



ESTARREJA'S CARNIVAL – PART II: THE NIGHT PARADE

It was February 28, 2025. We arrived in Estarreja about 30 minutes before the start of the samba schools' night parade and we could notice that there was a lot of movement around the city for the Carnival. There are some people in costumes and gathered in groups, but the general crowd is made up of families and everyone is heavily dressed with layers because of the cold weather. Unlike a Brazilian Carnival, where the party and the noise take all the streets by storm, here we have a fairly restrained Carnival, with people going to the Carnival site in an organized way and talking at a remarkably low volume.

We took a short break for dinner at a snack stand and then ran to our section of the grandstand, having to cross the Carnival avenue, where the parade would take place, in order to get there. At this point, I almost lost Leo, who was anxious and afraid of missing the parade. Ultimately, everything went well and we got ready to watch the first procession.

Right from the start, the atmosphere in the stands is unlike a Carnival parade in Brazil. There are hardly any people chatting, singing, dancing or celebrating. The public's reaction is limited to watching the parade, whose first school on the avenue is *Trepa de Estarreja* [Estarreja's Climbing], whose theme is dedicated to the work of António Variações, the unique Portuguese musician who was a hit in the late '70s and early '80s.

The school's parade features a front commission that, unlike *Vai Quem Quer* [Whoever wants to go], has only a few men parading. The male presence is timid throughout the parade, but appears in some allegories and wings. During this parade, we go through the evolution of António Variações' career, with highlights such as a beauty salon or a stage with António at the center, illuminated by LED panels and a disco globe.

In the audience, there are timid reactions, such as brief claps to accompany the music and a few screams whenever a wing passes close to a group of supporters of that particular school. However, there is no sign of dancing in the stands. A drone passes by with the school's flag high above the avenue, which attracts the public's attention. On the avenue, the *passistas* send kisses to friends they locate in the stands and are extremely smiley, in a gesture of happiness for having accomplished a lengthy job, at the same time as they are performing as *passistas* parading on the avenue. Meanwhile, the parade organizers stand to the side, following each wing, always keeping an eye on the time and shouting to the passistas "C'mon, let's go!", signaling that they must run to meet the parade time.







Figures 1 to 3. Samba School "*Trepa de Estarreja*" Parade

At the end of the first parade, I take a short break to get some beers and, in the bar, there is already a gathering of *carnavalescos* and supporters, to the sound of "*Alegria*" by Ivete Sangalo. The groups are quite restricted and there isn't much room for interaction, but I did notice a few carnival performers from the "*Charanguinho*" group from Ovar, who were excited about the next school to parade, *Vai Quem Quer*. I got the impression that the "*Charanguinho*" group from Ovar immediately commented: "They've already won, they don't even need to compete". My colleague Leo also endorsed this chorus, arguing that *Vai Quem Quer* presented a parade much closer to a Rio de Janeiro parade than the previous school. Despite my sympathy for *Vai Quem Quer* for the reception we received, I confess that I was more impressed by the first school (*Trepa de Estarreja*), despite being a complete outsider when it comes to Carnival. Surprisingly, my lack of knowledge was matched by the judges' votes, as *Trepa de Estarreja* and its António Variações were the winners of the parade.







Figures 4 to 6. Samba School "*Vai Quem Quer*" Parade

Following the *Vai Quem Quer* parade, we had the *Os Morenos* school, with a theme focused on the universe of literature and its importance. With a samba-enredo that mixed dreams, fairy tales and a passion for the blue and white school, the parade was – possibly – the one that elicited the most response from the public. Of particular note in this parade was the presence of a disabled child, parading alongside his walker as a lost boy from Peter Pan's Neverland. I could also see that, for the children in the stands, it was a great time of celebration, either throwing confetti on the avenue or joining the barriers of the stands to get a closer look at the parade.







Figures 7 to 9. Samba School "*Os Morenos*" Parade

Finally, there was the parade of the *Samba Tribal* school, which presented a parade paying homage to the African continent. This may have been the parade that most surprised us, either because it presented a tribal Africa, with an emphasis on savannahs and animals (such as a zebra on one of the allegorical elements), or because it featured Portuguese passistas parading with wigs that emulated curly hair and black power – was this a gesture of recognition and respect for differences? I'd rather see it this way than believe it's just a case of cultural appropriation. At the end of the parade, another surprise: the school had a black carnival designer at the head of the samba-enredo, possibly the person who suggested the African theme.







Figures 10 to 12. Samba School "*Samba Tribal*" Parade

If, at first, I had a gigantic impression that it was all a melting pot of cultural appropriation rather than a melting pot of cultural hybridity (Canclini, 1990; Bhabha, 1998), the more I reflected, the more I understood that I was facing a large third space, defined by Bhabha as the:

> contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation [...] It is the Third Space that, although in itself unrepresentable, constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation, ensuring that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity – and that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read in another way.
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> (Bhabha, 1998, pp. 67-68)

This third space that we have located, when looked at through a decolonial perspective (Walsh, 2006), brings out a series of ambivalences, among which I wonder if this translation and re-signification of cultural practices from the Brazilian Carnival respect the country of origin or if it can be interpreted as a subtle gesture of recolonization. The same question applies to the representation of Africa: Is it a gesture of honour and appreciation of the continent's history or an appropriation that can be read as a subtle gesture of recolonization? Furthermore, does the fact that they sing in Brazilian Portuguese signify a respect for this variant of the language? How does this subsequently impact the lives of those who take part in this Carnival? And does the figure of the sensual woman represented by the passistas symbolize an emancipation of the Portuguese female body or perpetuate exoticized images of Brazilian women?

I would like to stress that these questions are meant to stimulate a debate, especially from a decolonial point of view. However, I would like to highlight the joy (albeit modest) of everyone who visited the Estarreja Carnival. I hope that initiatives such as the Estarreja Carnival will pave the way for greater tolerance of linguistic varieties and collective imaginaries in Portugal, even if it is through a confusing third space that promotes multiculturalism in the Estarreja style.

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Published in June 12, 2025

This micro-essay is the second part of a duology entitled ***"Estarreja's Carnival: A Third Space created by the Samba Schools"****. The first part can be read here.*

References

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