

THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING IN THE DIALECTIC OF HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF “CONGADO” IN UBERLÂNDIA

Gerson de Sousa

Faculty of Education, Federal University of Uberlândia, Brazil

Clarice Bertoni

Faculty of Education, Federal University of Uberlândia, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Is it possible that the production of meaning of “Congado”, in the daily life of the city of Uberlândia, can be ratified by the historical reconstruction of the past struggle for black identity, without the risk of depoliticization of the subjects by the beauty of the folkloric representation or by being a tourist attraction? This is the problem analyzed in this article, which aims at historically examining the production of meaning of “Congado” in the city of Uberlândia, MG, Brazil. The death of ancient personalities and the need for renewal have created a disruption between the present and the past. It is as if the threads of tradition were being broken. These questions lead us to undertake cultural analysis, through Cultural Studies, in which historicity, dialectic and the subjects in movement constitute primordial factors, to understand the history of Congado amid the dialectical complexity of its historical course.

KEYWORDS

Congado; daily life; Cultural Studies; dialectic; communication

A PRODUÇÃO DE SENTIDO NA DIALÉTICA DA RECONSTRUÇÃO HISTÓRICA DO CONGADO EM UBERLÂNDIA

RESUMO

Será que a produção de sentido do presente do Congado, no cotidiano de Uberlândia, pode ser ratificado pela reconstrução histórica do passado da luta pela identidade do ser negro, sem que recaia na despolitização dos sujeitos pela beleza da representação folclórica ou de ser atrativo turístico? Esse é o problema que move este artigo para analisar historicamente, no campo da comunicação, a produção de sentido do Congado em Uberlândia. A morte de velhas personalidades e a necessidade de renovação deixou em aberto uma ruptura do presente para o passado. É como se o fio da tradição estivesse se rompendo. As perguntas nos remetem a percorrer a análise cultural, por meio dos Estudos Culturais, em que a historicidade, a dialética e o sujeito em movimento se constituem como fatores primordiais para compreender a história do Congado em meio à complexidade dialética do percurso histórico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Congado; cotidiano; Estudos Culturais; dialética; comunicação

INTRODUÇÃO

Is it possible that the production of meaning of “Congado”¹, in the daily life of the city of Uberlândia, can be ratified by the historical reconstruction of the past struggle for black identity, without the risk of depoliticization of the subjects by the beauty of the folkloric representation or by being a tourist attraction? This is the problem analyzed in this article, which aims at historically examining the production of meaning of “Congado” in the city of Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, Brazil. This article is the result of reflections and practical development of the research: “the construction of popular identity in the communicative process: cultural analysis of the production of meaning and representation of Congado in the daily life of Uberlândia”, which began in 2018, with funding from FAPEMIG – Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation.

If, on the one hand, we have to consider the theoretical problem underlying the analysis of Congado in Uberlândia, on the other, we need to consider the daily dialectic in which subjects are inserted. The first dilemma lies in the very conception of experience that has emerged through oral discourse. The death of ancient personalities and the need for renewal have created a disruption between the present and the past. It is as if the threads of tradition were being broken. The new generations entering the *Terno Congado Sainha*² [Sainha Congado Suit] not only do not know the subjects who struggled in the past to maintain this manifestation, but also make possible the production of other meanings related to their participation in the *Terno*. The following is a dilemma discussed by Benjamin. The question, which reflects denunciation of the poverty of experience, still resounds and resonates with the present:

moreover, everyone knew precisely what experience was: older people had always passed it one to younger ones. It was handed down in short form to sons and grandsons, with the authority of age, in proverbs with an often long-winded eloquence, as tales; sometimes as stories from foreign lands, at the fireside. – Where has it all gone? Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? Where do you still hear words from the dying that last, and that pass from one generation to the next like a precious ring? Who can still call on a proverb when he needs one? And “who will even attempt to deal with young people by giving them the benefit of their experience?”.
(Benjamin, 1986, p. 1)

In order to research this dilemma it is necessary to examine the historical reconstruction of the popular in Uberlândia. For the struggle that takes place in popular culture

¹ “Congada” or “Congado” is a Brazilian cultural manifestation of African and Catholic influence. The groups of Congado are composed of a series of popular ritual acts, which enables them to preserve their tradition. But, at the same time, they adopt a dynamic stance, which keeps them alive over time. Between religiosity and profanation, Congado is a party with ethno music enchanting attractions (Gabarra, 2003).

² *Ternos* are groups that gather together under the influence of an African macro culture and make up the Brazilian cultural manifestation called “Congado”. Each *Terno* has, as its core, a consanguineous family, which forms a large group also considered as family. The *Terno* may have up to four captains, with the first captain representing the father of that group, and his blood son is to replace him when he dies (Gabarra, 2003).

and oral history, it is necessary to understand that the emergent demand to intervene in the present comes from the group itself. This is true even if the concept of orality, materialized in tradition, is examined through dialectical movement. There is, initially, identification of the act of valuing the ancient subject as life experience. At the same time recognizing that the historical course of Congado in Uberlândia can be narrated through life stories. In this context, the ancient subject may suffer resignification, and lived experience is an important element to unveil the concept of Congado.

