

THE BLACK DIASPORA DISPROVING THE SINGLE CHORUS: IMAGINARIES OF TIME, HISTORY AND GENDER IN THE REBELLIONS OF THE BLACK PEOPLE THROUGH BRAZILIAN POPULAR MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by Paul Gilroy's *O Atlântico Negro* (The Black Atlantic; 1993/2001), this study sets out to interpret four renowned Brazilian popular music (MPB) lyrics: "Chico Rei" (Jarbas Soares, Djalma de Oliveira Costa e Geraldo Soares de Carvalho, 1964); "Zumbi" (Jorge Ben, 1974); "Mestre Sala dos Mares" (João Bosco & Aldir Blanc, 1975) and "Morena de Angola" (Chico Buarque, 1980). By examining the songs within the intellectual framework of *The Black Atlantic*, the analysis focuses on two main perspectives for interpretation: (a) the imaginary of time/history and (b) the gendered principles of enunciation. Following the methodological approach proposed by Gilroy (1993/2001), music emerges as a public space for articulating and disseminating memories of the black diaspora. Informed by the historical struggles waged by black people, the lyrics reclaim narratives insistently invisible and challenge the supposed place of political "non-agency" of enslaved populations or those living under authoritarian regimes. These compositions, confronting the urgency to break free from the tiresome chorus of a single history, provide privileged access to memories of uprisings against enslavement and colonialism, spreading decolonial knowledge in the contemporary context. The production and inscription of an oppositional memory — one that claims space and place while contesting sedimented versions — is a constant endeavour that is closely related to the establishment of new horizons for struggle in the present.

KEYWORDS

The Black Atlantic, black diaspora, imaginaries of time and history, decolonisation of knowledge

DIÁSPORA NEGRA E A DESAUTORIZAÇÃO DO REFRÃO ÚNICO: IMAGINÁRIOS DE TEMPO, HISTÓRIA E GÊNERO NAS REVOLTAS DO POVO NEGRO ATRAVÉS DA MÚSICA POPULAR BRASILEIRA

RESUMO

Tendo como inspiração *O Atlântico Negro* de Paul Gilroy (1993/2001), propomos realizar um exercício de interpretação de quatro letras consagradas da música popular brasileira (MPB). São elas: "Chico Rei" (Jarbas Soares, Djalma de Oliveira Costa e Geraldo Soares de Carvalho, 1964); "Zumbi" (Jorge Ben, 1974); "Mestre Sala dos Mares" (João Bosco & Aldir Blanc, 1975) e

“Morena de Angola” (Chico Buarque, 1980). Ao tomarmos as canções como parte do arcabouço intelectual d’O *Atlântico Negro*, focaremos duas principais chaves de leitura: (a) o imaginário de tempo/história e (b) os princípios generificados de enunciação. Seguindo a trilha metodológica proposta por Gilroy (1993/2001), identificamos a música como espaço público de elaboração e difusão de memórias sobre a diáspora negra. Informadas por lutas históricas travadas pelo povo negro, as canções recuperam narrativas insistentemente invisibilizadas e questionam o suposto lugar de “não-agência” política das populações escravizadas ou vivendo sob regimes autoritários. Frente à urgência em interromper o cansativo refrão da história única, encontramos nessas obras acesso privilegiado às recordações sobre revoltas contra a escravização e o colonialismo, difundindo no presente saberes decoloniais. A produção e inscrição de uma memória oposicional — aquela que reivindica espaço e lugar ao mesmo tempo em que contesta versões sedimentadas — é um trabalho constante que está intimamente relacionado com o estabelecimento de novos horizontes de luta no presente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

O *Atlântico Negro*, diáspora negra, imaginários de tempo e história, decolonização do saber

1. INTRODUCTION

*Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
Bob Marley, Redemption Song, 1980*

In the preface to the Brazilian edition of *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy (1993/2001) suggests that anti-racist movements often articulated “strong versions of historical consciousness” (p. 17). Such consciousness blossomed from the memory of collectivities endowed with political and hermeneutic heritage. His approach, refusing the premise of automatic racial solidarity, demands recognition of efforts to formulate subversive interpretations of the past that criticize the world “as it is”. The fact that these interpretations emerged outside (and opposed) the official historical versions should not be surprising. Even so, there is something deeply subversive about identifying composers as intellectuals. Likewise, it is crucial to recognize that the fight against racism is a collective political task that involves aesthetic and identity work, part of the long process of “becoming black” (Souza, 1983).

