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# Pillars: Archaeology, Wealth and Material Life at Bush Hil

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## June 2007 Newsletter

### **The Politics of Culture and Diaspora Settlement in Lagos: Ethnographic Presentation of the African Brazilian Fanti/Caretta Carnival**

By Alaba Simpson\*

This paper offers an ethnographic presentation of the politics of Diaspora settlement in Lagos, using the popular Fanti/Caretta carnival as point of assessment. It notes that the seemingly entertaining cultural aspect of the people of Lagos as highlighted by the Fanti/Caretta carnival goes beyond mere aesthetic appeal and appreciation that largely characterizes the subject. It emphasizes some cultural and remarkable features that characterized the years which immediately followed the abolition of the slave trade and the ensuing return to Nigeria of some liberated slave descendants from Brazil, where a significant proportion of the slaves from the West coast of Africa had been transported. The people, who at their return, were settled in the Campos area of the Lagos Island, had brought with them some aspects of Portuguese culture from Brazil, and largely incorporated these into the existing cultural patterns in Lagos, among which was the Caretta (later known as Fanti).

The returnees were largely believed to have experienced exclusion as they tried to integrate with the culture of the larger Lagos Island. The strains that were involved in the adjustment procedures motivated the Diaspora community to seek solace in the performance of the Caretta carnival which was a socio-cultural activity that was practiced by them during the time of slavery in Brazil. The carnival has metamorphosed over the years into a widely accepted

cultural feature of the people of Lagos. Through the present ethnographic report the carnival is being presented as a profitable window through which specific aspects of the earlier indigenes versus African Brazilian inter-group relational activities in the area can be gauged.

### **Background to Study**

This paper is derived from an ethnographic research work that was carried out among the inhabitants of Lagos Island in Nigeria (2002-2004). Related photographs by the author are presented at the end of the paper.

### **Introduction**

The years that immediately followed the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the ensuing return of some liberated slaves from Brazil where a significant proportion of the slaves from Africa were transported, were quite remarkable in Lagos. This is because the people experienced seclusion on arrival as they were settling into the culture from where their ancestors had left as slaves and where they had now returned to settle. They had brought with them some aspects of the Portuguese culture from Brazil, including the “Careta” carnival which later came to assume the name “Fanti.” These cultural practices introduced a basic dimension of re-contact that can be described as “recycled acculturation.” The latter is relatively indicative of a two-way culture contact or cultural diffusion among a people facing a new experience of being re-groomed at their return from the land of slavery into their original culture. The process of re-grooming had to contend with a backlog catalogue of the imbibed culture from Brazil.

Along this line, the Nigeria Magazine (1975) has noted the cultural importation of acquired experiences by the post slavery African returnees to Nigeria:

*During the slave trade period, many Nigerians were taken to Brazil where several generations lived and died. With the abolition of the slave trade,*

*the emancipated ones returned home, bringing with them, elements of Brazilian cultures that were deep rooted in their experiences.*

*(Nigeria Magazine, 1975:52)*

Herskovitz (1962) has emphasized the inevitability of some change or the other in the meeting of cultures over time. Thus, the mechanism of cultural diffusion, culture contact or acculturation was explained by him as quoted below:

*it means that whenever people having different customs come together, they modify their ways by taking over something from those with whom they newly meet. They may take over much or little....*

*(Herskovitz, op cit:206)*

Although some scholars have attempted the presentation of the Lagos experience in its relationship with the African Brazillian settlement on its shores (Omenka, 2004), the dearth of sociological and ethnographic writings on the subject has so far not allowed this aspect of the culture of Lagos to be adequately approached at the level of research investigations.

The socio-cultural practices that are involved in the Carreta turned Fanti carnival presently require documentation that goes beyond mere aesthetic manifestations of the carnival's representation but preserves in addition, the memory of slave trade among the people of Lagos and its immediate environment. "Freedom Dance" (Simpson, 1992) which the erstwhile slaves practiced on the plantation field is still very much to date, a part of the cultural practice in the former slave port of Badagry in Nigeria.

