



# The Siriricando Block and the Lesbians and Bisexual Women at São Paulo's Carnival

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## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

The Siriricando Block is a carnival block of lesbian and bisexual protagonism that has been out on the streets of downtown São Paulo, Brazil, since 2016. Founded by a group of lesbians and bisexual women, Siriricando seeks to promote spaces for socializing and strengthening of the lesbian and bisexual identities, sexual freedom, and awareness of the reproduction of prejudices existing in Brazil's sexist and patriarchal society. Welcoming to the entire LGBTQIA+ community, it is based on lesbian and feminist protagonism and visibility. We reframe the lyrics of well-known Brazilian carnival songs in a creative and funny way. Siriricando also promotes the coalition and collaboration of artists from different areas, since it is organized in a network through collaborative work. It also seeks forms of social intervention through awareness and creative economy in the events it holds. Since 2016, it seeks to act politically and socially beyond carnival in the Brazilian context (which has been experiencing an authoritarian setback).

**Keywords:** Lesbians; Feminism; Carnival; Street Carnival; Siriricando Block

### How to cite

Falcão, Barbara and Milena Fonseca Fontes. 2020. "The Siriricando Block and the Lesbians and Bisexual Women at São Paulo's Carnival". *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, Issue 14: 153-168.

“The connections between and among women are the most fearful, the most problematic and the most potentially transformative force on the planet.”

Adrienne Rich 1993

## **1 The Birth of the Siriricando Block**

The Siriricando Block is a carnival group that has been participating in the street carnival of São Paulo, Brazil, for four years.<sup>1</sup> The Block is also a way of lesbian and bisexual women's resistance, as well as a movement for visibility that welcomes LGBTQIA+ communities. Our group seeks to create safe and comfortable spaces in which everybody is able to express their identities and sexual freedom through joy, fun, and art, as long as they understand and respect the fact that lesbians and bisexual women are the protagonists in the Block. The Siriricando carnival Block was founded in May 2016, in São Paulo, Brazil, by a small group of lesbians and bisexual women from the most diverse backgrounds. This self-organized and independent group decided to start a carnival block that would promote alterity and, at the same time, be a space for fun and sociability. We understand the block as a political act of visibility and resistance based on three pillars: lesbian and feminist protagonism and visibility through alliances, collaboration of artists from different areas, and the promotion of social intervention through awareness and creative economy.

## **2 Lesbian Protagonism and Visibility**

For the Siriricando Block, it is important to create spaces that promote the lesbian and bisexual identities and coexistence to prevent the reproduction of prejudices by emphasizing the pride of being what we are and empowering female sexual freedom within a sexist and patriarchal society (Delphy 2009). These identities and this freedom are celebrated and emphasized in various

ways in the performance of Siriricando. Starting with its name: Siriricando was chosen from a survey done on the Block's Facebook fan page, in which several names were suggested. After a few weeks of voting, the name Siriricando was chosen. In Brazilian Portuguese, it is slang for female masturbation and represents women's freedom, especially women's sexual freedom. This initiative of an open vote to choose the Block's name meets the ideals of horizontality, collaboration and collective participation that guided our actions from the very beginning. The name is also a parody of a well-known Brazilian carnival song called "Sassaricando."<sup>2</sup>

The parodies created and played by the group in the parade and other events comprehend another dimension in which we exercise this visibility and freedom, re-signifying famous carnival songs. Through humorous lyrics related to the experience of lesbians and bisexual women, the *marchinhas* express our feminist, political and libertarian thinking.<sup>3</sup> One of the parodies named "Women aren't objects" illustrates this approach.

"Você pensa que mulher é coisa?  
Mulher não é coisa não!  
Coisa você domina  
No meu corpo cê não manda não!  
Eu sou a dona da minha vida  
Amo quem eu quiser [...]  
Não preciso de marido  
Disso eu até acho graça  
Só não quero que me falte  
As amigas e as sapatas"

Siriricando

“Do you think women are objects?  
Women are not objects!  
Objects can be dominated  
You don't rule my body!  
I own my life  
love whomever I want [...]  
I don't need a husband  
I even find the idea funny  
I just don't want to be missing  
My friends and the *sapatas*”<sup>4</sup>

Siriricando

These lyrics describe the need for autonomy over our bodies in a context in which we defend our agendas, fighting for decriminalization of abortion and against rape culture. Another recent parody composed by the group refers to the conservative wave that is growing strongly in Brazil as we resist and call for unity and struggle in the affirmation of our identity:

Mesmo que haja ditadura  
Na minha vida ninguém manda não  
Vivendo feliz com meus gatos  
Tendo orgulho de ser sapatão  
Apesar da lesbifobia  
Vamos gritar e vamos ser ouvidas  
Sozinha ou com as amigas  
Vamos resistindo

Even if there is a dictatorship  
Nobody but me is in charge of my life  
Living happily with my cats  
Taking pride in being a *sapatão*  
Despite lesbiphobia<sup>5</sup>  
We will shout and we will be heard  
Alone or with our friends  
We resist