Thus, for Gilroy (1993/2001), memory is dynamic, and the fight against racism is also a fight for historical awareness. Long-term power dynamics are reflected in the recounting of the past, evident in the challenges of accessing documentary sources from specific racialized groups. The annihilation of uprisings against enslavement, for example, also entailed the deliberate destruction and erasure of evidence of dissent. Such censorship strategies employed by the colonial project resonate today, upholding the “narcissistic pact” (Bento, 2002, p. 49) and perpetuating the symbolic and material racial privileges of whiteness (Müller & Cardoso, 2017, p. 15). That is also true for narratives about the traumas of enslavement and colonialism. In Seligman-Silva’s (2008) terms, denial “precedes the act itself” (p. 75). Like Seligman-Silva, we contend that the “politics

of memory” is complex and that trauma may be formulated in “imaginative” artistic forms capable of collectivising narratives.

To circumvent the monopolisation of the past, we followed Gilroy’s (1993/2001) methodological proposal to study the musical repertoire produced on the circuits of *The Black Atlantic*. This non-hegemonic tradition offers an “enhanced mode of communication” (p. 164) for disseminating knowledge censored in the official archives. Within this theoretical matrix, the power of black music in communicating information, and organising anti-racist struggles should be foregrounded. In other words, it is worth exploring how to articulate (and legitimise) the records of the past and the obstinate commitment of music that celebrates the memories and struggles of black people while upholding the promise of a better future. As the author has observed (Gilroy, 1993/2001), these aesthetics and counter-aesthetics embody a “dramaturgy of remembrance” that transcends genealogy and geography, expanding the concept of belonging, where groups acting together generate a more “substantively democratic energy than race will ever allow to exist” (p.13).

This study sets out to interpret four renowned Brazilian popular music (MPB) lyrics: “Chico Rei” (Binha, Djalma Sabiá & Geraldo Babão, 1964); “Zumbi” (Jorge Ben, 1974); “Mestre Sala dos Mares” (João Bosco & Aldir Blanc, 1975) and “Morena de Angola” (Chico Buarque, 1980)¹. These compositions provide privileged access to memories of rebellions against enslavement and colonialism, spreading decolonial knowledge in the contemporary context. They encapsulate relevant insights into the experience of black communities that strike us as gold nuggets to discover. The metaphor of the mine is premeditated, as these songs rocked the second half of the 20th century in Brazil and are widely known. However, most people are unaware of the political activism implicitly enunciated, like historical resources to be mined². In fact, part of the motivation behind this article is to bring to light some of the meanings implicit in insinuations and suggestions that are not always recognised, even in very famous songs. It is important to emphasise that the selection of the four songs is controversial, as all selections are³. It does not aspire to canonise certain works to the detriment of others. It is, above all, the result of a tentative initiative to seek alternative sources beyond the hegemonic narratives. Although the limited scope to Brazilian borders may contradict Gilroy’s methodological proposal urging us to transcend national horizons, we hope to make it clear that the compositions themselves

¹ Due to character limitations, this article does not include all the lyrics. We encourage you to enjoy them with the accompanying melodies.

² It does not seem an exaggeration to say that many songs hold meanings often overlooked. We both listened to these songs as children (1980s), and it took us a long time to learn who Dragão do Mar was or to realise that the acronym “MPLA” (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]) sounded like “M-P-Lá”. This inexhaustible learning process is both the cause and invitation within these pages.

³ We must acknowledge that our selection is somewhat incoherent because it does not include songs by women composers. It is pertinent to note the ease with which white composers (such as João Bosco, Aldir Blanc, and Chico Buarque) are included in black resistance repertoires. This ambiguity warrants expanded discussions on cultural appropriation, complicity, interdependence, and/or interracial solidarity, aspects not covered in this article. It is also important to stress that, although not explored here in all its breadth and diversity, the black Brazilian songbook holds vital importance not only in the universe of popular music but also in other expressions of the cultural industry such as cinema, theatre, soap operas, and television series. The vigour of black musicians and performers deserves to be highlighted for their dynamic and fresh perspectives on issues dear to contemporary cultural studies. This expansive field merits further exploration in future work.

have already taken this step. Translocal and transtemporal affinities have always been the leitmotif of these melodies.