The absence, to a large extent, of sociological and ethnographic writings on the subject of settlement by the returned descendants of the Atlantic slave trade captives has so far not allowed this aspect of the culture of Lagos to be adequately approached at the level of research investigations. The present work therefore offers an ethnographic documentation of Fanti as an

aspect of the socio-cultural relationship between the African Brazilians and their traditional cousins on the island of Lagos, bringing to bare, the undertones of political anthropology as characterizing such relationships.

Undoubtedly, the African-Brazilians that arrived in Lagos had been greatly acculturated by their Brazilian slave captors-turned-mentors. For example, the main Christian denominational faith of Catholicism was profoundly impressed upon the lifestyle of the returnees, an attribute that gave rise to their being referred to as “Aguda,” the popular name by which the adherents of the Catholic denomination are called. Similarly, the taking on of Portuguese names was greatly reflected in the overall social presentation of the people.

The phrases from the Portuguese language during normal conversation or discussions has come to reveal over time, the impact of Portuguese influence on the general lifestyle of the African Brazilian in Lagos. Consequently, they began to practice the trades which they had learnt while in the land of their captivity. Such trade included building, tailoring, carpentry, welding and so on. These were soon emulated by the people of Lagos who came to acquire some of the traits in African-Brazilian life patterns.

Such acquired culture traits of African-Brazilian origin cut across different aspects of the people’s lifestyle. These include religion, music, dances, festivals and carnivals, social performances, dress modes, food types and their preparations as well as architectural designs. Indeed, the impact of the architectural aesthetics on the Lagos island and beyond has proved a major point in establishing the presence of African-Brazilian influence on Lagos across time.

### **Lagos State: A Brief Overview**

The island of Lagos, which by far predates the State named after it, was originally given its name by the Portuguese who called it “Lago de Kuramo,” having been attracted to the

area by its suitability as a slave port (Burns, 1955:3). Originally, its earlier foundational refuge-seeking settlers called Lagos “Eko,” and it is still very much known by this native name in contemporary times. Indeed, the central point of Lagos is commonly referred to as “Isale Eko,” a term that may be taken to infer “The core area of Lagos.”

As the erstwhile Federal Capital Territory, the island of Lagos has gained wide popularity both at home and abroad, and it is by the same Portuguese-derived name that Lagos State, which is the present commercial capital of Nigeria has come to be named.

Administratively, Lagos State covers five main divisions that today, are becoming more and more relevant to the spread of the African-Brazilian Fanti heritage. These divisions are: Ikeja, Badagry, Ikorodu, Epe and Lagos.

As already noted above, Lagos State is doubtless regarded in Nigeria as the central point of commerce and industry, even after the capital of the Federation was moved to Abuja, in the Northern part of the country.

### **Relics and Evidences of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade**

There still exist in Lagos State, relics of slave trade related materials that have direct relevance to Portuguese, French and British presence in the area, just as there remain in the Republic of Benin and Ghana, evidences of Dutch, Portuguese French and British related slave castles and other relics of the horrible trade (Anquanda, 1999; Simpson, 2004). An example of these is found in the Portuguese umbrella gift to the erstwhile slave dealer in Badagry Chief Williams Seriki Abbas. The umbrella, which was presented to the slave dealer around the 17th century, is presently an object of exhibition at the Seriki Abbas compound in Badagry town, though worn and presently falling into shreds.



**The Umbrella at the installation of Chief Seriki Abbas  
in Badagry during the 17th Century.**



**The umbrella as recorded in the year 2001.**

Apart from the ancient umbrella, there exists to date in Badagry, the slave market, which still contain the well from which water was drawn for the slaves to drink. Also, in existence are the baracoons that held the slaves in custody as they awaited their final movement through the Badagry lagoon to Gberefu, the island in Badagry from where they went through the “point of no return” unto the awaiting ship that transported them to the land of slavery.

### **Aguda in Popular Sayings of Lagos**

Whichever way they are perceived, there remain certain characteristics that are identified with the Aguda, and these have come to be built into popular Yoruba sayings in Lagos in contemporary times. Such sayings, some of which are examined below, will no doubt assist in generating deeper understanding of the ways in which the concept of Aguda is perceived among the people of Lagos State.