But, on the other hand, the emerging significance reveals that the strength of this experience of the ancient is steeped in the past. This configures a separation that is not only generational. The absence of the voice of these ancient subjects, as direction of meaning for new generations, indicates that it needs to be contextualized in the present. And this is the significance of orality: the transmission of the social nature of the organization of *Ternos*, simply through oral knowledge, is now requested to be transposed into the image recording system of the ancients. Far from being merely a procedure of methodological variation, it is necessary to problematize this substantive change, from oral to video, from method to theory. For there is something uncomfortable in considering that ancient is to be assisted by young people so that it can be revealed as a historical subject and lead the new generation to understand the same sense of the present through the dilemmas and tensions of the past. From the simple procedural movement, video presents a challenge: to avoid that the defined means to grasp the image of the other. The ancient “congadoiro”, does not establish itself as a deterministic factor, as an end in itself, of the reading of the young, in the present, about the culture of Congado.

It is this concept of culture that becomes important to problematize, in this social context, from the theoretical defense of the centrality of culture proposed by Stuart Hall. The author considers two factors for understanding culture as the foundation for understanding reality: the noun and the epistemological:

by substantive, we mean the place of culture in the actual empirical structure and in the organization of activities, institutions, and cultural relations in society at any particular historical moment. By epistemological, we refer to culture’s position on issues of knowledge and conceptualization, on how culture is used to transform our understanding, explanation, and theoretical models of the world. (Hall, 1997, p. 15)

The place of culture, in the empirical structure, leads us to understand daily life as meaning production for the construction of the identity of the *Terno Sainha* in Congado. Here arises a first dialectical indication for reflection: daily life as the state of tension and conflict, as proposed by Certeau (1995), or as the confrontation of determination in the process of identity construction, according to Hall (2003). In considering Congado as a movement of subjects in history, we must consider as natural the incorporation of other elements in the identity process. Here it is essential to discern the meaning of this movement. May the incorporation of other evaluative elements in the current culture of

Congado, to express the production of meaning in daily life, be considered as resignification? Or is it a deviation of meaning that may somehow trap the *Terno* in a presentification in which it empties its historicity? The question sometimes leads us to the translation of culture as a noun, sometimes moves us to the need for understanding it in its epistemological conception.

The initial problem of the *Terno* lies in the distancing in which the temporalities of ancient and young are tensioned in their present encounter. Here is the question: Is there a risk that the past will be considered as meaningless for the present? How strongly can problems of the past history of Congado reorient young people's present meaning production to build other values? And how can past experience not be conducted as a violence of tradition to the new generation? These questions lead us to undertake cultural analysis, through Cultural Studies, in which historicity, dialectic and the subjects in movement constitute primordial factors, to understand the history of Congado amid the dialectical complexity of its historical course.

In dealing with the concept of culture, we must clarify that Congado's analytical interpretation is based on what is called the communicative process. It is necessary to understand the totality of this communicative process in order to apprehend the interpretation of Congado in Uberlândia. The first aspect is the critique of a positivist approach to communication which places the sender of a message in decontextualized and fragmented situations in relation to its receiver. In this continuum, there is also criticism of the concept of communication as the transmission of information. This delineation then directs us to another aspect of speech: the production of meaning by the subjects who express themselves as both senders and receivers. In relation to the latter, the elaboration of meaning can be articulated by the process of consumption, circulation and interpretation of news. What is emphasized here is the refusal of any technological determinism or behavioral assumption of effect that signals other theoretical conceptions as communication.

There is an explicit defense, in Cultural Studies, that the analysis of daily life is performed from the perspective of the other, who is marginalized in the formation of the history. If theories present conceptions from the masses and from the receiver as a conscious object or subject, we assume that the identification of the subject's tactics and strategies and their effectiveness in the communication process will lead to a return of the path of confrontation with other perspectives of reality. What we defend here is the notions of memory and past as historical movements and the subject as theoretical defense.

The concepts of tactics and strategies are linked in the conception posed by Michel de Certeau (1994):

tactics are procedures that are worth (something was skipped, it was probably worthwhile) for the relevance they give to time – to the circumstances which the precise moment of an intervention turns into a favorable situation, to the speed of movements that change the organization of space, to

the relationships between successive moments of a coup, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms. (Certeau, 1994, p. 102)

As the author contextualizes, the tactic is, thus, movement within the enemy’s field of vision and in the space controlled by him; “in short, tactics are the art of the weak” (Certeau, 1994, p. 102).

The main goal here is to understand how the production of meaning narrated by the history of Congado, from the articulation of the struggles of the popular in the history of Brazil, can be understood as identity construction, or whether it is redefined by the embodied representation of the violence that afflicts it. Here the primordial difference is established to immerse us in the methodological proposal of Cultural Analysis: it is about understanding the dilemmas of identity that arise from the tension and conflict present in the lived experience of the subject. On the other hand, it is about understanding how determination of the power relations suffered by the *Ternos* of Congado in the course of history is characterized as violence and how this violence reorients the construction of the subjects in this process. The first step in this descriptive analysis is to understand, even if in synthesis, the trajectory of the meaning of Congado in Uberlândia and the way this relationship with the concept of the past may be established and translated as memory.