They also include topics like female sexual freedom and pleasure, with a funny approach that describes the pride of being a woman while still facing the fear and repression imposed on us by the sexist patriarchal culture:

As mina bi quer chupar xoxota  
As hétera quer ver como é que é  
Tudo já se lambeu, estão todas se esfregando  
E a *sapatão* sou eu  
É muito bom ser mulher

The bisexual chicks want to eat pussy  
The straight ones want to see what it is like  
They all licked each other already and are now  
rubbing themselves  
And I am the *sapatão* one here  
It's great to be a woman

Female sexual freedom is also depicted in the Block's logo that displays the group's name around a winged vulva. This symbol is an important metaphor for

the group's libertarian and political attitude, through fun and pleasure, as explained in our fan page description, which we also consider as our manifesto:

[...] just like masturbation, the group is free and accessible to any woman who has a/and/or likes pussy. Nothing else matters besides your desire to have fun and to enjoy yourself in a free and safe space, secured by the strength and power of all the “chicks” that come together to enjoy carnival and have it as pleasurable as a *siririca*.<sup>6</sup> That is why our symbol could not be different – a pussy with wings – representing the freedom that we want all women (lesbian, bisexual, trans, cis, nonbinary, straight) to feel, not only at the party, but anywhere they feel like landing and resting their wings. May the wings take the pussies away from harassment, prejudice, and fear, and, rather, take it to places of unique pleasure where all pussies can love and pamper themselves with the wonderful joy that carnival provides: a moment that only women decide and command the limit of their own pleasure (Bloco Siriricando's Official Facebook Page 2020).



Image 1. Logo

A graphic designer named Natê Miranda created this logo and its concept, as well as the entire visual identity of the Block. The participation of several people is what makes our existence possible, we are a self-organized group, which means we rely on our volunteers to make it happen.

### 3 Organizational and Artistic Collaboration

Siriricando has already paraded in four carnivals (2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020) in São Paulo's downtown. In addition to the organizational work, we raise funds for expenses such as logistics, food and for renting a sound-equipped truck for the parade. Since we have neither public nor private sponsorship, our parade has only been possible so far thanks to the militant work of the Block's members, in addition to the support of the people who believe in the Siriricando's concept. 2017 was our debut year at the carnival and we paraded with a moving truck powered by a generator we borrowed from a partner theatre. To raise funds, we made and sold T-shirts with the Block's logo. We also held fundraising parties at the lesbian bar *Cantinho Rosa*, in downtown São Paulo, which unfortunately went bankrupt in 2018.



Image 2 . 2017 Parade. Source: Facebook.

Although we have collaborated with artists from the lesbian music scene in São Paulo, such as the rap singer Luana Hansen and the Obirin Trio band, we were unable to form a percussion group in the first two parades. This happened



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mainly due to the lack of instruments, which prevented the participation of many people who were interested in becoming part of the Block. Therefore, for the first two years, we sang our *marchinhas* accompanied by an electronic background song we downloaded from the internet.

In the second year, we were able to rent a sound-equipped truck with funds obtained from the sale of drinks and food at parties which were held in a house provided by a union entity where one of our members used to work. This is the moment when we saw our audience starting to grow.



Image 3. 2018 Parade. Source: Facebook

In the third year, one of our members organised, collected and fixed instruments donated by a school. This is how we started our percussion group and added musicians, in a gradual construction promoted by mutual strengthening generated by both music and the unity of people in the collective.



Image 4. 2019 Parade. Source: Facebook

To raise funds in 2019, in addition to the parties, we also carried out a crowdfunding, offering rewards such as mugs, T-shirts, and soaps with the Siriricando's logo, as well as other services and products. Lesbian and bisexual collaborators, who maintain the network that supports Siriricando that allows us to have a social impact, provided them all.

#### **4 Awareness and Creative Economy**

Through the participation, partnership and love in our collective, the Siriricando Block has been growing gradually and gaining more visibility. We are, therefore, able to take other actions and organize more events within our collective. At our events, in addition to the presentation of our percussion group, we offer space and establish partnerships with other artists from São Paulo's scene, such as *samba* and *farró* bands with musicians who identify as women. We also hold small fairs so women who produce some kind of art or product are able to offer those items to the public.

In both 2019 and 2020's crowdfunding, we offered products and services made exclusively by lesbians and bisexual women. Thus, in addition to resources for the Block, we contribute to the creative economy network by seeking to increase the income of our partners, either through sales at our events, or through the visibility of their brands within our community.

Another initiative is the series of talks and workshops held at our events. We have already dealt with issues such as harm reduction and lesbians' and bisexual women's sexual health. We have also promoted self-defence workshops for women and we are always looking for new partnerships, as well as offering space to those who want to share their expertise with us.