**“Jaguda je Gbaguda Aguda.”** The last three letters that form the phrase “guda” in the words “Jaguda,” “Gbaguda” and “Aguda” reveal the tongue twisting nature of this saying that came to render it popular among the people of Lagos. In the saying, “*Jaguda*,” which is one of the alternative words for “ole” (meaning “thief”), is said to have eaten the cassava (*gbaguda*) of the *Aguda* (the African-Brazilian). Some older members of the Lagos island community are of the belief that the word “jaguda” actually derived from the Yoruba expression “ja Aguda l’ole.” This simply means “stealing from the Aguda.” The saying also illustrates the elitist status that was believed to have been associated with the early African-Brazilians in Lagos State, a view that persists to date. Accordingly, there was indeed, the idea of superiority carriage attached to the character of the African-Brazilians, as they were deemed to be more enlightened than their counterparts that were not as exposed to European culture and other aspects of Western lifestyle. The arrival of the African-Brazilians no doubt met with occasional pilfering by petty thieves



around the Lagos Island who were attracted by the excess substance in terms of material and edible goods possessed by the newly arrived Aguda. Based on the foregoing, the saying: “Jaguda je gbaguda Aguda” (the thief has stolen the cassava of the Aguda) is depictive of the initial situation surrounding the settlement of the Aguda on the island of Lagos. Cassava is one of the main ingredients used by the Aguda in the preparation of “Tapioca” which is eventually made into “Mengau,” a major delicacy among the people of Lagos till date. It is also used in making “gari,” a staple food in Nigeria.

**“Aguda ko je l’abe Geesi, Owo l’o pa won po.”** One of the notable explanations for this saying is founded on the realization that the African-Brazilians at the time of their return, had come to establish a form of economic independence with their respective artisan skills and merchandising prowess.

Consequently this particular saying attests to the separate classification of African-Brazilians as a group, both on the social and religious level. It implies that Aguda is not dependent on the benevolence of the British, the latter being commonly referred to as “Geesi” in Yoruba. This, on its own may be a way of alluding to the ruler-ship position enjoyed by the colonial administration of the British over Lagos indigenes during that era in the area.

**Ceremony lo’npa Iya Aguda, “Never Mind” l’on pa Omo Kriyo (Creole).**

Generally, this saying is taken to be indicative of the sense of decency, orderliness and ceremonial attributes that was associated with the Aguda in Lagos. It is also seen to reflect the apparent Western attributes of the Sierra Leoneans (Creole) who also settled in the Olowogbowo area of Lagos which is in close proximity to Popo Aguda. The Literal translation of this saying touches on the point that the incessant preoccupation of the Aguda woman with “ceremony” (implying the constant giving of attention to details) is her eventual source of death while the

Creole (locally called “Kriyo”) is prone to great loss and eventual annihilation because of the perpetual confession of “never mind.” By saying “never mind” to virtually everything, the average Sierra-Leonean was seen to accommodate all sorts of unfavourable situations that would doubtless be treacherous to life in the early Lagos.

Concerning in particular the aspect of food preparation, African-Brazilian women have been credited with a notable sense of achievement and excellence which is doubtless earned by a lot of “moving around.” However, the result of this associated attribute has often found confirmation in the generally appreciated sumptuousness of the Aguda cuisine.

An Aguda woman has therefore come to be noted as someone that normally would stretch herself far to achieve excellent results in all that she does without the slightest intention of inviting attention. It is seen as a part of her social attributes. This may not be unconnected with the sense of discipline that may have been imbibed and passed down over time from the slave environment that was experienced in Brazil.

The fact that the Creole, who also formed a small proportion of the liberated slaves that settled in the Olowogbowo area of Lagos island were equally addressed in the saying is suggestive of the “foreigner” syndrome that was associated with the returnees. The creole were the returnees who were further shipped from Sierra Leone following their initial landing at “Free town” where they had first stopped at their return from the Americas, following the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Furthermore, these sayings, when considered in the light of the effect of the slave trade on the people of Africa, would no doubt testify to the disintegration that beset the continent of Africa both at the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and during the times that immediately followed its abolition. These factors are still prevalent today as is being testified by the social

interrelationship that is observed between the people of Lagos who were then known as the returnees and their host counterparts.