Informed by the historical struggles of black people, these songs narrate political actions undertaken during the colonial regime and serve as a fertile ground for cultural studies insofar as they retrieve narratives persistently made invisible. They challenge the supposed place of enslaved populations — or those living under authoritarian regimes — as having political “non-agency” while debunking the romanticised idea of a “pure” Africa, portrayed as a passive victim of intense trafficking that devastated and oppressed its populations under Iberian expansion. The songs also highlight the interconnected struggles and experiences of populations on both sides of the Atlantic, elucidating the relationships of exchange, displacement, and collaboration inherent in the construction of black resistance. More recently, this interconnectedness extends to the convergence between groups resisting colonial regimes in countries like Angola and Mozambique and militants who fought against the military dictatorship in Brazil from the 1960s onwards. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the role of popular culture in expressing — under two very different regimes of exploitation and domination, such as the colonial and the dictatorial — the daily oppressions experienced by those denied their right to freedom. By examining the songs within the intellectual framework of *The Black Atlantic*, the analysis focuses on two main perspectives for interpretation: (a) the imaginary of time/history and (b) the gendered principles of enunciation. Following this introduction, the article is structured into four sections, each dedicated to chronologically analysing one of the selected songs, and concludes with the final considerations.

2. “CHICO REI” (1964)

“Chico Rei” was the *samba-enredo* (samba plot) of Acadêmicos do Salgueiro in 1964, the samba school whose parade won second place in the Rio Carnival competition. The composition was credited to Jarbas Soares, Djalma de Oliveira Costa, and Geraldo Soares de Carvalho, better known by their nicknames Binha, Djalma Sabiá, and Geraldo Babão (all founders of the samba school and residents of Morro do Salgueiro). The song’s enduring success was further solidified through re-recordings by Martinho da Vila⁴.

According to official history, Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, starting from the mid-1950s, presented “plots that eschewed the patriotic themes imposed by the Estado Novo” (Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 2014). Instead, they actively promoted “black themes” such as Navio Negreiro in 1957 and Quilombo dos Palmares in 1960. “Chico Rei” is a testament to the school’s (and the black movement itself) broader endeavour to bring innovation to the carnival universe by celebrating resistance to enslavement, honouring black heroes and heroines such as

⁴There is divergent information regarding the year Martinho da Vila recorded “Chico Rei”. Gabriel Carin (s/d) mentions the albums *Sambas Enredo* (1980) and *Canta Canta Minha Gente* (1989), but on the artist’s official website, the song features only on the album *Voz e Coração* (2002). Cf. <http://www.martinhodavila.com.br/discografia7.htm>

Aleijadinho, Zumbi, Xica da Silva and Chico Rei himself⁵. The school's contemporary memory demonstrates the deliberate effort to displace hegemonic narratives:

[in 1963] Salgueiro introduced a new character who was a *stranger to official history* [emphasis added] - Xica da Silva, *a slave who lived in Minas Gerais* [emphasis added]. (...) The impact of Salgueiro's parade proved irresistible, and the cry "you've won!" which echoed from end to end of the avenue, has few times been so unanimous. When the parade ended, the impression lingered that something very important had happened in Rio's carnival. (Acadêmicos de Salgueiro, 2014)

It is notably striking that the mention of Xica da Silva requires a comma followed by an explanation: "a slave who lived in Minas Gerais". The didactic tone adopted by the school is partly explained by the fact that these figures were not readily recognisable because they were "stranger[s] to official history" (Acadêmicos da Salgueiro, 2014). That is evident in the samba "Chico Rei", which mythologically narrates the life of Francisco, assuming the listeners' ignorance. While such "pedagogisation" may seem aesthetically dubious to contemporary sensibilities and even inconsistent with the other compositions analysed below, it makes sense to acknowledge that alternative interpretations lack collectively constructed hermeneutic foundations. In other words: "the ability of excluded communities to decode dominant programming through a perspective of resistance is contingent upon the extent to which their collective life and historical memory provide an alternative approach to understanding" (Shohat & Stam, 1994/2006, p. 465).

Chico Rei is said to have been the Brazilian name for Galanga, an enslaved monarch from the Kingdom of Congo who won his freedom and became the owner of a gold mine, founding the first brotherhood of free blacks and living with great pomp surrounded by his court in Vila Rica (Minas Gerais). There is consensus on the lack of sources validating the character's historical authenticity. However, his fictional existence can be traced back to at least 1904, inspiring a novel by Agripa Vasconcelos (1966) and a film by Walter Lima Jr. (1985) featuring a soundtrack with Clementina de Jesus and Milton Nascimento.

