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Formative Trajectories of Black Musicians in Post-Abolition (1890-1930)

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ABSTRACT – Formative Trajectories of Black Musicians in Post-Abolition (1890-1930). This paper seeks to construct visibility to black musicians' memories about their own formative trajectories in post abolition Rio de Janeiro (1890-1930). Analyzing oral interviews from Museum of Image and Sound of Rio de Janeiro, we show some values and knowledges which those musicians considered important for their formation, as well as their comprehension and experiences of education. We focus on the strategies they used to access school and formal knowledge, their intellectual protagonism in this process, and situate their thoughts and experiences in the historiographic debates on school education in post-abolition Rio. The analysis shows: that these subjects were relatively successful in their attempts to acquire school knowledges even without having broad access to schools and that they never ignored the importance of such knowledge. It also presents evidence of enormous inequalities and racial barriers to their access to formal education.

Keywords: Post-Abolition. Black People Education. Black Musicians.

RESUMO – Trajetórias Formativas de Musicistas Negros no Pós-Abolição (1890-1930). Este artigo tem por objetivo visibilizar as memórias de musicistas negros acerca de suas trajetórias formativas no pós-abolição carioca (1890-1930). A partir da análise de entrevistas orais do Museu da Imagem e do Som do Rio de Janeiro (MIS), procura-se mostrar os valores e saberes que tais musicistas consideravam importantes para a sua formação e a maneira como entenderam e viveram a educação. Focalizamos as estratégias empreendidas para acessar a escola e os conhecimentos formais, situando suas experiências nos debates historiográficos sobre educação escolar e sublinhando a agência da população negra. Nossa análise constata que tais sujeitos foram relativamente exitosos em suas tentativas de aquisição de saberes escolares, mesmo quando a escola não esteve ao seu alcance, e jamais ignoraram a importância de tais saberes. Também evidenciamos a operação de poderosas barreiras socioraciais ao acesso e permanência desses musicistas na escola.

Palavras-chave: Pós-abolição. Educação da População Negra. Musicistas Negros.

Introduction

In analyzing the role of slavery in shaping racial inequalities in Brazilian society, a dominant stream in Brazilian historiography until the 1990s confined the black population to sociological types, seen as incapable of devising strategies to negotiate with power structures, claim rights and compete in capitalist society (Rios; Mattos, 2005, p. 33-34). The absence of approaches to black agency and presence in the history of education in Brazil is a result of that hegemony.

New studies in the post-abolition field – developed over the last 20 years and centered in the period of Brazilian “Primeira República” – have sought to change this Picture. Works such as Dávila’s (2003) have shown that racial inequalities in education are not the fulfillment of a fate sealed in slavery, but rather the result of a continued renewal and sophistication of discriminatory and repressive practices and ideologies, active in everyday life, in legal provisions, in the routine of the police and in educational policies and institutions. Other studies seek to capture the *historical protagonism*¹ of the black population in the field of education: their attempts to enter public schools, their mobilization in favor of expanding the reach of educational policies and their strategies to overcome the inaccessibility of schools in metropolises such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Lucindo, 2016; Silva; Araújo, 2005).

This article seeks to bring these debates closer to the experiences of musicians, a group rarely remembered by historians of education and portrayed, in the field of music, outside the context of conflicts and inequalities in Brazilian society. We present and analyze memories of black musicians who lived through the challenges of post-abolition in Rio de Janeiro (some also in other cities) regarding their *formative trajectories*.² Because they left visible marks on the musical history of the city and the country, their memories allow us to establish connections between cultural history and the history of education, showing that their careers and works are not the result of “strictly musical” *experiences*³ or peaceful cultural mixtures. These are achievements arising from the struggles and pain of the black population in the face of racial structures of power, in different dimensions of their lives.

The oral interviews that inform the article are part of the series of *Testimonies for the Posterity* of the Museum of Image and Sound of Rio de Janeiro (MIS). Most were recorded between the 1960s and 1970s, originally on audio tape and then re-recorded to CDs. Twenty-five testimonies from the “Música Popular Brasileira” section and four from the “Carnaval” section were analyzed, of which 26 were biographical and three collectively given by members of the Escolas de Samba (Samba Schools) Mangueira, Portela and Império Serrano. These testimonies were idealized by a team of music professionals, journalists and producers, mostly white men, and were intended to celebrate an ideal of a happy, musical country free from racial prejudice (Lima, 2021). Yet, the musicians heard in this article were always active in conducting their testimonies, despite that intended framework and the inferior position

they occupied in the power relation established between them and that socially privileged team at the very moment of the interviews. They narrated unforeseen stories about struggles, pain and achievements, deeply marked by the experience of racism in Brazilian society.

As Portelli (2016) notes, this type of insubordination is often seen in oral history works among subordinate groups and is a political act that challenges the historian to review their assumptions about the past. In this case, they are particularly relevant political acts, insofar as they oppose the attempt by the groups in power to forge mystifying historical narratives. Due to this counter-hegemonic potential, memory has been recurrently used by the historiography of post-abolition and of black education, and will also be used here: it unveils angles and facts that power structures do not want, or do not allow, to be registered in official sources (Rios; Mattos, 2005; Schueler, 2009; Lima, 2021).

Following the practice of oral history (Portelli, 2016), we do not use our sources to establish the past in any *definite* manner; but rather we explore the possibility that memory refers to real facts and experiences – and the more numerous the testimonies pointing to a same direction, and the more the objects of memory find support in other sources and in historiography, the more probable that possibility becomes. However, what interests us above all is the *understanding* that the interviewees have of their *experiences (individual/collective) in the past*, the way they communicate it and assert themselves as subjects through it, in face of their interviewers. On this, no source is more accurate than their own voices.

In the research process at the museum, which lasted over one thousand hours, the testimonies were transcribed and organized into a text file, observing the divisions of tracks present in the media. The reference to them throughout this text will always indicate the name of the interviewee or the association (in the case of the Escolas de Samba testimonies), year of the interview, CD and Track where the quoted narrative is found.⁴ We removed pauses and interventions from the interviewers for they do not interfere in the interviewees' speech in the excerpts here cited.

The article is organized in four sections. In the first section, we place the musicians in the general framework of the Brazilian population's schooling rates, based on data from the 1950s and the 1970s. Then, in section two, we comment on their testimonies about their difficulties in accessing school and their strategies to guarantee access to education. In the third section, we analyze the relationship between studies, work and music as learning spheres of different knowledges and social values. Lastly, we focus on the crossings and tensions between the official school and its knowledge, especially in respect to literate culture, and the learning forged in the musical experience within the family and the community.

The Musicians in the Brazilian Educational Framework

In the 26 biographical testimonies analyzed, formal education, or *the studies*, to borrow the term used by the interviewers, are mentioned in only 12. Despite not being part of the scripts programmed for the Samba Schools' testimonies, there were also significant mentions of formal education in two of the three consulted. Thus, although it was not relevant to the MIS team, which was mainly interested in *strictly musical* themes, the discourses on education ended up acquiring an unexpected prominence. Even on occasions when the theme appeared laterally, the message that was transmitted, sometimes through silences and hesitations, was full of historical and emotional content, revealing the importance of education for the evaluations that musicians made of successes and frustrations they had in their careers.

