I gave up because this party involves a hard work, and people don't get it very well. In addition, there is also a fundamental thing in a St John's feast: the bonfire. I wasn't allowed to start a fire [in Vila Madalena]. Once I did that, and it was a shitty thing. They complained about the mess on the sidewalk [laughs]. Doing that at home was calmer, I invited the neighbors, and there was no complaint at all [laughs] (Julio Valverde, interview).

In addition to the St John's feast, the Valverde family also organized a washing of the Soteropolitano's stairs, inspired by the traditional Washing of the Bonfim Church held in Salvador. This time, what prevented it from being maintained was an economic issue:

I held it four times in Vila Madalena. There was a parade, the washing of the stairs followed by a party inside the restaurant. I stopped doing that because it was complicated, it was held on Saturdays and I've always worked for a living on weekends. So, holding the washing, I couldn't make money on Saturday, which was a big problem for me (Julio Valverde, interview).

Thus, due to its special significance for the Valverde family, the Saints Cosmas and Damian's caruru was the only celebration from Bahia that continued to be held without a break throughout the past 25 years of the Soteropolitano, even in the years when the date was on a weekend and meant a loss of revenue for the restaurant.

More than a response to feelings of nostalgia (Baily and Collier 2006, 171), the founding of the Soteropolitano, the recreation of Bahia's manifestations and the preservation of the accent were parts of an affirmation process of a Bahian social identity<sup>10</sup> (Techio et al 2015), which was fundamental to overcoming the challenges imposed by the metropolis of São Paulo:

I haven't lost my Bahian identity. I'm still a Bahian, after almost 30 years here. It's the same thing, I'm a native Bahian, a Soteropolitano<sup>11</sup>. And I preserve the origins, the tradition, the Bahian culture. In fact, the Soteropolitano [restaurant] is a result of it. Mainly to preserve this tradition of Bahian cuisine without making any change, without adding, or making anything up. They are the traditional recipes. This is also a way to guarantee this memory, this tradition (Julio Valverde, interview).

10. Based on Henri Tajfel's studies, Techio et al (2015, 80) define social identity as an individual's "self-concept that comes from the knowledge and recognition of their membership of a particular social group or category, with the evaluative and emotional meaning associated with this membership."

11. *Soteropolitano* [Soteropolitan] is the demonym of people born in Salvador.

This issue of roots, of identity, is very strong. I guess it's really part of our culture. It's really strong [...]. So it's a great thing that we have this revenue [with the Soteropolitano] and that we haven't lost our identity. I think this is a defense of mine. I've been living here for over 30 years and I haven't lost my accent. I say that speaking *Bahian*, that is, the Bahian accent, is my defense. At the same time, we don't behave arrogantly. Because there are some people who hold to this question of origins and behave arrogantly, we're not like that. We present our culture as a pleasure, and I guess that the same happens where Julio is. People want to share with him this knowledge we have from Bahia (Deborah Valverde, interview).

In a survey conducted by Techio et al (2015) with college students from Bahia, most of them answered that the basic principle of “being bahian” is a geopolitical matter, that is, having been born or lived in Bahia. However, more subjective aspects, such as happiness, hospitality, tolerance, and resilience, are also mentioned by a significant number of respondents. Taking into account that similar notions are mentioned by Mariano (2019) and Aragão and Arruda (2008), who, respectively, approach Bahia from the point of view of songwriters and students from other Brazilian states<sup>12</sup>, declaring oneself Bahian involves much broader meanings than the territorial one.

As owners of a Bahian restaurant, Julio and Deborah came to be considered by their customers as representatives of their state's culture. However, this social identity was not innate but rather “constructed in a psycho-social process of recognition and self-recognition linked to the sense of belonging” (Techio et al 2015, 85), which required some polishing:

In Bahia there is this matter of the Candomblé with the Church, the syncretism. I just never cared for that [...]. When we opened the restaurant, I realized that I was uninformed about these things, because people questioned me and I knew nothing, because I just lived there. So I began researching. I asked a professor of mine from UFBA to send me articles about the Candomblé. I wanted to understand it right away and then one day, I went into a bookshop downtown and found a book by Carybé called *As sete portas da Bahia* [Carybé 1962]. I found in it everything I wanted about Bahia's culture [...]. It presents Candomblé in such a didactic way that I fell in love with it. It dawned on me at last (Deborah Valverde, interview).