### **The Early Period of Fanti Carnival**

Fanti was not the original name of the carnival that has come to be known by that name in contemporary Lagos Island and beyond. The celebrated carnival has its roots in the cultural expression of the African-Brazilian returnees on the Lagos Island. It dates back to the close of the nineteenth century and gained prominence in the twentieth century. Oral tradition in the Lagos island area has traced the introduction of the carnival in Lagos to a “fill-gap” incidence among the early returnees.

These people were claimed to have reached a decision on the need to introduce one of the events that were observed and which had “kept them going” during their sojourn on the slave land. It was seen as a way of breaking the monotony of adjusting to new environment even where such environment was their original continent and homeland. The strains that were involved in the adjustment procedures, coupled with the desire to be associated with some form of culture that was identified with them motivated the returnees to introduce the *Careta* carnival, a socio-cultural activity that was practiced by them during the time of slavery.

Fanti has been mostly depicted as having emerged out of the carnival known as “Careta,” which is widely accepted as the Portuguese expression for “mask.” Also, it has been associated with the name “Fancy” especially among the Ologbowo residents, given its highly decorative pattern as commonly reflected on participants’ costumes and environment. It started mainly, in an atmosphere of jollity as embodied in the festive terrain of dance, music, colourful costumes, typical African-Brazilian cuisine, display of competitive float and diverse entertainment acts.

Popular explanation of the *Careta* carnival has also stressed a close link between the carnival and the Catholic celebration of the beginning of the Christian fasting period that eventually culminated into the Easter season. Hence, it is indelibly identified in early Lagos, with the concept of Aguda, both as African-Brazilian descendants and as the people of the Catholic faith.

### **The Adaptation of “Fanti” as the Carnival Name**

“Fanti” as the name for this contemporary carnival has been traced to two main sources. The first source suggests that the name was derived from the enthusiastic reaction of the people in Lagos, to the ingenious contribution to the carnival of the year 1936, of the Fanti (Togoese and Ghanaian) settlers in the Lafiaji area of Lagos.

During the carnival performance of the year 1936, this group of settlers who were mostly washermen, did not have the wherewithal for the elaborate costumes that were demanded by the conduct of the carnival and so came out in the relatively cheaper “Ankara” clothe ( a locally printed cotton material of Ghanaian origin ). This generated remarkable appraisal from the people of Lagos and so their group came to be known by the name Fanti and this came later to be adopted as a reference title for the African-Brazilian carnival.

The second explanation sees Fanti as an adulteration of the word “Fancy” by which the carnival was claimed to have been known at a point during its early stage in Lagos. “Fancy” was particularly associated with the Sierra-Leonean sub-group of the Lagos indigenes in the Olowogbowo area of the Brazilian Quarters. These are those who were claimed to have chosen to identify their own carnival group regardless of other names, by the title “Fancy.”

Some members of the Fanti Carnival Association have insisted on the “Careta” explanation. As a result, the correspondence Logo of the Association is presently depicted by the artwork and lithographic representation of “careta.”

Sometimes, there is among the people of Lagos, a mix-up in terms of appellation, of both Fanti and Fancy. Some have even suggested that Fanti is a corruption of the word “Fancy,” but there is no doubt that the name by which the carnival is known in contemporary Lagos State is “Fanti.”

### **The Disintegration and Resuscitation of Fanti**

At a point in the history of Fanti in Lagos state, the carnival was labeled as violent but later metamorphosed into a large organization that currently spans a wide terrain of the geographical spread of Lagos State. The case of Fanti in Lagos State testifies to this. At a point in the early history of Fanti, some elements of disorderliness that was borne out of the unbalanced introduction of other cultural mannerisms in the different traditional set up in early Lagos, began to be noticed in the carnival. At this initial stage of the carnival, it went through some cultural shock as the effects and fanfare attributes of Fanti began to be negatively affected.

For example, the members of the Egungun Masquerade group introduced the use of the cane that was characteristic of the Egungun festival. Members of this group believed that the introduction of the cane into Fanti will enable the “visitor” from the realm of the spirit to make use of the cane on his visit, to ensure discipline and effect cleansing during the Fanti carnival. Similarly, the “Opambata,” the ritual stick that is used during the Eyo Festival for blessing the people by lightly tapping them on the shoulder was introduced into Fanti, albeit with an undertone of violence. The use of the cane and the stick among other things and the ensuing

violence that was precipitated by them thus discouraged the Afro-Brazilian custodians of this carnival and caused some lull in the regular performance of the carnival.