In order to properly grasp such importance and historically situate the narratives that communicate it, we need to consider the deponents' class origin and the indicators of their schooling. Combining the testimonies with other sources, it was possible to verify that, in a group of 24 musicians (see Table 1), only 3 (Walfrido Silva, Booker Pittman, Pixinguinha) came from families with relatively stable and comfortable income, while the origin of the others were situated between the poorest strata of the population and a lower middle class. We were also able to map more or less accurate information about the school trajectory of 18 musicians. Table 1 below shows that, of these 18 musicians, four (22%) had completed only "Primary Education" (generally equivalent to the current "Basic Education" in Brazil); three (16%) attended "Secondary Education" (equivalent to all training); and one (5%) had a College diploma, in addition to technical education in Nursing (current Brazilian high school); one (5%) had primary and technical-profession.

Although they reflect the general difficulty in accessing higher levels of formal education, especially College education, the schooling rates of this group are well above the national average. The percentage of Brazilians with complete Primary Education in 1950, when all deponents had already exceeded school age, was approximately 16%, and 45% in our group; the illiteracy rate, null in our survey, reached 42% in the general population; and the percentage of individuals with complete secondary education exceeded the national average, which did not reach 3% (Komatsu et al., 2019, p. 711).

Table 1 – Schooling Data from 24 interviewees

Name		Place of birth	Schooling
João da Baiana (João Guedes)	1887-1984	Rio de Janeiro	Basic Literacy
Donga (Ernesto dos Santos)	1889-1974	Rio de Janeiro	Primary, 2 nd year
Patrício Teixeira	1893-1972	Rio de Janeiro	?
Pixinguinha (Alfredo Viana)	1897-1973	Rio de Janeiro	Secondary
Heitor dos Prazeres	1898-1966	Rio de Janeiro	Incomplete Primary; Incomplete Professional training
Carlos Cachaça (Carlos de Castro)	1902-1999	Rio de Janeiro	?
Alcebíades Barcelos (Bide)	1902-1975	Niterói	Primary, 4 th year
Clementina de Jesus	1902-1987	Valença	Primary
Walfrido Silva	1904-1972	Rio de Janeiro	Technical (Accounting)
Ismael Silva	1905-1978	Niterói (in Rio de Janeiro state?)	Primary
Cartola (Angenor Oliveira)	1908-1980	Rio de Janeiro	Primary, 4 th year
Ataulfo Alves	1909-1969	Miraf-MG	?
Booker Pittman	1909-1969	Dallas-Texas (USA)	?
Nelson Cavaquinho (Nelson da Silva)	1911-1986	Rio de Janeiro	?
Synval Silva	1911-1994	Juiz de Fora	?
Aniceto Menezes	1912-1993	Rio de Janeiro, Estácio de Sá	Primary
Jamelão (José dos Santos)	1913-2008	Rio de Janeiro	Primary
Raul de Barros	1915-2009	Rio de Janeiro	Primary, incomplete
Orlando Silva	1915-1978	Rio de Janeiro	Primary
Elizeth Cardoso	1920-1990	Rio de Janeiro	Primary
Carmen Costa	1920-2007	Trajano de Moraes-RJ	Basic Literacy
Zé Kéti (José de Jesus)	1921-1999	Rio de Janeiro	Secondary, 1 st year
Dona Ivone Lara	1922-2018	Rio de Janeiro	College
Dona Zica (Ariósébia Nascimento)	1913-2003	Rio de Janeiro	Basic Literacy

Source: Authors' own elaboration – Testimonies from the Museum of Image and Sound of Rio de Janeiro; Zaira (2020); Silva and Filho (1983, p. 28); Lopes (2000, p. 25).

These numbers are even more expressive when we consider the differential effect of the difficulties in accessing education on the black population. Data in this regard are imprecise and scarce during the first half of the 20th century; but we can approach the racial inequality in education in that period based on the 1970s. Commenting on data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics's National Household Sample Survey (IBGE/PNAD), from the year 1976, González and Hasenbalg (1982, p. 92) observe:

Considering people aged five years or more on the reference date, the proportion of illiterate persons among non-whites (40%) is almost double that of whites. The degree of educational inequality experienced by blacks [*pretos*] and browns [*pardo*] increases rapidly when the highest levels of education are considered. The white group has an opportunity 1.55 greater than non-whites to complete between 5 and 8 years of study and a 3.5 times greater to complete nine or more years of study.

On the other hand, we verified the effectiveness of these obstacles in the data of the other half of the subjects included in our survey: 55% did not finish Primary Education, three (16.6%) spent short periods in the school institution—between one and two years at most—, just enough for the acquisition of basic skills in reading and writing. Dona Zica⁵, an extreme case (5%), never attended school.

However, among the subjects that constitute the group with the lower educational rates are some of the most successful musicians, both professionally and economically, such as Donga, Elizeth Cardoso and Raul de Barros. What can this mean? Our hypothesis is that, despite being limiting, the absence of formal education was not an insurmountable obstacle to the exercise of the profession of instrumentalist and composer. More precisely, the difficulties in accessing school were not enough to prevent these musicians from acquiring certain skills and knowledge relevant to social ascension, including those conveyed by educational institutions. An eloquent evidence of this is Donga's trajectory, who became a bailiff of the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court (STF) after having learned to speak French on his own and despite not having passed the second year of primary education.

Thus, even those whose school experiences were decisively marked by exclusion, difficulties in access and permanence reveal, through their trajectories, the strategic role that education – in a broader sense – played in their processes of social mobility. The initiative to self-educate, with or without the acquiescence of the school institution, is a unifying feature of their histories.

In addition to opposing the sociological theses that discredited the capacity of autonomous mobilization of the black population in slavery or post-slavery society (Lucindo, 2016, p. 305-308), these preliminary traces of the educational trajectories of our interlocutors challenge prejudices widespread in the history and historiography of popular music in Brazil. These include, on the one hand, the racist stereotype of the “*malandro*” (roughly translatable as trickster) – a subject averse to the basic conventions and institutions of life in capitalist society (family, school, work) and inclined to transgressions (theft, misdemeanor, violence) –, characterized since the 1920s as a synthesis of the life of male samba practitioners in Rio de Janeiro. And on the other, the essentialist common senses according to which black culture is the product of a racial “nature,” or of a “primitive” African heritage, alien to the official spheres of knowledge and acting alone, lacking consciously en-

gendered educational and training processes (McCann, 2004, p. 52-54; Ramos, 1995, p. 182).

‘The rest I did by myself’

In the post-abolition period in cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, one of the obstacles to accessing formal education among the popular classes was the lack of structure and public investment; in other words, the lack of schools and teachers, despite the recognized importance attributed to education by Brazilian elites in the debates on the modernization of the country between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. For the black population, this insufficiency was enhanced, among other factors, by race-class discrimination in the school institution (Lucindo, 2016, p. 318-319).