12. It is interesting to note that, in Aragão and Arruda's research, “non-Bahian students address Bahians as *lerdos* [slowpoke], while for the Bahian students, this characteristic has a connotation of tranquility, no stress” (2008, 192). However, in the survey made by Techio et al (2015), Bahian students consider the willingness to work hard one of the main characteristics of Bahian people. Similarly, the prejudicious attitude of associating Bahian people with laziness is vehemently refuted by Deborah: “this label is disrespectful, because they think we aren't productive, that we are always putting off the deadline, and even that we are unable to think.”



Although the fundamental reason for holding the Saints Cosmas and Damian's caruru at the Soteropolitano was the tribute to Mariá and the twin saints, the party progressively became the restaurant's peak moment of exaltation and dissemination of Bahian culture. Julio recognizes the didactic aspect of the Caruru, since it is "a form of bringing some type of manifestation of Bahian culture here in São Paulo" (Julio Valverde, interview).

In discourses on migrant communities, there is still a strong tendency to view them as homogeneous entities, ignoring the fact that the individuals who make them up may present considerable differences with regard to ethnicity, social class, religion, and age group (Baily and Collyer 2006, 171; Lidskog 2016, 3). Similarly, the production of an identity discourse and the reconstitution of elements of the homeland are not a rule among immigrants: as shown in the film *Two Brothers*, Neide Silva, a Soteropolitano staff member, attributes to the restaurant her knowledge of what being a "real Bahian" means, considering that her parents, for the most different reasons, did not tell her what Bahia is – at least not the Soteropolitan Bahia which names the restaurant:

I got to know the real Bahians here [...]. Because my parents are Bahians, they came to São Paulo and I had no contact with Bahia people, their lives, their daily lives. And here, I took in a lot of knowledge (Neide Silva, interview).

However, the Bahian religiosity based on Candomblé, exalted by the restaurant through the caruru party and exhibition of artistic works (sculptures, paintings, and pictures) with representations of the orishas, brought her tense times regarding her evangelical faith:

I was a Pentecostal. Then, when I started working here, I didn't know Mrs. Deborah and Mr. Julio were members of Candomblé<sup>13</sup>. And I had to make a decision. I kept blaming myself, thinking: "how can I work in a place where I, who am totally against drinking, have to prepare *caipirinha* to serve people?" It made me feel terrible. So I talked to the pastor, who said it wasn't right. How will I testify? I was caught between a rock and a hard place. I needed the job, but I also had my faith. And then one day a guy [...] told me that working here was God's will and I shouldn't be like that, I shouldn't be sad, for God knew that I could make it and nothing would change what I really was. They had their religion and I had mine, and there's only one God. So I continued working here up to now. In my first caruru party I saw people receiving orishas and I got terrified<sup>14</sup>. I was puzzled. I went outside to take a breath. Then Neto [Deb-

13. In fact, Julio and Deborah do not consider themselves Candomblé practitioners. In turn, their children Guilherme Valverde and Ricardo Valverde are members of the Kyloatala Candomblé center, located in Embu-Guaçu (SP).

14. As for the demonization of Saints Cosmas and Damian's candies promoted by evangelic Pentecostal churches, especially by the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, see Dias' articles (2013; 2015).

orah's brother-in-law] said: "Neide, that's perfectly understandable." That was difficult. After the second caruru, I was more relaxed. And today it doesn't bother me anymore. I have a funny relationship with the sculptures of Cosmas and Damian. Now I light the candle and I serve guarana to them. And one of these days the girls [other employees] asked me: "gee, did you drink Cosmas's guarana!?" "I can, they are my friends, they don't mind if I drink" [laughs] [...]. Now I even chat with them. I get close, light the candle and chat with them. That's OK. We became friends [laughs]. And when I tell this, people look at me and ask: "But, aren't you an evangelic?" And I say: "Yes, but I've learned to respect other people's religion. I respect them and they respect me, and everything is fine" (Neide Silva, interview).