CONGADO IN UBERLÂNDIA

Congado emerged as a self-affirming dance of identity and an instrument of social resistance. It represents the coronation of the kings of Congo and Angola, and the struggles among African kingdoms. It incorporates the worship of the patronized Catholic saints of the enslaved, such as St. Benedict, Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Efigenia, and St. Elesbão, into the elements of African tradition. It occurs in several states of Brazil, with greater representation in Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Goiás and Paraná. It is also characterized as Candombe, Mozambique and Congo (Munanga & Nilma, 2004). The gathering of all the *Ternos* is the Congada. “*Terno* of Congada is understood as the different groupings of congadeiros that commonly participate in the Congada festivals throughout Brazil. These can be divided into different types: Mozambiques, Congos, *catopés*, sailors, plumes, villains, among others” (Macedo quoted by Carvalho, 2008, p. 3).

The first reports of Congado registered in the city of Uberlândia date from 1874, when blacks enslaved on the farms began to gather near the place known today as Posto da Matinha. From there, the gathering moved to Bambus Square and then to Dr. Duarte Square, where it stayed for a few years. A church was built there, but the area around it was an elite region which sheltered farmers and merchants. In order to keep the festivities far from the city center, the congadeiros were moved, in 1891, to a peripheral area, now known as Rui Barbosa Square. A chapel was established so that black people could say their prayers separated from white people. It was named Igreja do Rosário [Church of

the Rosary], as was the celebration in praise of Nossa Senhora do Rosário [Our Lady of the Rosary], and inaugurated on October 7 (Brasileiro, 2019).

After the work was completed, the chapel was given to the “Confraria do Perpétuo Socorro” [Confraternity of Perpetual Help], made up of white women from the hegemonic social group, of the Paróquia Nossa Senhora do Carmo [Parish of Our Lady of Carmo]. In 1916, the black devotees of the Rosary of Mary organized the Irmandade Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens de Cor [Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of Black People] and, thereafter, became responsible for the church. This change concerning the control of the key of the church “would produce an institutional breakdown. The women associated with the Confraternity, started to hold the celebration of the Virgin of the Rosary in October, causing the blacks to hold their celebrations in November” (Brasileiro, 2019, p. 95). In addition to the change of date of the celebration of the festival of Congado, the Brotherhood began to suffer impositions of norms and rules determined by the Diocese.

The city expanded and, in 1930, the current building of the Rosary Church was designed and built with the collaboration of the local population. The press at the time reported that the new construction, with its imposing architecture, was more suitable and would beautify the square. (Lopes, 2007) Pharmacist Cicero Macedo de Oliveira, having built his residence at the back of the chapel, took “the initiative to raise a new church in the same place, but with its front facing north – towards Floriano Peixoto Avenue and Afonso Pena” (Teixeira, 1970, p. 180). Brazilian notes that:

if, on the one hand, Tito Teixeira informs that the construction of the church was the result of the support of the always solicitous people of Uberlândia, who contributed with financial resources for the building of the church, through liberal professionals, and merchants such as Cicero Macedo, Abelardo Pena, Arlindo Teixeira and Manoel Alves, on the other hand, a testimony of Manoel Rodrigues Siricoco, captain of Moçambique de Belém, reinforces, through oral discourse, the participation of the Congado community in the construction of this second Church. (Brasileiro, 2019, p. 117)

“Every person who came from the countryside brought a car loaded with wood, he would come and, if he sold the wood for twelve thousand réis, two thousand réis would be destined for the construction of the Rosary Church” (Siricoco quoted in Brasileiro, 2019, p. 117). In 1940, the church of Nossa Senhora do Carmo [Our Lady of Carmo] was demolished and the women of the Confraternity of Perpetual Help migrated to the Cathedral of Santa Terezinha. However, the party in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary in October continued until the 1950s, when a third party arose next to the celebrations of the abolition of slavery, held in May in praise of St. Benedict. This festivity was performed by black congadeiros from the Martins neighborhood and surroundings, who did not participate in the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and created the Association of Saint Benedict (Brasileiro, 2019).

“There was a little church in honor of Saint Benedict, covered with straw, in a place far from the suburb area of Martins, now Rua Ângelo Testa, where today is the Osvaldo

Rezende neighborhood” (Cassimiro quoted in Brasileiro, 2012, p. 91). However, in the late 1960s, the party in praise of St. Benedict ceased to exist. As a result, the newly created Association was terminated and its *Ternos* joined the Our Lady of the Rosary Brotherhood. The image of Saint Benedict in the chapel of the neighborhood of Martins was taken in procession to São Vicente de Paulo Asylum. After restoration, it was taken to the Rosary Church to compose the altar next to Our Lady (Brasileiro, 2019).

The decade of the 1970s brought changes to Congado. It is at this time that the black female presence stands out when parading on the streets. Women had always been present, but it was from then on that they established themselves as active components in the functions once performed only by men. “From flag carriers to bearers of banners, they came to occupy the structure of a Congado group, being presidents, captains, saint mothers and spiritual protectors, and they also became percussionists of various instruments” (Brasileiro, 2019, p. 59). From then on, changes in rhythms and nomenclatures began to appear, and many groups adhered to a percussion characteristic of the “paradinhas” performed by the samba school’s drums. These changes gain strength in the 1980s (Brasileiro, 2019). In 1985, Our Lady of the Rosary Church was listed as a Cultural and Material Heritage of the city of Uberlândia.