Although the performance of Fanti was perceived for a long time to have lost its original gaiety, it soon began to pick up social recognition once again when in the early nineties, there came a new initiative to clean up the organization and introduce discipline and decency into it. Unfortunately at this time, there began to creep into the Fanti scene, the appearance of certain elements of rivalry between the Afro-Brazilians who were the original custodians of the carnival and the early settlers.

As part of the efforts to resuscitate Fanti, the “Family Pride” concept was introduced at the early part of the 1990s by a new leadership structure in the carnival organization. This was to serve as a platform on which the element of pride in family decent could be tapped to reawaken general interest in the carnival.

According to some members of the Lagos Island and those within the Brazilian Quarters in particular, the organizers of Fanti approached Coca-Cola as a corporate citizen in the country and acknowledged forerunner in the international soft drinks market for support in this resuscitating exercise. The organization assisted by putting up banners for different family houses, announcing their membership and participating intention in the Fanti that was coming up at the time. This action gingered up the interest of the people and many houses and family compound sought for recognition through the medium.

Similarly, the sale of “Ankara” material was used as part of the attire for the approaching carnival parade was used as another form of incentive to get people to come out in large numbers for the intended image renewing carnival.

Certain undercurrents of complaints have beclouded the activities of Fanti in the organizers' bid to move the carnival forward. In the first place, the organizers are currently making the point that the carnival has not been enjoying certain privileges in terms of support from the State Government in the same way that other festivals and cultural activities have been doing.

Accordingly, efforts have been made by the apex body of Fanti, headed by the chairman of the recently inaugurated Grand Council of the carnival Association, to ensure the regular support and involvement of the State Government in the association's activities. This has made the Lagos State Governor to show specific interest in the Association. Since then, the activities of Fanti have achieved greater level of positive restructuring.

For those at the helm of affairs in the Fanti organization, it is the first time ever on record that the organization could boast of the Lagos State government involvement in the performance of the carnival. This for them, is a welcome change, based on their claim that there have always seemed to be some form of reluctance by past government authorities to give due recognition to Fanti. This for them, is not the case with the Eyo Festival whose custodians are the original settlers of Lagos. Being the primary recognized indigenous festival of Lagos, the latter has often enjoyed the overwhelming support of succeeding governments in Lagos State. Fanti is gradually moving towards achieving recognizable excellence especially as it is being extended beyond its initial enclave of the Island of Lagos to other parts of Lagos State.

### **Songs and Acts that Tell Stories in Fanti**

At various points during the course of the research work from which the present paper derived, it was discovered that sometimes during the performance of Fanti, songs which indicate the silent rivalry or cooperation that lurk behind the social relationship set up between the native

settlers and African-Brazilians in Lagos are rendered. These songs can be seen to have invaluable interpretation for the socio-cultural set up of the people of Lagos State. Even when considered to be “vulgar,” as a noticeable proportion of the adult population on the Lagos island appear to view these songs, they are reflective of the existing inter-group relations on such occasions.

Indeed, role reversal in terms of dressing and mannerism forms a major part of the carnival performance. The acts of “free dressing” by which some male members come out in female attire and with seemingly feminine demeanor are prominent features of the carnival.

Indeed, role reversal in terms of dressing and mannerism was a major part of the carnival performance in Lagos. An aspect of “free dressing” in which some male members of the carnival had come out in female attire thus permeated the carnival scene. For example, the Fanti people of Lafiaji also came out with role reversal acts in which the men dressed like women and referred to themselves as “Iyawo Olele” (fake bride) in their “Ankarah” wears. The term implies the status of a newly wedded wife who would usually be seen to walk with elegant gait and exaggerated strides. Indeed, some participants who exhibit transvestite characteristics often go to the extent of engaging in pseudo-breastfeeding, an act that is deemed relevant to the entertainment environment of Fanti but which is frowned upon in the everyday life of the Lagos Island.