Composer and instrumentalist João da Baiana’s reminiscences about his first studies in Rio de Janeiro in the 1890s dialogue with that reality:

Directly, I didn’t learn to read, at that time there were virtually no public schools, you know? I studied at a family’s home and my mother made me learn from the second reading book by Felisberto de Carvalho. *The rest I did by myself*. It was in a family house, and she [the teacher] had five or six children. She would then give the A-B-C lessons for us to study. And she went to make lunch and take care of the house. She only came back when we were done. (At that time, my mother paid this family 2\$500 [two thousand and five hundred réis] a month to teach us how to read). We played games, played samba music, sang, banged instruments, when she [the teacher] came back, poor thing, there were so many children! (João da Baiana, 1966, CD 94, f. 6, emphasis added).

Besides the inaccessibility of the public school, which João’s memory perceived as almost non-existent, the apparently common presence of community/family educators stands out in this testimony—the “family houses.” Pixinguinha (1966, CD 123.1, f. 5) also reports something similar. Although he attended *stricto sensu* schools, he claims that he did his first studies in a “paid school,” along with other brothers; the classes were given by a professor named Bernardes. Zé Kéti (1967, CD 176.1, f. 2) also mentions a “private school” as the place of his “first letters” in the 1920s.

This type of private investment in the children’s basic education was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Rio de Janeiro, both for families that had a better economic situation – such as Pixinguinha’s – and for the less favored classes (the case of João and Zé Kéti). In these cases, private investment sought to make up for the inaccessibility of public education and/or to avoid race and class constraints (Lucindo, 2016, p. 319; Schueler; Magaldi, 2009, p. 46). João’s account suggests that, in addition to his mother, many other fathers and mothers resorted to family schools (“there were so many children!”), paying an amount that, according to the available estimates (Hertzman, 2003, p. 76), could be significant for low-income families.

Heitor dos Prazeres, whose family belonged to the same community nucleus as João's, tells us about the banality of the exclusion of black boys when their parents insisted on the right to partake in public schools:

My first studies were in 261 schools, because any day at a school was the day I could be expelled. In ways that, where I stayed a little longer, it was at the Externato Souza Aguiar, at the Colégio São Sebastião, at Benjamin Constant, which was at Praça XI. I went to Colégio dos Santana, Colégio dos Padres, where I was expelled because of a sock ball, because football at that time was considered a bum's pastime. And the place I stayed the most was Externato Souza Aguiar, which I liked the most because there I learned a craft, I was keen to do anything, I learned the craft of lath operator there, at Lavrado street. (Heitor dos Prazeres, 1966, CD 184, f. 1-2).

Given that racial identity was an important element in the pictorial and musical work of Heitor dos Prazeres, and given his contact with black movements in Brazil and Africa, it seems unlikely that he did not understand—although he does not say it explicitly—that the reason for his expulsions had less to do with sock balls than the body of the child who played with it. What would happen if he, or João, or another classmate of his color, decided to make a rhyme, sing a candomblé song, or dance samba during break time?

Similar problems run through the school trajectory of Aniceto Menezes, eleven years younger than Heitor, marked by “transfer recommendations.” His first teacher would have called his father to say:

‘I have other students; if I give them what your child needs to learn, they will be harmed; and if I give your child what I am giving them, I will harm your child. Because your child is very lucid, your child is very intelligent. Please, find another school for the boy, I like him a lot and I don't want to harm him’. Dad then put me in another school, a private one, on the same street (Aniceto Menezes, 1991, 811.1, f. 4).

The same situation is repeated years later in another school, according to Aniceto. He attributes these recommendations to the institutions' inability to meet his needs, something that converges with his recognized intelligence, admired in the vernacular samba circuits of Rio.⁶ However, perhaps this is a way to avoid a painful memory, as its supposed “inadequacy to schools” may have covered up reasons related to his color.

Carmen Costa, 23 years younger than João, speaks more directly about the problems faced by black children, especially black girls, in their early struggle for the right to education, outside and inside schools. She also provokes us to reflect on the historical and existential relevance of the experiences of racial violence:

MIS: in the farm [Agulha farm, Trajano de Moraes-RJ, where she was born], did you study?

Carmen Costa: No, when I came to Niterói, my boss's children studied, so that's when I learned a little bit. I would hold on to one of them and look at the others at the table so I learned. I wrote a letter to my mother, I remem-

ber it well, when my boss started to get angry with me I wrote a letter to my mother. I don't know if she understood it, but I know she sent someone to take me back. Because, the stamps, I used those of beer bottles, in 1930 there were many stamps. And I hid the letter between the boy and me, which I was holding, and the post office seems to have sent that letter to my mother because all of a sudden my boss let me go. That's how I learned. When I started school, I was 11 years old, I stayed for a few days because... It took a month or two. 'Cause I felt... it was the end of the year and the principal and my teacher had organized a party. *All students were going to sing*. I was one of the students in my class that my teacher said 'you will sing too!' Because I liked music, I was so happy. I still remember the song I was going to sing. [...] I was so happy that I was going to perform dressed like a tomboy. *But the principal later decided to take my role away and give it to another student*. I was offended by that, I mean, in less than three months of school I became so heartbroken, 'cause I saw that the student was prettier than me, I never wanted to go back to school again. So I never did, I didn't even finish elementary school (Carmen Costa 1972 CD 83.1, f. 2, emphasis added).

Carmem Costa's narrative brings together several constituent elements of black childhoods in the post-abolition period: the need for early housework, forcing children to separate from their families; the mistress's violence; the lack of and difficulty in accessing formal education; and the exclusion and psychological violence operated by professionals from educational institutions. Furthermore, it signals continuities in relation to the slavery past: the image of the domestic enslaved woman who silently observes the lessons of the little "mistress" to learn clandestinely to read is evoked by Silva and Araújo (2005, p. 69) as representative of the gaps open to slave literacy. And continuities with the present time: the denial of the full right to public and quality education and the persistence of domestic work analogous to slavery in the experience of many black and peripheral women (children, youth, and adults).

But there we also see a picture of possible resilience and autonomy: Carmen mobilizes her own intellectual and moral capacities to learn to read and write on her own. With cunning, she manages, through the exercise of writing, to contact her mother in order to escape her violent mistress. Later, this sharpness of mind was also fundamental to the realization of the dream of being a singer and to challenge, albeit belatedly, the headmistress of the only school she attended, who wanted to convince her that her body was not suitable to occupy a prominent place.

But Carmen remained strongly affected by this experience of discrimination. She mentions it again minutes later in her interview. Even if she had overcome most of its practical effects, with the help of family and friends, the emotional costs of the episode would not be forgotten:

MIS: Carmen, do you remember, at your beginning, the people who helped you the most and the people who created the greatest obstacles?
Carmen Costa: Well, [Grande] Otelo wanted to help me a lot. Now, the obstacles... I'd rather not remember. For example the one at school, where I

wanted to sing and the girl took my number and I was very shocked (Carmen Costa 1972 CD 83.1, f. 3, emphasis added).

Dona Zica lived and narrated a drama very similar to that of Carmen, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the 1920s:

Look, I'm not ashamed to say: never, I don't even know how it is to enter a school building. What I learned... When I was 7 years old, my mother did the laundry for this family and she asked me to go with her. I was 7 years old. So she asked the girl to teach me how to read and write. The girl taught me ('cause they had the ABC booklet that time) so the girl taught me 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', but she didn't teach me how to put it together. I mean, here [pointing out a word on the interview table] I didn't know it was 'foundation', I knew that here it was an 'f', the letter was an 'f', it was a 'u', it was an 'n', but I didn't know how to form 'foundation'. (*At that time there were no street boys or girls, everyone worked*). When I was 7 years old, I worked in this girl's house, I washed the dishes, scrubbed pots, washed the bathroom, and nothing of her teaching me the booklet, she just taught me that and that was it.