Since the 1990s, the neighborhood called Patrimônio, one of the places occupied by a considerable black population since the eighteenth century, has undergone constant urban interventions in a process of socioeconomic ascension, culminating in the expulsion of former residents.

For almost five decades, it was located in the neighborhood of Patrimônio, and, due to different circumstances, such as real estate speculation, death of family members and other social pressures, it had to move to the Campo Alegre neighbourhood, residential place of its main leader. Moving in this sense means rebuilding new survival tactics, recreating new neighborhood ties, continuing, even in another distant neighbourhood, to maintain its cultural and religious tradition. (Brazilian, 2019, p. 204)

At the end of, the 1990s, the number of groups increases significantly and, with this phenomenon, there is a growing presence of young people, children and women in the *Ternos*. This expansion in the number of components makes some *Ternos* gain up to five hundred members. In 2001, the Mozambique Estrela Guia is created in the neighbourhood of São Jorge. The group comes up with a proposal to accept teenagers, adopting a form of dance incorporated in the Hip Hop culture, increasing the number of percussionists and creating new songs, new costumes and new movement. “During the celebratory rituals in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Benedict in front of the Rosary Church, these young dancers received applauses from the public but bothered the traditionalist Mozambicans” (Brasileiro, 2012, p. 125).

Another peculiar detail of the *Terno* is the figure of the boy “Mameto”, which appears in its banners. In the backyard of Moçambique Estrela Guia, the boy’s figure is portrayed among the paintings of devotional saints, Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Benedict:

The figure of the boy “Mameto”, raised by several hands, has become an advertising piece of the group Moçambique Estrela Guia form (of) Uberlândia, a logo that transcends the days of the festival and is presented in posters, folders, banners, t-shirts, matchboxes and mini banners, distributed during the group’s extemporaneous cultural presentations. Thus, the image of “Mameto”, over the years, has also become a visual identity of the group. (Brazilian, 2012, p. 124)

In October of 2003, there was a change in the calendar of the celebration of the Congado, after almost nine decades. This change was defended by Father Olimar Rodrigues, head of Our Lady of the Rosary Church, in an attempt to unite the liturgy with popular manifestation. This linked the celebration with the devotion on a date celebrated in the Catholic calendar of St. Benedict and Our Lady of the Rosary, October 5 and 7 respectively. However, for many congadeiros, the change meant a loss of tradition, as their memories were forged with the festival of Congada in November (Brasileiro, 2012).

Five years later, Congado was registered as a Municipal Intangible Heritage by the city hall of Uberlândia. The Historical and Cultural Heritage was recorded in the Book of Celebrations by Decree No. 11,321 of August 29, 2008. Through Decree 17.903, of January 7, 2019, the Brotherhood of the Rosary received, together with the Conselho Municipal de Patrimônio Histórico, Arqueológico, Artístico e Cultural (COMPHAC) [Municipal Council of Historical, Archaeological, Artistic and Cultural Heritage], recognition of Rosario Square as a place of memory, resistance and permanence of the congadeira black community in the center of the city of Uberlândia.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

In his study of “Memory and Social Identity”, Michael Pollak (1992) argues that, at first, memory appears to be an individual, intimate, and personal phenomenon. But the sociologist remembers Halbwachs and clarifies that memory must be understood above all as a collective or social phenomenon. The subject’s memory exists due to a collective memory, and memories are constituted in group space. Thus, they can be reorganized according to the perception of other subjects and the representation of historical memory. Halbwachs (1968) treats collective memory as a process of reorganizing the past lived by a particular social group, allowing the understanding that remembering depends not only on what the individual remembers, but also on fragments of the memory of the group to which he belongs.

Pollak (1992) specifies three elements that constitute memory, individual or collective: first are the events which are experienced personally; secondly, are the events in which the person did not participate directly, but which were lived by the community to which he belongs; and third, the people, characters, and places linked to a memory that may be personal or “inherited” from the community. The memory of the residents of Uberlândia lies in this field where the subject’s ways of being and the social world intersect. The institutions and the different actors and groups whose social conflicts are part

of their trajectories. This factor places, as a methodological requirement, that the articulation of the dilemmas of the present with the historical process; which will give support to the narrative, be produced in the contemporary analysis.

The author points out that dates set in the calendar of a municipality are determined from the political point of view. When one seeks to frame the memory of a region through officially selected dates for municipal festivities, an arena of political struggle is created. Official memory is an important object of dispute, and conflicts are common in determining which days and events will be recorded in the memory of a people (Pollak, 1992). Thus, in Uberlândia, two distinct festivities were defined in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary: the Confraternity in October and the Brotherhood on the second Sunday of November. Even after the migration of women from the Confraternity to the Cathedral of Santa Terezinha, they continued to hold the celebration in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary in October (Brasileiro, 2019).