More than tolerating other people's religion, Neide points out that her work in the Soteropolitano made it possible a particular encounter which was responsible for a growth of her own spirituality:

A co-worker and friend of mine named Fabíola, was an Umbanda member. I used to argue with her about it. And one day she asked me: "why don't you come [to the Umbanda center] one of these days?" I went twice. And then I saw that I was wrong. Eventually, I became Spiritist too. There I went for a longer while, because I wanted to delve into that religion. The Evangelical Church with those concepts was the religion of my birth, but Spiritism is the religion of my heart. If I had to choose, I would be a Kardecist. Because this is the religion in which I've delved. I like it, I believe in it. When I arrived at the Kardecist center I had another vision of everything I had learned. I got the answers I was looking for. You can attend a religion for years, and yet, don't find what you are looking for. Because it's not the church you are looking for, but the answers. And in Kardecism I found some things that were inside of me. It's my second choice. I attend the Evangelical Church, but it's my second choice (Neide Silva, interview).

With regard to music, which is the most practiced artistic activity in the Soteropolitano, its power of communicating, thrilling, congregating, and mobilizing, but also demarcating boundaries between social groups (Lidskog 2016), makes it play an essential role in the construction of identities. At the close of the Saints Cosmas and Damian's caruru party, for example, the predominant music genres are *terreiro* music and *samba de roda*, which, for the association with the idea of an ancestral Bahia, reinforce the authority of the Soteropolitano as a qualified space that knows how to celebrate a caruru party.

Rice (2016, 148) points out, however, that identity is always multiple and fragmented, varying according to particular contexts and

specific performances<sup>15</sup>. Thus, Julio Valverde considers the Soteropolitano as a cultural center, since, in addition to promoting, before the Covid-19 pandemic, events such as art exhibitions and book launches, the restaurant organized regular musical gastronomic events for friends and close customers, the so-called *Confraria do Soteropolitano*. Mentioning this event is important due to two aspects: the dishes prepared by Julio at the *Confraria* are not the ones on the restaurant's menu, which allows him to free himself from the duty to preserve the "tradition of Bahian cuisine without changing, adding or inventing anything"<sup>16</sup>; and musical performances, usually by professional musicians under the complete silence of the audience, are performed according to the format that Turino (2008) calls *presentational* (when there is a clear distinction between musicians and audience), unlike the *caruru*, when the performance takes place in *participatory* mode, in which there is not a clear distinction between musicians and audience<sup>17</sup>.

In the same way, although some compositions such as *Saveiro* and *Bumba-meu-boi*<sup>18</sup> reveal a nostalgic Bahia of the 1950s – which may indirectly contribute to his recognition as a "real Bahian" –, Julio is partner with Soteropolitano's client-poets whose writing styles are strongly linked to São Paulo urbanity, such as Fabricio Corsaletti, Alexandre Barbosa e Karmo, which is often reflected in a broadening of the range of musical genres used in their compositions (*samba*, *ijexá*, *lambada*, *baião*, *frevo*, rock, among others). In that sense, even if the idea of *tradition* is strongly present in the discourses about the Soteropolitano, it was necessary that the Valverde family also made a *translation* movement (Hall 2006), the negotiation that people who are scattered far beyond their homeland establish with the new culture in which they live, looking for a balance between the maintenance of their identities and the assimilation of new cultural languages.

Although we cannot deny the participation of writers, musicians, publicists, tourism entrepreneurs, and public authorities in the construction of what has been called *bahianity* (Bezerra and Schvarzman 2010; Mariano 2019), *idea of Bahia* (Pinho 1998), or *Bahian identity* (Techio et al 2015), and that these same notions may find echoes in the discourses of the

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15. Here we can draw a parallel with Novaes' concept of *self-image*, which is constructed "from very specific concrete relations that a society or a social group establishes with others" (1993, 27).

16. This does not mean that Julio doesn't have creative freedom in his cooking, as shown in the very particular seasoning of his wonderful *moquecas*, as well as the famous *abadejo no caju*, a dish of his own.