So, at that time, newspapers were left at the front door. Someone would leave the *Jornal do Brasil* and the *Jornal do Comércio*, then she [the boss] would say: 'Hey, Zica, get the *Jornal do Brasil*!' I didn't know that was Brazil. Then I would bring the *Jornal do Comércio*. *She would give me that newspaper, hit me, I would leave crying: "My God, how am I going to do it, I don't know!"* One day I kept thinking: what am I going to do so I don't get hit anymore? I was already nine years old, I said: what am I going to do so I don't get hit anymore? Then I thought, 'when she asks me for the newspaper, I'll see the letter that says Brasil and that that says Comércio'. I stayed there, at night, brooding. When she arrived in the morning she asked me for the newspaper. 'Get the *Jornal do Brasil*'. Then I said, 'uh... *Jornal do Brasil*, I'm going to see what the letter is. Ah... b, b, Brazil'. I went there and brought her the newspaper. 'Ah, at last!' Like that I did it, with my will power, I started learning (Dona Zica 1993, VI-00257.1-, 20'-30', emphasis added).

The association between domestic work, employer violence and self-education as a path to liberation connects the narratives of Zica and Carmen. She was sent to work alone in a family's house, while Zica started out with her mother, but soon became, it seems, the only maid in the house. The mothers of both – this is clear – were hoping that, in addition to the service, their daughters would have access to some education. Also in both accounts, the importance of education is felt firmly and its acquisition is the result of the "willpower" of the protagonists and their mothers. This force is central to these narratives, as are the pains and hardships. On this "willpower" is based, in a decisive measure, the formative process that these two women undertook for themselves throughout their lives.

This dyad of violence and willpower is also relevant for the interviewees who had successful trajectories at school, although in this case the pain has less space in the narratives than the successes. For we know, through historiography, that these trajectories were materialized in hostile contexts. Analyzing the documentation produced by white educators responsible for educational policies between 1917 and 1945,

Dávila (2003) showed that black children constituted for them a biopolitical problem. If they were not legally prevented from attending public schools during this period, and if there was even an effort on the part of these intellectuals to expand these children's presence in schools, it was because they saw them as individuals who were "degenerated" by race, slavery, and poverty. The improvement of the Brazilian race thus involved inculcating in these children values and cultures modeled on European references, by means of education, habits, behavior (hygiene, food, religion, etc.). According to this eugenic ideology, whiteness – a cultural marker of a project of civility – could be "learned" through the internalization of gestures, attitudes and moral dispositions that would mitigate the moral degeneration of non-whites.

And despite all the violence that the educational institution engendered, it constituted a place that was decisive for the black population to occupy in order to meet their desires of social ascension and existential fulfillment. Let us imagine what it must be like to struggle against dehumanization, to attempt to make use of the capitals that derive from an educational structure that at all times constrains and violates us: this is the order of the conflict waged by black communities in search for instruction. This lacerating conflict manifests itself differently in the experiences narrated here. It is crucial for us to understand the rates of school dropout within those communities; but it is also a measure of the effort of those who, like Dona Yvonne, managed to advance in their studies at school.

'An extraordinary worker and a verser [*cantador*']

Among the adversities faced by musicians in accessing formal education was the complex relationship between the need and the value attributed to work, present in most of the testimonies cited so far. In more than a third of the 17 narratives that directly touch on personal experiences with formal education, there are references or reflections about the overlaps and (dis)encounters between education and the world of work. Elizeth Cardoso's is one of them:

MIS: Before being a musician, you had other professions, didn't you?
Elizeth Cardoso: At 10 years old, due to the situation, you know, of my family, I had to leave my studies to work, to help my household a little, my mother. And I went to work at a cigarette retailer, which was on the corner of São José Street with Vieira Fazenda Street. I also want to apologize a lot to everyone who is here. I didn't have time to study, I didn't study much. So maybe I have a little difficulty expressing myself (Elizeth Cardoso, 1970, CD 61.2, f. 2.10).

Elizeth attributes, with an evident tone of regret, the abandonment of school to the need to work to support her family, a regret that is also an apology for her lack of education. These feelings are also shown in the narratives of Carmen Costa and Dona Zica. Carmen describes the "little" formal education that she was able to receive in her working life and says, with indignation and resignation: "I didn't even fin-

ish elementary school.” Dona Zica highlights above all the importance of work in the childhoods of her generation when she says that “at that time everyone worked” and that there were no “street children;” but she also speaks, with a mix of pride and embarrassment, about the absence of school in her life: “I’m not ashamed to say, never, I don’t know how to enter a school”. They, like other black children of their generation, had to deal with a diffuse ideology, coming from the dominant groups, which blamed the excluded from school for their own exclusion and linked the lack of education to “backwardness” or “uselessness” (Lucindo, 2016, p. 320). The readings of the world by these musicians seem, ambiguously, to reproduce and denounce this idea.

Jamelão only mentions his studies when talking about his precocious work routine, in terms very similar to Elizeth’s, but with a tone closer to the pride of Dona Zica:

When I was 9 years old [1922] I was already... [selling newspapers]. I studied at Visconde de Cairu School, in Meyer, and in the evening I would pick up the newspaper to go earn some money to help, you know. My parents weren’t in the best of conditions and there was still a separation. My father abandoned the family and I had to help. Surprising as it may be, I earned quite well. I went out on those streets hawking the newspaper, my voice... I think my voice learned to be open like that through... [that job] (Jamelão, 1972, CD 53.1, f. 2).

This double shift of newsboy and student did not immediately lead to his dropping out of school, but the need to enter the world of work to ensure the family’s livelihood certainly did. Jamelão says that he interrupted his studies at the age of 14, when he was looking to become a professional soccer player. It is likely that the urgency of survival made work something more valuable and appreciated by children and their families than the uncertain promises of the education system (Lucindo, 2016, p. 313). The same can be seen in the pronouncements of Heitor dos Prazeres on the subject, as we have already seen him say that he “was keen” to “learn a craft.” In addition to the grief arising from his repeated expulsion from school, other reasons mobilized his interest in the world of work:

[My father] was a military musician and a carpenter. *And those are [knowledges] that I also inherited from him.* I worked for many years, supported my family with carpentry. Still... I still think I’m a worker. And if I am in need, I still work in carpentry, which I take great pleasure in, there is no disgrace in it.

It was the time of ‘apprenticing’ and I was an apprentice in everything: I did an internship in typography, carpentry, shoemaking, tailoring. But I stayed in carpentry, and I worked for many years in several of these carpentry houses around town. *My father and mother were not earning enough and I wanted to help* (Heitor dos Prazeres, 1966, CD 184, f.1-2, emphasis added).