This conflict recurs decades later, in 2003, when the Diocese and the Brotherhood returns the date of the Congado celebrations to October, causing dissatisfaction among the *congadeiros*. Pollak explains that “the concerns of the moment constitute a structuring element of memory” (Pollak, 1992, p. 4). Due to the personal and political concerns of the present, the organization shows that memory is a constructed phenomenon and is also the result of organizational work. It is important to note that this change comes at a time when Congado has attracted many fans and its *Ternos* have grown in number and components. This can be explained by the relation between the memory of slavery and the valorization of the Congado at the present time:

there may be regional events that have traumatized and marked either a region or a group so much that their memories can be transmitted over the centuries with a high degree of identification. Very distant places, outside the space-time of one’s life, may be important for the group’s memory and, accordingly, for one’s own, either indirectly or by belonging to that group. The memory of Africa can be part of the family’s heritage with such force that it becomes practically a sense of belonging. (Pollak, 1992, p. 5)

Congado suffered a process of transformation, and became an inherited and reconstructed cultural heritage through which subjects reaffirm their identity, gain visibility, politically ratify their historical trajectories and reinforce a sense of belonging in the daily life of the city. Thus, new perspectives emerge in the group, keeping ancestral histories alive so that memories remain in the present (Brasileiro, 2019). The past is an area of conflict and it is often in competition with memory and history. In Uberlândia, memories have been built and rebuilt throughout the twentieth century, but they have always belonged to a collective memory that began in the post-abolitionist process which did not hear all of the voices during the historical course.

The memory of the *congadeiros* is marked by social construction. Faced with the modernization framework of society, these subjects had to cope with the issue of urbanization, which, in turn, brought transformative elements in the configuration of the

cultural process of the people of rural communities. They suffered social pressures and restrictions concerning land ownership, in addition to the legitimated racism in the delimitation of different places for whites and blacks (Lopes, 2007). This is about experiences and narratives of experiences that official history has failed to tell. The interpretations of the past to be safeguarded are integrated in attempts to define and reinforce feelings of belonging among collectivities: regions, parties, families, etc. The reference to the past serves to maintain the cohesion of the groups and institutions that make up society, to define their respective places, and also the irreducible oppositions (Pollak, 1989).

The separation of festivities in the last century offers evidence of the racial segregation that persisted in the daily life of the city. And this division was not restricted to places of prayer. For many decades, in addition to not praying together, whites and blacks did not frequent the same spaces in cinemas and clubs, besides having to walk on different sides of the street (Sousa, 2014). This racist dynamic is directly responsible for the way the history of Uberlândia was constructed by a group that sought to legitimize events through a type of work that Pollak calls the framing of memory, which can be done in political and trade union organizations, in the church and in everything that leads groups to solidify the social (Pollak, 1992).

Collective memories formed and defended by a framing work are important for the continuity of the social fabric and institutional structures of a society. This is not about a falsification of the past, but about its reorganization according to the need of that group to maintain its cohesion. "The analysis of the framing work of their agents and their material traits is a key to studying, from the top to bottom, how collective memories are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed" (Pollak, 1992, p. 10). A reality is established that legitimizes the history of specific groups, creating an organized collective memory which summarizes the image that a majoritarian society wishes to convey and to impose. Therefore, it is necessary to seek new possibilities from other voices, sources and documents, in order to understand the realities that did not make up the collective memories of Uberlândia.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, specifically in the 1970s, theories have attempted to account for new forms of social mobilization, leading the Social Sciences to turn to the study of these movements (Sousa, 2014). The subject was once again a concern of the researchers and it could be understood that subjectivities were imminent and that the analysis of the relationships between people and groups would be productive for the new goals of historians. "The sociology of the 1980s was dominated by themes related to new social subjects and new social movements (NSMs)" (Santos, 1999, p. 221). The political importance of these social movements grew significantly in Brazil during this period and gradually gained space in the struggles of policy formulation, obtaining expression and legitimacy in the field of social concerns.

It was during this period that oral history takes strength, along with the new historiographical conceptions. It was linked to a new line of Cultural Studies, taking into account new objects of study, methodologies and research sources. Pollak (1992) explains

that oral history, the collection of representations through oral discourse, which is also life history, has clearly become a privileged instrument to open new fields of research. History, as we research it, can be extremely rich as a producer of new themes, new objects, and new interpretations. Through History, it is possible to hear the memories told by subjects who belong to minority groups who did not take part in the process of construction of official memories of Uberlândia:

by focusing on the analysis of excluded and marginalized people and of minority groups, oral history has stressed the importance of underground memories which, as an integral part of minority and dominated cultures, oppose official memory. Initially, this approach uses empathy with dominated groups as a methodological rule and rehabilitates the periphery and marginality. (Pollak, 1989, p. 2)

The concept of underground or marginal memory, as Pollak proposes, refers to the memory of members of the dominated groups who have not been heard and who oppose the "official memory" created to universally define the identity of the city. Working with the underground collective memories is to privilege the excluded, offering a new point of view of the history and of social facts of the past, whose reference "serves to maintain the cohesion of the groups and institutions that make up a society, to define their respective place, their complementarity, and also the irreducible oppositions" (Pollak, 1989, p. 9). Perception of changes and continuities in the practices of Congado is only possible through the analysis of reports, social experiences and memories of subjects because, despite being silenced by the official memory over the years, memory is recovered through oral discourse from one generation to another and remains alive.