Words contained in popular Lagos songs are sometimes clearly changed to accommodate certain sexual connotations during the Fanti carnival celebration. The following is a typical example of such songs:

*Omo pupa baba oloye,  
Ajo ma ro mo l’orun ni.*

Within its original context, the song, which infers the following:



“The fair-skinned girl (lover) of the title-holding father (chief),  
Together, we shall all rest our arms around her neck”

is turned during the occasion of Fanti carnival, to:

*Omo pupa baba oloye,  
a jo ma ro mo l’oyon ni*

Here, the initial expression “a jo ma ro mo l’orun ni” (together we shall rest our hands around her neck) thus becomes “a jo ma ro mo l’oyon ni” (together we shall rest our arms on her breast). “Neck” is thus changed to “breast” in the vulgarization of this particular song. During the rendition of this song which is greatly accompanied with dancing, side comments like “ti o ba ti le gba!” (“If only she can agree!”) or “feeku feeku” (“almost to a point of dying!”), implying “seriously so!”

The song can also be said to be indicative of the admirable qualities that were associated with the fair skinned individuals on the island, especially of the female sex. It is not unlikely that the attributed fairness of the proverbial lover-girl of the chief is as a result of the African-Brazilian heritage features of this personality who eventually was taken for wife by a traditional chief on the Lagos Island. African-Brazilian men were also mentioned during the course of research to have taken for wives, notable women from among the earlier settlers of the Lagos indigenes.

The preferred choice of fair skinned female participants as Queen during Fanti carnivals (as shown in the picture below) is an indication of the preference for this skin colour type among the people of Lagos Island. Lagos Island native women were claimed to have been noted as being very free with sex, and the African Brazilian male were highly appreciative of this.

Moving further to the social relationship aspect of the natives of the core area of Lagos and the Afro-Brazilian descendants – the two dominant groups on the Lagos Island, a particular song that clearly points out the occasional acknowledgement of the separate status of these two groups is presented as follows:

*Isale Eko o e, Isale Eko o e,  
Isale Eko o, a mo'ra wa,  
Awon atohun rin wa o, won mo ra won.*

Literally, the song implies that “we, as the original occupiers of Lagos (Isale Eko), we know ourselves. Just as we know ourselves, those that came in from ‘there’ also know themselves.” A critical examination of the intent and content of this song can be seen to tell of an underlying current of division that separates occasionally, the core indigenes (as the earlier settlers in Lagos mostly see themselves), and the later settlers of which the Aguda (Afro-Brazilian descendants) make up a significant composition.

Also, the apparent supremacy that is often claimed by the people of Lagos Island and particularly of the Isale Eko segment of the island finds expression in the following song that is popular during festivals, ceremonies, carnivals and other functions in Lagos:

*Isale Eko area, b'o se kere mo ni won,  
Awon t'o wa nibe, baba ni won o!*

The song describes the area referred to as Isale Eko (consisting for example, Enu Owa, Oju Olokun, Idoluwo, Idumagbo, Ita Onikoyi, Dosunmu and others) which is very small in size but contains within it, people with notable personality. This type of song has proved intimidating in times past to the people not only of Afro-Brazilian origin but also those who occupy the areas on the island that are not within the immediate enclave of the Isale Eko area.

It is at this point that the recent observations being put forward by Hountondji (2000) deserves attention in any area of search that may have to do with the idea of the oral traditions relating to slavery and slave trade in Africa. He has observed the sense of inferiority that was associated with some culturejs, from both external and internal dimensions. According to him:

*It was the fate of some cultures in the world to have been systematically said to be inferior during centuries of Western domination including as far as Africa is concerned, a long history of slave trade and colonialism. This sense of inferiority was unfortunately internalized to various degrees by the cultures themselves.*

*(Hountondji, 2000:19).*

During the time when violence appeared to be a major signpost of Fanti, a song that was common during the carnival performances was built around two favourite meals that were associated with the people of Lagos – dodo (fried plantain) and moinmoin (cooked bean cake).

It goes thus:

*Oni dodo, oni moinmoin,  
Igbati ko ta, ogbe 'gba kale,  
E wa wo'ja ni Lafiaji!*

Literally translated, the song tells of the fighting that ensued between the respective sellers of *dodo* and *moinmoin* when sales were low. Its deep-seated meaning however has been linked to the disgruntlements that arose from the pulling out from the carnival by the original custodians of the programme who were claimed to have been unwilling to accommodate violence as a part of the carnival.