Heitor remembers that his parents did not want him to work in the streets because they considered it to be “vagrancy.” This contradictory association between work and vagrancy can be understood when

we observe that, as a child, he was arrested for “the crime of vagrancy.” For black boys, it was enough to walk unaccompanied to be subjected to such an authoritarian device (Fischer; Grinberg; Mattos, 2018, p. 181-182). The fear that this would happen again—we believe—is what led parents like Hector’s to reprimand their children for going out to work and, probably, also for having fun, making music, in short, for being a child. In any case, music and the value of work (beyond its necessity) were immaterial family inheritances, mainly attributed to the father, forging the personality and story of Heitor dos Prazeres.

The work had similar meanings for the composer Alcebíades Barcelos, “o Bide”:

MIS: How was your childhood, Bide?

Bide: My childhood, I... started working at the age of 9 [1911], my profession was shoemaker, I worked in a shoe factory. I worked at Bordallo (on Do Nunes Street), at Gaula, here on Lavradio Street. As an apprentice. I also worked at DNB as an apprentice until I became a shoemaker officer.

MIS: Did you attend primary school?

Bide: I attended there in Niterói. I studied until the fourth year, then I gave up. My brother [Mano Rubem] was also a shoemaker. I knew how to make a shoe from start to finish! When I was 15 years old, I was already making shoes, you know? At 15 years old I already knew how to make a shoe. I would add the surrounding parts, add the sole, make the entire shoe! (Alcebíades Barcelos, 1968, CD 12.1, f.1, 3).

Bide’s childhood was intertwined with the factory floor, which he learned to admire as a place to learn the shoemaker’s craft, of which he was proud, and which was shared by his brother and father. The absence of school is offset by the mastery in this art and the appreciation for it, both cultivated within the family.

The connection-disjunction between work and formal education is present even when not verbalized. For, as shown in Table 2, almost all of the musicians interviewed (21 out of 24) started working around 10 years of age:

Formative Trajectories of Black Musicians in Post-Abolition (1890-1930)

Table 2 – Non-artistic jobs of 24 interviewees

Musician		Job(s) in chronological order	Approximate Age of first job
João da Baiana (João Guedes)	1887-1984	Apprentice at Arsenal of Navy, coachman; stevedore	13
Donga (Ernesto dos Santos)	1889-1974	?	?
Patrício Teixeira	1893-1972	Street Vendor	13
Pixinguinha (Alfredo Vianna)	1897-1973	Telegraph Company worker	14
Heitor dos Prazeres	1898-1966	shoeshine boy, newsboy, carpenter	10
Carlos Cachaça (Carlos de Castro)	1902-1999	Rent collector in Mangueira; train-way worker	10
Alcebíades Barcelos (Bide)	1902-1975	Shoemaker	9
Clementina de Jesus	1902-1987	Housekeeper; washerwoman	15
Walfrido Silva	1904-1972	Accountant at the Navy Arsenal	17
Ismael Silva	1905-1978	Officeboy; janitor	11
Cartola (Angenor Oliveira)	1908-1980	construction worker; general services (at Ministry of Labor and at Secretary of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro)	11
Ataulfo Alves	1909-1969	<i>everything</i> (shoeshine boy, camper, shepherd, loader, errand boy), glass cleaner; pharmacy worker	8
Booker Pittman	1909-1969	shoeshine boy	10
Nelson Cavaquinho (Nelson da Silva)	1911-1986	electrician, construction worker; police officer	10
Synval Silva	1911-1994	car mechanic; driver	?
Aniceto Menezes	1912-1993	cook; coal deliveryman; shoeshine boy; dockworker; washer apprentice	10
Jamelão (José dos Santos)	1913-2008	newsboy; factory worker; police investigator	9
Raul de Barros	1915-2009	officeboy; typist at the police department	10
Orlando Silva	1915-1978	factory worker	12
Elizeth Cardoso	1920-1990	saleswoman; hairdresser	10
Carmen Costa	1920-2007	nanny (<i>ama-seca</i>); housekeeper	9
Zé Kêti (José de Jesus)	1921-1999	factory worker; police officer; public agent at IAPETEC (RJ)	8
Dona Ivone Lara	1922-2018	nurse; social worker	18
Dona Zica (Ariósébia Nascimento)	1913-2003	housekeeper; cook; small businesswoman	7

*Quotes indicate words used by the interviewees

Source: Authors' own elaboration – Testimonies from the Museum of Image and Sound of Rio de Janeiro; <https://dicionariompb.com.br/nelson-cavaquinho/biografia>; Castro *et al.* (2017); *O Paiz* (1911); Lopes (2000).

But work had other and more positive functions and meanings in the lives of these subjects than that of rivaling school trajectories. Booker Pittman and Pixinguinha, individuals of privileged socioeconomic origin in relation to the others within our group, also had non-artistic jobs at an early age. Pittman (1969, CD. 128.1, f. 2-6) says that this was not due to material necessity, but to his parents' intention to make their children incorporate the value of work during their school holidays in Dallas (Texas). Pixinguinha probably had a similar experience in Rio de Janeiro, judging by his father's position, a medium to high level public servant.⁷ There is evidence of this value in the memories of Jamelão, Bide, Zica, Heitor dos Prazeres and others, in whom this value is also associated with family and community musical heritage. During a few minutes dedicated to the memory of Elói Antero Dias (Mano Elói) in the testimony of the Império Serrano Samba School, one of the members of the association asked to speak:

I wanted to say something about Elói. I consider Elói one of the greatest men I have met in my life. *I studied a little, but when I met Elói, I saw that I had not been educated.* Elói taught me one of the most sublime things in a man's life, which I didn't know before: how to listen. I had a defect in my life which... a term that... I don't remember at the moment, a verb that goes like this: the subject anticipates what the person is going to say. This man corrected this defect for me: today I already listen, to the good and the bad. He taught me something very sublime. It's that the more one is attacked, the more one must be coal or firewood within a row; attacks must not serve to tire me; the bigger the attack the bigger the fight. He still hasn't got this, Elói, hasn't made me shut up [so that I can hear better], one of his greatest wishes, *but he taught me how to work.* He had said to me, 'words take the wind, work remains and dignifies man'. And this man is the greatest exponent of samba to me; not just me, to the Imperians. *A father and a man who, oddly enough, hardly speaks, but when he speaks, he speaks right* (Império Serrano, 1968, CD 195, f. 5, emphasis added).

Elói's wisdom and importance, according to this testimony, resided in a serene economy of words and the ability to listen, a philosophy linked to his life as *a worker who makes use of intelligence in his struggles* and as a leader in samba—two activities for which knowing to listen and knowing how and when to speak are fundamental. Elói was a great political organizer of the Escolas de Samba circuit, of longshoremen and other workers, and mediator in the negotiations of these groups with the political elite of Rio de Janeiro.

For the collective memory of his contemporaries and apprentices, it did not seem correct to separate these dimensions from his existence: Elói was a *macumbeiro*, verser [*versador*], *sambista*, singer, composer, worker, union member, thinker, historical leader of the samba communities. This memory also shows that, although Elói probably debated communist, Marxist and anarchist ideas in his long trajectory as an unionist, and even though he attended schools in the capital, his thought was not merely theoretical and was not born from the school institution. For, as our narrator indicates, the teachings of Mano Elói transcended formal knowledge, that is, they were both practical and sublime.