HISTORICAL DELIMITATION

Is it possible that the production of meaning in the present days of Congado, in the daily life of Uberlândia, can be ratified by the historical reconstruction of the past, the struggle for the identity of the black people, without risk of depoliticization of the subjects by the beauty of the folkloric representation or by being a tourist attraction? The issue treated here has a different perspective when one realizes that the narrative of the black people of the Congado is fundamental to present another meaning production in history. More than just being related to memory, this reading of the past enables present understanding of the identity of these men and women who experience their tensions and conflicts.

In order to materialize this analytical enterprise, three historical periods will be taken as references of temporality since they are considered important to understand, although in a limited way, the movement of popular culture in this communicative process. The first period refers to the beginning of Congado in 1874. Here an important question should be posed: what is the point of criticizing, in the present twenty-first century, a historical fact that occurred in the late nineteenth century? We could argue,

first, that it is a matter of being consistent with the methodological approach of cultural analysis. Because it is constitutive of dialectical method, history is founded as a substantive problem for cultural analysis, which rules out the possibility of treating history as periodization, as if it were only spaces occupied by dates.

In treating history as an analytical problem, we are led to consider that the history of Congado *Ternos* in Uberlândia is also related to the historical context in which the struggles of black people took place. And why not consider that the debate on slavery, in the country whose Lei Áurea [Slavery Abolition Law] was signed on May 13, 1888, can be examined using an analytical framework? In his work, Alfredo Bosi (1992) presents the context of the dialectic of colonization. In one of his passages on reform and abolition, the author shows the clashes that occurred in Brazil in the period from 1868 to 1888. Bosi mentions, as an element of analysis, Joaquim Nabuco's distinction of the five forces and agents that led from reform to abolition:

1) the abolitionists who campaigned in the Parliament, in the press, and in academia; 2) the activists of the cause, openly committed to assisting mass escapes and instructing manumission processes; 3) the owners of slaves, especially northeastern and gauchos, who began to release them in large numbers in the last years of the movement; 4) the public men (Nabuco generously calls them statesmen) most closely related to the government, who, from the Throne Speech in 1867, showed their intention to gradually resolve the servile issue; 5) the personal action of the emperor and the ruling princess. (Bosi, 1992, pp. 244-245)

Admittedly, the text emphasizes the dialectic of colonization, but the outcome of Nabuco's letter, after the closure of the problematization of the republic in Brazil on the issue of blacks, from the narrative of republican liberalism, is symptomatic:

Nabuco writes to Rebouças, who would exile himself to Africa on the very day of the proclamation of the Republic: What sort of people are we dealing with! Today I am convinced that there was not a single portion of slave love, disinterest and self-denial in three-quarters of those who claimed to be abolitionists. It was one more speculation! The proof is that they created this Republic and, after that, they only advocated the cause of the stock traders, the thieves of finance, infinitely worsening the condition of the poor. It is true that the blacks are dying and degrading themselves from alcoholism even more now than when they were slaves, because they are free today, that is, responsible, and they were pure machines before, whose fate God had put into other hands (if God consented to slavery); but where would the propagandists of the new crusade be? This time none would even be believed (...) We were involved with financiers, not puritans, with streams of bankrupt bankers, moneylender mercenaries, etc.; we had everything but sincerity and love for the oppressed. The transformation of abolitionism into stock market republicanism is as shameful, at least, as that of slavery. (Bosi, 1992, pp. 244-245)

The narrative described above enables us to understand the main dilemma concerning the dialectic of colonization: what happened after the golden law was that the enslaved blacks were left to their own fate. As Bosi describes the dilemmas presented by Lima Barreto and Cruz e Souza about the blacks, the question is: how did this abolitionist and republican process lead, in that period, to another existential dilemma for modernity? The critical construction of Lima Barreto's gaze is expressed by Bosi in the face of this dialectical dilemma:

after that May 13th, what could be the expectation of blacks, aggregate mulattos, sub proletarians or marginals? The myth of the redemption of an entire people was no longer historically considered valid. Hopes of collective redemption are only conceived when one lives, or is believed to live, a time full of promises: it is the messianic expectation of a day of judgement that will come to liberate and to save. But after this D-Day, the present imposes itself with the burden of its contradictions. Lima Barreto faced this present, which was our Old Republic, as an observer who admits defeat, but who is not submissive to the social machine. (Bosi, 1992, pp. 266-267).

He knew he had been defeated, but was not subservient to social machine. This conflict presents the struggle over the reality of black people in Brazil. And, as we have previously explained, this struggle can be extended as a contextualization of the situation experienced by blacks in Uberlândia during this period with the beginning of Congado in 1874. There is an important demarcation considered by Bosi that addresses the crisis of modernity. That is when blacks recognize that D-Day acquires an additional meaning in their daily lives. They had to face a lack of economic opportunities and social action as well as the slave mentality that, in the post-abolition period, was defined and put into practice in micro social relations. The confrontation was no longer against the slaver state but within social relations.