Another violence oriented carnival song that appeared to be popular in the hay days of Fanti carnival in Lagos was:

*Lafiaji ma ja mo o, Lafiaji maja mo o,  
Camposi ti wa bebe, Lafiaji maja mo o, e.*

The literal meaning of this song is as follows:

*Lafiaji, please stop fighting, Lafiaji, stop fighting,  
Campos has come to make reconciliatory moves,  
Lafiaji, ( I implore you) stop fighting now.*

Depending on the group singing, the one who has come to make peace is incidentally, always the outer group. Hence, *Lafiaji* is sometimes changed to *Campos*, depending on which group is rendering the song.

Opposition songs among the group also include:

*Emi leru, emi leru, emi leru  
Oya logberu, oya l'gberu,  
T'o ba pade awa, wa gbo  
koboko lehin re. Kekere  
Camposi, omo awo ree o,  
Kekere Camposi' omo  
awo ree o!*

This song is confrontational in nature, a daring reference to the physical lashing of anyone who attempts to undermine the leadership prowess of the Campos segment in the Fanti carnival set up. Translated, the song implies the following:

*Just what is it you depend on?  
Just what is it you depend on?  
Is it the antelope that you carry?  
When you come up against us,  
You will hear the sound of the  
Whip-lash on your back! Little  
Campos! In you reside the secret  
of the mighty.*

It must be noted that the erstwhile violence related songs do not connote antagonism in present day observance of the carnival. Consequently, amidst these utterances in songs, there are great jollifications and fanfare that put the environment in great merriment and inter-area participation and cooperation.

There is therefore the interplay of conflict and necessary cooperation among the people as Fanti continues to stand out as one of the major carnivals of Lagos State. Although its association with the people of Afro-Brazilian descent has persisted from the time of its importation into Lagos, it is increasingly perceived as a general cultural practice of Lagos State in the areas outside of the immediate enclave of the Lagos Island.

### **Fanti Carnival In Contemporary Lagos State**

Nowadays, Fanti carnival has extended beyond the Lagos Island to other parts of Lagos State that were hitherto not included in the hosting of this cultural event. With the extension of the carnival to the other parts of Lagos State, it has now become an all-embracing holiday event, including Muslim festival periods. In short, Fanti is becoming more and more identified with notable holiday celebrations in Lagos State. Consequently, various forms of music from other cultural backgrounds have been introduced into the carnival, including Fuji, Juju and Brigade band music.

Fanti carnival performance is reminiscent of political manipulation which looms large at periods of political contestation. This manifests in the covert rivalry between some traditional political institutions, Diaspora community of the African Brazilians and the State government.

### **Lagos Related African Brazilians in Ghana**

There is a notable relationship between the African-Brazilians of Lagos and the African-Brazilian community of Ghana, commonly referred to as “Tabon.” These people, who also sing Yoruba songs that are heard during the Fanti carnival in Lagos, claimed arrival first in Lagos from Brazil before coming to Ghana. The singers do not however, understand the meanings of the songs, which they claimed were brought into Ghana from their fore-parents who

first arrived in Nigeria before their onward movement to Ghana from Brazil at the abolition of the slave trade.

Interestingly, when the Tabon sing the song “Iyalode, e wa pe’yalode ko wa jo” (the commander of the women folk, do, call the commander of the women folk to come out and dance), adequate response is witnessed by the appearance from the crowd, of the “Iyalode” who is also an equivalent of the Tabon Queen mother. The latter is the highest of the female traditional offices within the organizational structure of the Tabon community. Any Yoruba speaking spectator at the occasion would thus be left with the impression that such response generating song is well comprehended by the Tabon but the subjective explanation of the people within this group will present the opposite view, thus confirming the enduring effect of the African-Brazilian heritage on the lifestyle of this people who moved on their return from Brazil, to Lagos and eventually to Ghana.

The Tabon have their own chief from around the time of their arrival in the Osu area of Ghana, and it is interesting to note that there was a recent, albeit fairly unacceptable installation of the chief of the African-Brazilians called “Onipopo of Popo Aguda” (the chief of the African-Brazilians in the Brazilian Quarters) in Lagos. Unlike the case in Ghana, no chief of the African-Brazilians has ever been installed on the island of Lagos until the emergence in the year 2001, of the first *Onipopo* (chief of the African-Brazilians), Dr.Oluyomi McGregor. It is therefore not surprising that Lagos does not, from popular opinion, see the creation of the office of the *Onipopo* as one of the traditional chieftaincy titles of Lagos. As such, it might not receive the official recognition and attendant privileges that are accorded such positions by the king.