The testimony of Mr. Armando Passos, president of Portela in 1968, on the great leader of this Escola de Samba, Paulo Benjamin, a contemporary and friend of Mano Elói, goes in the same direction:

Now, talking about the life of the great Paulo da Portela [Paulo Benjamin], I, having spent much time with him in the early days, can say that he was shy. *He was a man of extraordinary capacity – a verser [repentista] – to dominate the masses. He wasn't tough [valente], though. This is important: he controlled the masses with a simple look, a simple gesture.* And all why? Because for him there was no woman, child, nor man, for him everybody was the same in samba.

He used to speak, he had the gift of the word. *He didn't have primary school education, but he had the gift of speech. In ways that made up for [that shortage]* (Portela, 1967, CD 187.1, f. 4, emphasis added).

Paulo da Portela's role as political leader in mediating negotiations between the Escolas de Samba and the ruling groups is also well known. This "gift of speech" and everyone's ability to listen ("for him, everybody was the same in samba"), which earned him respect as a samba parade conductor, makes him very similar to Elói. It is worth noting, in this regard, the importance of the musical practice of improvised verse, of the "verser," in the development of such skills; an exponent of the vernacular black samba circles of the 1920s and 1930s would hardly be able to assert himself as such without this expertise.

Elói and Paulo illustrate a historical fact of the greatest relevance for Rio's culture and politics: the intimate relationship of these two dimensions as formative processes, developed in the life and struggle of Africans and their descendants in the Southeast coffee plantations, where jongos, calangos and other arts of verse thrived (and still thrive). We do not know the origin of Paulo's family, but Elói comes from the Paraíba River Valley (RJ), where many of his teachers and colleagues from the world of work and the Escolas de Samba also graduated or began learning.

The "sublime" wisdom and the "gift of speech," which constitute Paulo and Elói as distinct persons, and which are present in the social life and in their qualities as speakers and musicians, evoke the notion of orality [oralitura] as used by Martins (2003) to analyze Afro-Brazilian rites and performances. Oralitura refers to a knowledge that emanates from experience and is inscribed in the body: "what is repeated in the body is not repeated only as a habit, but as a technique and procedure for inscribing, recreating, transmitting and revising the memory of knowledge, be it aesthetic, philosophical, metaphysical, scientific, technological, etc." (Martins, 2003, p. 66).

The composer Ataulfo Alves was one of Elói's journey companions. Like him, he began his learning of the world of work and verse in the oral literature of Vale do Rio Paraíba, but in Minas Gerais state (MG). He tells us more directly about the knowledge that was taught/learned in the coffee valleys, between the 1910s and 1920s:

It was in Miraí (MG) [that I started to do music], due to the influence of my father, Capitão Severino. [He] was never a military man, *but he had the gift of speech*: he knew how to speak to the masses, to the workers, to the settlers, and I believe that's why they named him captain—the man in charge. *He was an extraordinary worker, a man who knew the fields and, luckily, a singer of improvisations [cantador de improviso], a guitar player, an accordion player, an inspired verser, you know? I too, when I was eight years old, was already dialoging with him, I was already versing with him. All settlers always sang their tune, my mother sang too* (Ataulfo Alves, 1966, CD 47, f. 2, emphasis added).

Could Capitão Severino not also be “captain” of the *Congada* or *Mozambique* of the region, a fundamental position to these black cultural and political practices/institutions in Minas Gerais and throughout Brazil (Martins, 2003)? It is certain that Ataulfo was already initiated in the skills of verse, sound and work, so valued by the black communities of Rio, when he arrived there, in the mid-1920s; it is not surprising that he soon joined the musical schools of these communities and converted his skills to the *métier* of professional composer of popular music.

For João da Baiana, it is the mother who assumes the role of supporter and family teacher for the exercise of the sung word and *the body's speech*:

Since I was a little boy [I started composing] because I was already doing ‘samba of broken foot’, as a boy, you know? I had that intuition, my mother liked it, you know? Because, everyone was from Bahia, the only one from Rio de Janeiro was me, and I went with the samba, my sisters were from Bahia and didn't know how to make samba, and I made fun of them. And my mother liked it because I was interested in Candomblé, *batucada*, *macumba*, and composing, and my mother was proud of me. Then I'd write a letter [*letra*], a step, and they [the sisters] would be like a jaguar! (João da Baiana, 1966, CD 94, f. 7, emphasis added).

It is not clear whether the “letter” that João refers to is a dance step or a samba verse, but the ambiguity is worth more in this case: both letters are possible because he exercised them equally in samba and macumba.

Although it permeates the entire set of testimonies, the appreciation of vernacular knowledge related to music, work and community politics is undoubtedly more noticeable among those who have participated for a long time in afrodiasporic practices endowed with technical, symbolic references and particular codes of sociability: Schools, parties, circles or ceremonies of Samba, “batucada”, “repente”, jongo, macumba and candomblé.

That is also the group of humbler social origin and which was most exposed, due to this economic condition and its link with this cultural universe, to exclusion from official instances of learning, religious racism, police surveillance and other forms of racial violence. We understand that the social bonds engendered in these practices, combined with the experience of this collective vulnerability, enhanced the political character of their epistemes and community values.

Resisting the epistemicides of non-school knowledge

The appreciation of these other spheres of learning and formative experiences did not imply a devaluation of formal education legitimized by the state. Aniceto Menezes shows this forcefully when talking about his father's reaction when he heard of his son's first job:

I earned 30,000 réis a month. Back then [mid 1920s], it was money! When I got home with my first paycheck, my father, instead of hugging me, praising me, wanted to beat me. 'When I want you to work, I'll get you a job! Now you gotta study!' (Aniceto Menezes, 1991, CD 811.2, f. 3, emphasis added).

For Aniceto's father, study came before work, no discussion. The son might have disagreed with his methods and the rigidity in separating these facets of life into successive stages, but he fully incorporated the value of school knowledge in his daily use of language. He says – and this is a well-known fact – that his far-fetched way of talking and speaking, combined with a strong genius, aroused admiration and enmity among his high *partido alto* and samba colleagues in Serrinha (Rio's North Zone), in the Escola Império Serrano and in the port region, where he was a longshoreman. The story of a strike he led during the Dutra administration (1946-1951) illustrates these tensions and his deep appreciation of literate culture. He begins by telling how he joined the Resistance Union in 1941:

I used to live at [Sebastião] Molequinho's house. Cesário Nascimento, who is from Portela and lived in Serrinha, one day arrived with a number of proposals from the Rio de Janeiro Housekeeping Union, formerly [...] the Resistance. *And he distributed them with Fuleiro [Dona Yvonne's cousin], Molequinho, Coronel and many others. I asked him for one, he said he didn't have more because he didn't like me.* For in Serrinha some people would say I was pretentious. Because I didn't say things like 'we all eats everythings', 'y'all'. They wanted me to slur my speech like them. [...] *After that I went to talk to Mr. Joaquim. He liked me a lot, you know? He was a longshoreman leader. Then, Mr. Joaquim got home, I asked him for a proposal, and he gave it to me. That's how I became a member of the Resistance, in 1941. From where I retired at the age of 72.*

[The strike was] during the administration of Leonardo Cruz. We earned \$200 to carry a 60-pound bag on our heads. I went to work at night at Warehouse 12. And I started to explain to the people that it wasn't right. It was very little money for so much work. 60 kilos on our heads is not easy! I went to Warehouse 11 to make this political stance [...]. I arrived at 11, I said: 'do you know what I came here to do? I came to tell you that tomorrow 12 will stop! And they're afraid you won't join'. 'No, if they stop we will stop here too!' When day dawned, the service stopped (Aniceto Menezes, CD 811.2, f. 11, emphasis added).