It is with this problematic content in mind that we must develop the analysis of the history of the black movement in its production of meaning concerning Congado in Uberlândia. That period is constituted as a moment of tension and hope, and represents a present whose results lead to the realization that the post-abolition period must be confronted for blacks to be treated as subjects. The first meaning of the struggle, which took place years later, revealed that the steps toward abolition initiated from the dialectic of the colonized as subjects. Farm rebellions, mass escapes, the formation of black sociability in quilombos, the life and death of leader Zumbi dos Palmares, all contributed to the production of the narrative that blacks acted as subjects in the constitution of Brazilian history.

On the one hand, we can consider Lima Barreto's accusation of what happened in this New Republic: "in the end, what happened on November 15th was the fall of the Liberal Party and the rise of the conservative, especially its most reactionary faction" (Bosi, 1992, p. 267). On the other hand, there is a narrative of the black as a questioning being in the slavery process in Brazil, whose action defined him as subject. Given this scenario,

how can we understand the beginning of the Congado movement in Uberlândia, even before the constitution of the city itself as a municipality? What was the collective conception of being black during this period until the revelation of D-Day and its result in meaning changes? Or more specifically, what were the tactics and strategies used in the face of this new context presented to the group?

It seems that this way of acting, with awareness of the existence of the new concept, has meaning beyond its denial, can be understood as the first aspect of the black movement, like the Brazilian Black Front, in 1931. But it is in the context of international order, especially with the widespread conflict in the United States, that new fronts of struggle against racism and inequalities flourish in Brazil, so that public policies related to black rights could be demanded. This period is being considered as the second historical delimitation problem for the analysis of this new resignification of the *Terno* of Congado in Uberlândia. Among the movements, we can mention the Unified Black Movement. It is undeniable that the 1970s and 1980s constitute, in historiography, a crisis of modernity that has been accentuated since the “disenchantment” of the presumed equality discourse of D-Day.

It is at this moment that questions about being black (*black is beautiful*) began in Brazilian society in order to denounce racism. It was a period in which we can analyze the struggle of other social movements, such as the women’s movement and the discussion of old age, to establish a counterpoint concerning the daily life of *Terno* of Congado of Uberlândia. The proposal, in that period, was to create, for Brazilian society, a sense of identity for these groups and, at the same time, reveal the obscurity in which the narrative of the past took place in the country. And this is how the *Terno* of Congado began to have new interpretations concerning the subjects that compose it, both regarding the struggle of the black men and women and the elderly. Here is a paradox: the production of meaning must question, in its constitution of identity, the values that lead to prejudice.

This historical continuum of the black movement took on new dimensions in the 21st century. The Zumbi March, in 1995, brought together 30,000 people in Brasilia to demand the inclusion and the implementation of public policies related to blacks. Additionally, the recognition of the *Ternos* became a new issue. From an internal point of view, there was the acknowledgment of the resignification of *Ternos* such as the “Estrela da Guia”. On the other hand, the struggle for the supposed acceptance, as a movement in Uberlândia was diluted by the acceptance of a festivity to be held on a certain day, consolidating a folk tradition. The struggle was to understand Congado culture as political. This third period of historical delimitation, of the 21st century, although it seems similar to the 60s, consolidated a new understanding of the debate which sustains the critique of positivism. As a result, the fear that Congado would be valued as a phenomenon in itself, without considering the subjects that produce meaning in daily life of Uberlândia, was consolidated. In this logic of denial, the congadeiros faced a new way of confronting prejudice.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Does popular culture exist in spite of acts that suppress it? This is the epistemological problem posed by Certeau (1995) in the text “The beauty of the dead”. The author’s critique is based on physical violence, followed by symbolic violence, with which popular culture is plagued in society. The narrative that is concretized in the popular, preponderant for the denunciation, is presented more for its denial than for affirmative movement. It is thus evident that the popular becomes beautiful the moment its force in political change, through its subjects, is disrupted by the violence of the opposition.

The analysis of the history of the *Ternos* of Congado in Uberlândia raises this problem as a concern as to whether the narrative of the violence suffered by blacks, in Uberlândia, received more emphasis than the movement that contributed to the constitution of their identity. The collective memory of the subject of popular culture pervades the physical and symbolic violence. However, it would be erroneous to consider, from this theoretical conception, that the black subject of the *Ternos* of Congado is restricted to the other who denies him. It is in plunging into the depth of lived experience of the self, through memory, that historical reconstruction takes on new meaning in relation to official historiography. And so, we reach the memory in conflict, which, in reality, is effective for the production of meaning of subjects in the hegemonic dispute of Brazilian reality.

From the physical violence of the period in which slavery was established, and the symbolic violence of the present, in which the valorization of the festivities decrees the emptying of the subject, criticism must now be sought in the dialectic of the black movement, or in the dialectic of identity building of Congado. The old people to be interviewed are demarcated in this context of struggle, both by being black and by being old, in the face of a capitalist economic determination. The new generations that turn to other references of the black movement, such as Hip Hop, to produce meaning in the daily life of the *Terno* of Congado, reveal the layers with which tactics and strategies are taking shape for the social meaning of the movement itself.