We have established partnerships with collectives such as *Meu Clitóris*, *Minhas Regras* [My Clitoris, My Rules], *Coletivo Louva Deusas* [Praising the Goddesses], *Pelvika* [Pelvik], *Espaço Esponja* [Sponge Space] and other LGBTQIA+ blocks.<sup>7</sup> Another carnival block that also promotes lesbian and bisexual visibility and started in the same year as Siriricando, the *Siga Bem Caminhoneira* [Have a Good Journey, Truckwoman] block, achieved greater visibility due to sponsorship and a percussion group composed only by women.<sup>8</sup> They hold exclusive events for women and their audience is younger, unlike Siriricando which has an audience made up of women over 25 and holds events open for all. Despite these differences, the two blocks help each other in the

dissemination of events and participate together in protests and official events within the lesbian community, such as the Lesbian Walk, which takes place the day before the LGBTIA+ Pride Parade, or the Day of Lesbian Visibility, on 28 August.

It is our understanding that, through unity, mutual support and collaboration between different women and women's collectives, we increase our power of representation, enabling our message of freedom and welcoming spirit to reach more people who identify with us and would like to unite their voices against sexism, oppression, harassment, violence, racism, lesbophobia and biphobia.

## **5 Final Considerations**

Brazil is a country with high rates of violence against women and the LGBTIA+ community. It maintains a culture based on patriarchal and racist values that place women, especially lesbians, bisexuals, Afro-Indigenous and non-feminine women, in positions of inferiority and vulnerability. This conservative discourse gained even more strength in 2019, with the election of a president who openly expresses homophobic, sexist and racist opinions. Due to this whole context, which has only gotten worse since the time of the Block's creation, we also aim to act politically, through our libertarian discourse, defying these reactionary values, in addition to assuring, with the strength and unity of our collective, security against violence and harassment in our events.

Through dialogue, we try to solve any problems that may come up during the parade, including *marchinhas* that alert potential harassers and, if this does not work, the idea is that each one will protect the other and everyone will protect us all, and collectively we can guarantee our safety. Especially on parade days, we advise the Block's members and the public to be aware and remain aware of their friends as well as to report any problem to the staff. Fortunately, dialogue and communication have worked in every event up to this date, because in the events and on street carnival, the public is mostly formed by lesbians and bisexual women, and the small portion of men who are present listen to the

messages given on the microphone about the presence and protagonism of these women in that space.

Therefore, we believe that being a feminist, promoting lesbian identity and singing openly about sexuality is a political act. Going out in the streets and defending this discourse is a form of resistance (Buitoni and Lopes 2018). Art, pleasure, humour, and the celebration of sexual freedom and love in its various forms are our ways of fighting against all the oppression to which we are still subject. Resistance with music, dance and joy is our way of showing that we are alive and that we will keep on fighting and occupying the streets with our dissident voices and bodies, for being free is having no fear, as Nina Simone said.

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<sup>1</sup> T.N.: *Siriricando* is a combination of a slang for female masturbation, "finger-fucking," and a carnival song, "Sassaricando." The straightforward translation would be Finger-fucking Carnival Block. However, we will continue using the word *Siriricando* throughout the article due to its essence and playful combination of words.

<sup>2</sup> Parody of the song "Sassaricando" to which the Block was named after. *Sassaricar* is an archaic slang for dancing and having fun. All lyrics and audio can be found on the social networks of Bloco *Siriricando*. "Sassaricando." Composed by Luiz Antonio / Oldemar Magalhães / Zé Mario. See: <https://www.letras.mus.br/marchinhas-de-carnaval/473888/>.

<sup>3</sup> T.N.: *marchinhas* are traditional Brazilian carnival songs; "libertarian" in the sense of honouring collective free will.

<sup>4</sup> T.N.: variation of *sapatão*.

<sup>5</sup> T.N.: made-up word that means both lesbophobia and biphobia.

<sup>6</sup> T.N.: *siririca* is a slang for vaginal masturbation.

<sup>7</sup> E.N.: *Coletivo Louva Deusas* is a play with words. In Portuguese, the praying mantis is called "louva-a-deus," literally "prays to god." Thus, *Louva Deusas* means, literally, "prays to goddesses."

<sup>8</sup> E.N.: *Siga Bem Caminhoneiro* [Have a Good Journey, Truckman] was a Brazilian TV show dedicated to truckers and their life on the road. Among many other terms, *sapatonas* are also called – and refer to themselves as – *caminhoneiras* [truckwoman, trucker] among their peers. There are some reasons behind this association. For example, the similarity between the stereotypes about *sapatonas*' and truckers' way of dressing (flannel shirts, caps, boots) and the aptitude for living on the road (since *sapatonas* are known for frequently having long distance relationships). All of this made the old TV show's name become a joke in the lesbian/*sapatona* community. Hence the block's name, *Siga Bem Caminhoneira* [Have a Good Journey, Truckwoman]. Additionally, "*Siga Bem Caminhoneira*" can also be interpreted as "keep on being very *caminhoneira*."



<http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/index.asp>