17. Of course, in participatory mode there may be rules of good conduct. In the Soteropolitano's samba performance, for example, the *atabaques* [hand drums] are usually played by members of the Valverde family or by professional level musicians. Likewise, only singers who are very familiar with the repertoire dare to lead the singing of a samba.

18. The videos of *Saveiro* and *Bumba-meu-boi* can be seen, respectively, at the following links: [https://youtu.be/\\_AD5t7hhfwE](https://youtu.be/_AD5t7hhfwE) and <https://youtu.be/U0ffryV74vY>

Bahians themselves, both as a possibility of self-affirmation and as a tool for subsistence in their own land or away from it, it is necessary to emphasize that the Bahia that Julio Valverde sings about in *Saveiro* and *Bumba-meu-boi* is the Bahia he lived in:

Saveiro boats transported goods from the Recôncavo to Salvador and they arrived at the ramp of the Mercado Modelo. And it was a very beautiful scene. The saveiro sails are awesome. I traveled by saveiro a few times to Bom Jesus dos Passos. A neighbor of mine had a house there and he used to take me there when I was a kid. But then the saveiro boats became schooners for tourists and their structure was completely changed [...]. Saveiro boat use to be meaningful to me. Just like the song *Saveiro*, another thing that I made a point of writing was *Bumba-meu-boi*, because I had a dream and I remembered that we used to travel to Itapuã. It was very far away at that time and people who lived in Salvador used to spend summer there. In Itapuã I saw *Bumba-meu-boi* festival and I wrote this song based on that trip [...]. And that moment in Itapuã was a very enjoyable and beautiful experience. It was a modest village, the straw houses, with fresh air, a kind of freedom we don't have today [...]. That was a wonderful thing (Julio Valverde, interview).

This is the Bahia, after all, to which his restaurant pays homage.

## CONCLUSION

In the hall of the Soteropolitano there was a mural, made by Guilherme Valverde, with excerpts from Julio Valverde's songs and phrases he usually says. One of these phrases had an enigmatic nature: "I make my own time." Thus, in the chaos of São Paulo city, Julio championed contemplation, maturation, and enjoyment. With the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the liminality of ritual meetings, which were capable of transporting us to a state of temporary suspension of our daily obligations, gave rise to a very long "non-time."

If the concepts of ritual and gift, linked by the importance of the meeting's moment and by the possibility of establishing ideal human relationships (Small 1998; Godbout 1998)<sup>19</sup> could be summoned to an understanding of the Saints Cosmas and Damian's Caruru, how to explain its being carried out in the atypical year of 2020, when it was only possible to promote an intimate celebration behind closed doors and for the first time, in order to cover the expenses, the dishes had to be sold instead of donated? "I've only fulfilled my obligation," replies Julio Valverde. In memory of Mariá, for the patron saints, and for his restaurant<sup>20</sup>.

19. Although Small (1998, 95) associates only ritual with the idea of exploration, affirmation, and celebration of ideal human relationships, I think it relates particularly well to Godbout's view of gift as "the state of a person who, resisting entropy, transcends the deterministic mechanical experience of loss by connecting to the experience of life, emergence, birth, creation" (1998, n.p.).

20. It should be noted that Julio Valverde only took the decision to sell the caruru dishes after Tata Kilonderu, leader of the Kyloatala Candomblé center, informed him that the

TRANSLATION  
Yuri Prado and  
Rubens Lacerda  
de Sá.

But there is still one last point. When Julio Valverde says with regret, in the final part of the film *Two Brothers*, that despite the hard work in the preparation of the caruru, it wasn't possible to see, but only *imagine* the emotion of the people receiving their dishes, a sparkle of hope is created, since as noted by Appadurai (1996, 181) in a very sensitive way, a *locality* is a "structure of feeling" that needs effort to exist. Whether it be Mariá's inauguration physical effort; the effort of her family in fulfilling, over 25 years, the obligation of keeping the party; or, finally, the effort of reconstitution, in the imagination, of that liminal space where it is possible to exercise the making of our own time.

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