According to Aniceto, the Ministry of Labor called an assembly on the same day. Zé Mariano, "a great leader", was called to speak first; then it was Aniceto's turn. He comments on the reaction of one of his colleagues, Mineirinho da Matriz, to his speech: "Ah, Aniceto is lettered!" Ah, my god in heaven, I wish! *'Aniceto is lettered, I know him, he*

sings samba with us in Morro da Matriz!" (Aniceto Menezes, CD 811.2, f. 11, emphasis added).

Pretentious or lettered, Aniceto was a reference for his companions in music and struggle; and these, as we see in these memoirs, were the reason for inspiration for him to continue searching for the literate culture of which he dreamed, with the tools at his disposal. Aniceto incorporated writing into the eminently oral practice of the *partido-alto*; he proudly recounts that he had a notebook with over 700 written *partidos-alto*. In the field of school education, he did not go beyond High School because the need for survival and other obstacles, touched upon throughout this text, did not allow him.

Dona Yvonne Lara, ten years younger, also played a similar community role. During his testimony, a member of Império Serrado made her a precious reverence:

Dona Yvonne, when those people [from Império Serrano] had difficulty writing, they used to run to her house, so she was the one who wrote the lyrics [of the song] for the guy on paper. And many times the samba was kind of rigid, so she corrected it, gave it to the guy, and didn't ask the guy to be [recognized as a] partner [in the composition]. [...] Today everyone has a tape recorder, today everyone writes on a typewriter, today everyone knows how to write: *but at that time the guy knew how to speak, sing, but he often didn't know how to write, and she was the one who did this work for the folks* (Dona Yvonne Lara, 1978, CD 523.3, f. 7, emphasis added).

Cartola's (Angenor Oliveira) fantastic narrative about the "composers' wing" in Mangueira goes in the same direction. It highlights the educational character, in a broad sense, of the Escolas de Samba in the 1920s and 1930s:

I'm the founder of the composers' wing, I created a small school for composers. Well, 'school' came from Estácio, because – says Ismael – they founded [The Escola de Samba of] Estácio close to the school, in Estácio. But I created a school for composers, created a wing for composers, because, in Mangueira, the only people who used to make samba at that time were me and Carlos Cachça. Those kids wanted to make samba, but they didn't know how to do it. I'd say: let's do this, let's make a wing of composers. All these kids who want to make samba, come with the broken samba, we fix it and say: *'it's yours!'* If he does it like this, like that, like that, he'll end up learning, right? So we started. They arrived with a samba:

– Ah, I have a samba to sing.

– Look at this here: look, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is not here, this is like this, like this. So that's it, fix it. It's your samba, now you can sing it! They would arrive all excited in front of us, and sing:

– *The samba is mine!*

And they would take a liking to it. When they would do another one, and it was wrong, they would ask:

– Is it wrong?

– It's wrong, it's wrong here.

Learning, learning and so, many emerged. Starting with Babaú [(1914-1993), black composer], this Babaú from 'Oh, oh, meu deus'. The first

samba he did, he couldn't even sing because no one understood anything. And I put him there:

– Come here, learn to make samba.

We taught a lot of people: including Zé Com Fome [José Ramos, 1908-1954, black composer] including Geraldo Pereira [1918-1955, black composer] (Mangueira, 1968, CD 209.3, f.1; Cartola, 1967, CD 139, 2 f.1, emphasis added)⁸.

Although Cartola does not go into detail, there must have been many disciplines – even if not formalized – at this “school of composers”: the precision of the written word (evidently valued in the passage above), the relationship between prosody and the rhythmic structure of samba, the melodic paths and appropriate harmonics, strategies to professionalize oneself as composer and much more. For the testimonies and musical works of Angenor and his companions are full of this knowledge. Whether or not such a composition school had been institutionalized in any measure matters less than the narrative we have just read. This shows that the experience and idea behind Mangueira as a place where different aspects of music making were taught and learned was very important for the members of this community.

Testimonies like these show that in the lives of these musicians, the vernacular and official worlds of knowledge were not mutually exclusive, but complementary and autonomous. In the spheres of work and community music, knowledges were acquired that the school did not teach: indispensable values such as the importance of work and the political struggle for a decent life, artistic skills, emotional bonds and solidarity. Music and work were also places of exercise and democratization of school knowledge, such as writing, mediated by leaders such as Dona Yvonne, and Aniceto, Cartola, among others. These processes ended up expanding the scope of this knowledge and opened the way for claims for what we now call “epistemic and cognitive justice” (Santos, 2019): knowledge politics that seeks to value and incorporate non-Western knowledge systems and practices. Dona Yvonne, when narrating her formative years, tells us about this complex relationship:

I think everything I do is due to the environment I was raised in, you know? Also there was the following: despite going to boarding school, for me it [the community learning] continued. [...] At this school I met Mrs. Lucília Guimarães Villa-Lobos and I met Lígia dos Santos' mother, wife of Donga (now deceased), whose name was Zaíra de Oliveira. [...] *They put me in Orfeon Artístico and they even wanted to educate my voice. Thank God there was no possibility to do so, because, otherwise, how would I sing samba?! [...]*

This was one of the good things my mother, before she died, did for me. She put me in a boarding school, I studied, learned how to be a person, because if I had been raised here outside, I would probably just be given over to samba and would not have laid my foundation. The artist's life is a heavy life, right? We have to run, as they say, after the ball. Now, as an old woman, at 56 years old, I have dedicated myself [to the life of an artist] (Dona Yvonne Lara, 1978, CD 523.1, f. 1, emphasis added).

In Dona Yvonne's serenity, we see the enormous value of school education and the need to resist its techniques of control and domestication of bodies, voices and vernacular knowledge. In this case, among the techniques of control and instruments were the orpheonic singing and the classical music, promoted by the Vargas government (1930-1945) and its official conductor (Villa-Lobos). But samba is not enough in this competitive and prejudiced world either, says Yvonne. It is essential, but life must not be only about samba.

This social reality and these cultural flows are fundamental for assessing and apprehending the meaning and social role of the *Escolas de Samba* and of the houses of the "aunts" and "uncles" of festive saints (*santos*) (afro-diasporic religions), as spaces of circulation of knowledge. In this regard, let us see the narrative of one of the most famous teachers in this field, Ismael Silva:

Nobody in my family knew anything [of reading and writing]. [...] Back in school, I was there every day asking my mother to take me to school, right? 'Would you not take me to school?' She always said that, she made an excuse, right – 'ah, I'll take you tomorrow' – because it calmed me down that day. But as a child you don't forget what interests you, so the next day I would ask for the same thing. Until one day I started school. The school was open, this school was open all day. Luckily for me, it was on the street where I lived. The name of the school I don't remember, I know it was written like this on the board: elementary school. When I got to the first room, I stopped, then the teacher came to see me, asking what I wanted. Today I imagine anything could have crossed her mind, right? I'm skinny, skinny legs, short pants and such, looking like I was needy, so one could even think that I was going to ask for money or something. When she asked, then the answer was: I want to study, I want to learn to read, I'm hungry for knowledge. *I told her that my hunger was for knowledge* (Ismael Silva, 1969, CD 5.1, f. 1; 5.2, f. 1, emphasis added).