The analytical theoretical challenge, faced with the dilemma of the presented historicity of Congado in Uberlândia, is to unveil the memory of the other, the marginalized, from this other place of speech. This alters the understanding of social reality. It is not a matter of refusing the violence suffered by the other as a problem of analysis. The point here is to consider that the self, recognized in this process, produces new meanings of history. The narrative of these experiences and the places of memory are essential elements for underground memory to allow the unsaid to assume a new configuration of being, in relation to the narrator. The existence of the black subject becomes the central point for discursive practices. The rewriting of the past through the memory of the present is the movement of the subject in the historical constitution of oneself and the group to which he belongs. Thus, it becomes possible to reconfigure, in this new reading, the determination of the power relations from which these black men and women conduct themselves and/or are led to face in the tension of daily life.

Translation: David Francis and Alice Cunha de Freitas

REFERENCES

- Benjamin, W. (1984). *Reflexões: a criança, o brinquedo, a educação*. São Paulo: Summus.
- Benjamin, W. (1986). *Documentos de cultura, documentos de barbárie: escritos escolhidos*. São Paulo: Cultrix.
- Bosi, A. (1992). *Dialética da colonização*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras.
- Brasileiro, J. (2012). *O ressoar dos tambores do Congado – entre a tradição e a contemporaneidade: cotidiano, memórias, disputas (1955-2011)*. Dissertação de Mestrado em História, Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, Uberlândia.
- Brasileiro, J. (2019). *O Congado (a) e a permanência do racismo na cidade de Uberlândia- MG: resistência negra, identidades, memórias, vivências (1978-2018)*. Tese de Doutorado em História, Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, Uberlândia.
- Carvalho, E. F. (2008). *O rosário de Aninha[manuscrito]: os sentidos da devoção rosarina na escritura de Anna Joaquina Marques*. Goiás: E. F. Carvalho.
- Certeau, M. de. (1994). *A invenção do cotidiano: artes de fazer*. Petrópolis (RJ): Vozes.
- Certeau, M. de (1995). *A cultura no plural*. Campinas (SP): Papirus.
- Gabarra, L. O. (2003). Congado: a festa do batuque. *Caderno Virtual de Turismo*, 3(2). Retirado de <http://www.ivt.coppe.ufrj.br/caderno/index.php/caderno/article/view/32/30>
- Halbwachs, M. (1968). *A memória coletiva*. São Paulo: Ed. Vértice.
- Hall, S. (1997). A centralidade da cultura: notas sobre as revoluções culturais do nosso tempo. *Educação & Realidade*, 22(2), 15-46.
- Hall, S. (2003). *Da diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.
- Lopes, V. M. Q. C. (2007). Uberlândia: racionalidade urbana, religiosidade e tradições culturais. In M. C. Abdala & M. C. T. Machado (Eds.), *Caleidoscópio de saberes e práticas populares, catálogo da produção cultural do Triângulo Mineiro e Alto Paranaíba* (pp. 76-77). Uberlândia: EDUFU.
- Munanga, K. & Gomes, N. L. (2004). *Para entender o negro no Brasil de hoje: história, realidades, problemas e caminhos*. São Paulo: Global; Ação Educativa.
- Pollak, M. (1989). Memória, esquecimento e silêncio. *Estudos Históricos*, 2(3), 3-15.
- Pollak, M. (1992). Memória e identidade social. *Estudos Históricos*, 5(10), 200-215.
- Santos, B. de S. (1999, abril). *Os novos caminhos da teoria crítica*. Conferência de encerramento do colóquio comemorativo dos 20 anos da Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais: Sociedade, Cultura e Política no Fim do Século; a Reinvenção da Teoria Crítica. Coimbra.
- Sousa, G. (2014). *Memórias do cinema em Uberlândia pela análise da comunicação e cultura*. Uberlândia: Universidade Federal de Uberlândia.
- Teixeira, T. (1970). *Bandeirantes e pioneiros do Brasil central: história da criação do município de Uberlândia*. Uberlândia: Uberlândia Gráfica LTDA.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Gerson de Sousa is Professor of the Journalism Course of the Faculty of Education (FACED) of the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) and Professor/advisor of the Postgraduate Program in Technologies, Communication and Education (PPGCE), FACED UFU. He has a degree in Journalism from UNIMEP, with a Masters and Doctorate in Communication Sciences from the School of Communications and Arts (ECA) of the University of São Paulo (USP). Researcher active in the areas of Communication, culture, memory and old age with emphasis on the theoretical line of Cultural Studies

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3857-3237>

Email: gerson.sousa1971@gmail.com; gerson.sousa@ufu.br

Address: Faculty of Education (FACED), Federal University of Uberlândia, Avenida João Naves de Ávila, 2121, Campus Santa Mônica, Sala 1G 156, CEP 38.408-100, Uberlândia (MG), Brazil

Clarice Bertoni holds a degree in Journalism from the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU), Brazil, a Bachelor of Cinema and a MBA in Communication and Semiotics from Estácio de Sá University. Conducts research in the area of Communication, culture, old age, experience and memory.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6385-309X>

Email: clabertoni@hotmail.com

Endereço: Faculdade de Educação, Avenida João Naves de Ávila, 2121, Campus Santa Mônica, Sala 1G156, CEP 38.408-100, Uberlândia (MG), Brazil

Submitted: 14.05.2019

Accepted: 12.10.2019