Perhaps a major complaint that emanated from the camp of the African-Brazilian descendants is that concerning the idea that, the very carnival that has brought great attention to

Lagos State is sometimes derided by some notable members of the Lagos Island as *nkan awon eru*, implying “the heritage of the slaves” when, indeed, they are no longer slaves but *bona fide* indigenes of the Lagos Island.

Hitherto, as far as title taking is concerned, the descendants of the African-Brazilians have not been discriminated against, as many of them have been given Lagos Island (non-African-Brazilian specific) traditional titles and offices in Lagos by the kings of Lagos. It could therefore be suggested that it is the recent creation of the title and office of the *Onipopo* from within the Fanti carnival association structure that has caused the denigration of the carnival and the apparent reciprocal feelings by the Afro-Brazilian descendants.

With the introduction of the office of the *Onipopo* on the Island of Lagos, a major and interesting question that remains pertinent to the continuation of the organization of the Fanti carnival in Lagos State is that of the succession to the office and the likely complexities it could generate.

## **Conclusion**

The performance of Fanti carnival in Lagos has provided an avenue whereby social relationships that are related to Diaspora settlement in the area can be examined. This implies that the existence of this seemingly entertaining cultural aspect of the culture of the people of Lagos as introduced by the African Brazilians goes beyond mere aesthetic appeal that largely characterizes the subject. More research is however required to further contribute to the knowledge of Diaspora legacy on the island of Lagos, particularly in the area of the merging of culture as based on the relationship between the Lagos indigenes of African-Brazilian descent and the community of earlier settlers in Lagos.

## Note

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## **Illustrations**



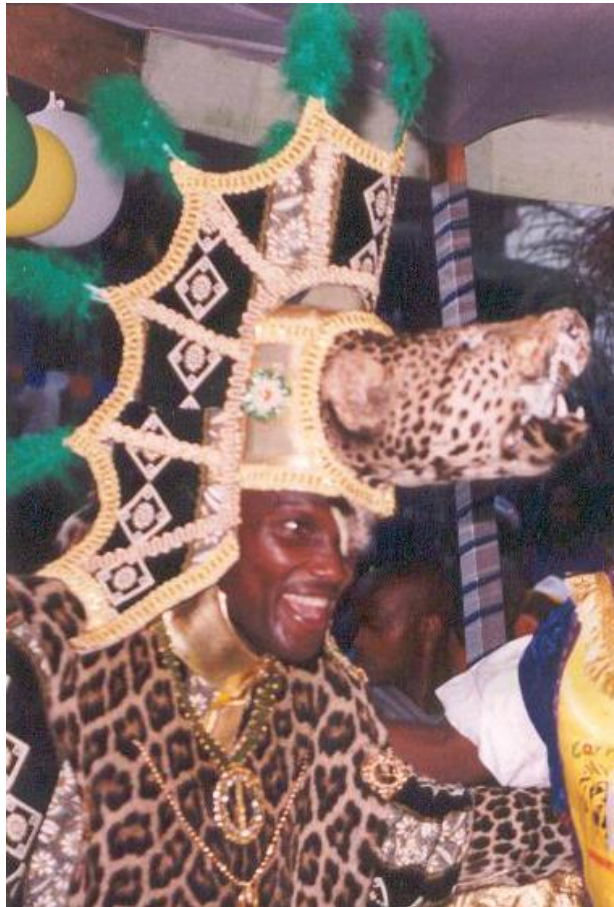
**A cross-section of festival participants.**



**The researcher with a member of the Lafiaji Fanti Group.**



**The “Holiness” prayer band “prophet” motif.**



**The captain in a Fanti carnival.**



**The “No more soldier – welcome Democracy” motif.**



**A female participant on a horse during a Fanti carnival.**





**A male participant on horseback during a Fanti carnival.**



**Another view of male participants on horseback during the carnival.**



**Participants and their horses at a carnival.**

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