Coming from a family with very few resources, probably a grandson of enslaved people, for Ismael Silva, the "hunger for knowledge" holds a density of pain, reflections and dreams that were hardly comprehensible to the upper-middle-class white men who interviewed him at MIS. Pains, dreams and reflections that also constitute the dilemma faced by his mother. Her apparent disinterest in enrolling her son in school, as portrayed in the narrative, has deeper meanings. Given Ismael's awareness of the value of education, she, as his first educator, must also have been conscious of the importance of school studies, but she also knew the risks involved. She knew about the police violence that surrounded her poor neighborhood, which was always under surveillance – the Morro de São Carlos region, in Estácio –, the police's authoritarianism and, probably, the constraints experienced by other colored children at school. For this mother, not enrolling the child might have been, above all, a way to protect him.

However, Ismael's hunger for knowledge was greater than his mother's fears and the objective obstacles to attending school. His narrative shows that "School" had no void meaning in his history, and it is no coincidence that he and his companions chose this word, in the

1920s, to name the institutions that today are undisputed symbols of a so-called national culture: the Escolas de Samba. The circuit of black popular culture is also a school, as their testimonies inform us, perhaps more important in the context in which they lived than the official schools. For therein, children, young people and adults were taught without discrimination of race or class; and Eurocentric knowledge had no precedence over the body, gesture, verse and lived experiences.

Conclusions

If today we can glimpse—from the perspective of an anti-racist education, representative of the constitutive cultural diversity of Brazil—the valorization of knowledge sustained in experience and oral expression of black communities, we must remember that this is the result of centuries-old struggles. Struggles in which musicians like Dona Yvonne Lara and Carmen Costa, samba teachers like Bide and Heitor dos Prazeres, conductors and *chorões* (*choro* musicians) like Pixinguinha and jazz-men like Booker Pittman participated.

These musicians helped legitimize Afro-diasporic cultural creations that were historically stigmatized due to a racist and Eurocentric cultural imagery, spread by the country's political and economic elites. Each, in their own way and within their communities, fought for the right to formal education and for access to places of knowledge authorized by the state; and at the same time, without forgetting their diasporic cultural heritage, they made efforts to consume and challenge the official knowledge and educational institutions. Regardless of their positions and social conditions, they were not alien to these institutions, and their movements to occupy these spaces are seeds of contemporary struggles and achievements for education (at all levels) and for epistemic and cognitive justice.

As for the period we focus on in this article, it is important to highlight a few points. Although singular in form and content, the narratives analyzed communicate collective experiences. The recurrences and similar thoughts we have seen are not coincidences, but result from the fact that they were built amid the direct and indirect connections of the narrators with each other. They were all descendants of Africans who suffered, differentially, from violence and racial and class inequalities; they lived in the same period and circulated through the same metropolis, Rio de Janeiro; most of them would have met each other often on the vernacular or professional music paths of the city in the first half of the 20th century; those who participated in *terreiros* de macumba, candomblé and Escolas de Samba were also linked by community and family ties, and by the cultural universe of these practices. So, by listening to them speak together about their formative experiences, we are not producing improbable dialogues. On the contrary, we are recreating debates they had among themselves or with other partners during breaks in vernacular musical practices, at recordings, in taverns and/or in their own homes, as the visits among many of them were constant.

We speak, therefore, of formative *experiences actually lived* and interpreted by black communities in Rio de Janeiro during that period; and therein lies the core of the contribution that this article seeks to make to historiography. The narratives are important documents for the history of education behind the scenes of the city's cultural history. They show, among other things, that the mobilization for formal education was constant among black musicians from the popular classes in Rio, above all, but not only, among those who became professionals in the artistic field. This reinforces the weight of racial and class barriers and prejudices within schools in the constitution of educational inequalities between whites and blacks in the post-abolition period in Rio de Janeiro. For it was not fundamentally due to a lack of interest or effort that the latter were relatively less present in these institutions. They were expelled, "invited to leave," or decided to withdraw as a form of self-defense. The difficult socioeconomic condition, associated with an early entry into the world of work, partly as a compensation for the difficulty in accessing studies, were other factors that stimulated their evasion.

We also saw that the effort to overcome the absence of school education in the formative process and in the construction of life projects was another constant among our interlocutors. Such effort was fundamentally about valuing their own, more democratic cultures and instances of learning, within the family and in the closer spheres of sociability, as well as by investing in work as a way of becoming a subject and helping the family. This is another valuable detail: families and communities were essential to face these difficulties and to build these alternative paths.

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Notes

- 1 The notion of *black protagonism* places at the center of historical investigation and narrative the actions and thoughts of black subjects (their agency), as a way of combating the silencing they have been subjected to in the writing of history in structurally racist societies, such as Brazil (Sundays, 2019).
- 2 By *formative trajectory* we understand the social/educational path through which the interviewees acquire the values, knowledge and experiences that constitute their self-image, life projects and personal and collective achievements, as well as the ideals of a person (good citizen, son, father, friend, etc.) and artist they communicate in their testimonies. It is part of our analysis, as will be seen, the identification of some of these references, evident in the speeches of the musicians we will listen to.
- 3 The notion of *experience*—as fundamental to historical knowledge as it is open to theoretical scrutiny, as Scott (1999) ponders—has in this text the broad meaning of the *lived past*, in its practical, emotional, symbolic and reflexive dimensions. In this sense, music lessons, the pain caused by racial exclusion and one's own reflection about society generated by this pain are *experiences*. The oral narratives we use here, as reflective acts, are also part of the narrated

experience, but the substance and origin of the experiences are constitutively greater than an act of language, for they are always related to the subject's *real* interaction with the world in which they live.

- 4 In only one case, the testimony of Dona Zica (1993), the recording was made on DVD, which is why the form of the quote will be slightly different: (NAME, year: DVD x, minute). Source of Testimonies: MUSEU of Image and Sound of Rio de Janeiro (MIS).
- 5 In Brazilian Portuguese, *dona* is a popular way to respectfully address women, usually elderly women, a popular synonym of *senhora* (Madam).
- 6 We use the category "vernacular" to refer to community or traditional knowledge, avoiding the ambiguities of the term "popular", which is generally extended to products from the cultural market.
- 7 Alfredo Vianna, Pixinguinha's father, apparently was a medium to high level of the City Hall of Rio de Janeiro in the early 1900s. Pixinguinha claims that, in his childhood, his father was a Telegraph employee (Lima, 2021, p. 21).
- 8 In this narrative, I combined passages from Cartola present in: Mangueira, 1968, CD 209.3, f.1; Cartola, 1967 CD 139, 2 f.1.

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