In Acadêmicos de Salgueiro's *samba-enredo*, the starting point for the hero's journey (Vogler, 2006), Chico Rei is the idyllic world from which he was plucked: "vivia no litoral africano / Uma régia tribo ordeira cujo rei era símbolo / De uma terra laboriosa e hospitaleira" (he lived on the African coast / A regal, orderly tribe whose king was a symbol / Of a hard-working and hospitable land; 00:00:02). The choice of adjectives is noteworthy because they relate to the (self-)imagined community (Anderson, 1983/2008) of the Brazilian population: industrious and welcoming. In the romanticised past, the hierarchical dimension is portrayed less as domination and more as the leadership's responsibility towards its subjects: faced with the disgrace of abduction and international human trafficking, Chico Rei "jurou à sua gente que um dia os libertaria" (swore

⁵ Guilherme José Motta Faria (2014) challenges the hegemonic versions of Salgueiro's pioneering role in introducing Afro-Brazilian themes into parades and public spaces, mapping the influences of black movements while acknowledging the significant contribution of Rio de Janeiro's samba schools to discussions about Afro-Brazilian history.

to his people that one day he would free them; 00:01:17). Freedom has always been an ambition and even on the crossing, plans for insurrection begin to circulate in the background: “ao longe, Minas jamais ouvia” (in the distance, Minas never heard; 00:01:09).

Notably, the enunciation avoids using descriptors of colour or race, identifying exploiters and exploited by their nationality: “um dia, essa tranquilidade sucumbiu / Quando os portugueses invadiram / Capturando homens / Para fazê-los escravos no Brasil” (one day, this tranquillity collapsed / When the Portuguese invaded / Capturing men / To make them slaves in Brazil; 00:00:21). The horrors of enslavement lead to a chorus bidding farewell to their origins, with the baobab tree and the Bengo region (now a province in the north of Angola, where the Bengo river is also located) symbolising the lost world: “na viagem agonizante / Houve gritos alucinantes / lamentos de dor / Ô, ô, ô adeus, Baobá, ô, ô, ô / Ô, ô, ô adeus, meu Bengo, eu já vou” (on the agonising journey / There were hallucinating cries / wails of pain / Ô, ô, ô goodbye, Baobá, ô, ô, ô / Ô, ô, ô goodbye, my Bengo, I’m going; 00:00:42). The chorus serves as a platform for expressing shared pain, which, as per Gilroy (1993/2001), may be “unspeakable” but not “inexpressible” (p. 158).

The song traces the geography of the slave trade: departing from West Africa, it arrives in Rio de Janeiro, where “no mercado de escravos / Um rico fidalgo os comprou / E para Vila Rica os levou” (in the slave market / A rich nobleman bought them / And took them to Vila Rica; 00:01:27). While working in the gold mines of Minas Gerais, Chico Rei purportedly encouraged “seu pessoal” (his people) to hide gold in their hair to buy their freedom. The reference to the Catholic Church as a place where gold was collected raises numerous questions about the relationship between religious power and economic power concerning the management of the enslaved population. There is ample documentation of enslaved individuals adopting tactics to occupy spaces within religious brotherhoods for activities that, while not overtly political, provided an opportunity for legitimate collective meetings (Lima, 1999).

Salgueiro’s samba emphasises faith and narrates Chico Rei’s voluntary conversion in the concluding stanzas: “escolheu o nome de Francisco / E ao catolicismo se converteu / No ponto mais alto da cidade, Chico Rei / Com seu espírito de luz / Mandou construir uma igreja / E a denominou / Santa Efigênia do Alto da Cruz” (he chose the name of Francisco / And converted to Catholicism / At the highest point in the city, Chico Rei / With his spirit of light / Had a church built / And named it / Santa Efigênia do Alto da Cruz; 00:03:01). Obviously, it would be simplistic to interpret the declarations of catholicism as something univocal, disregarding the syncretic nature of Brazilian religiosity. A direct effect of colonial edicts that prohibited African religious practices, syncretism emerged as a survival strategy, “merging” deities from different sacred repertoires. The Salgueiro Samba School itself has the orisha Xangô as its protector, identified with different catholic saints (St. George, St. Joseph and St. John).

Once freed, the hero “Sob o sol da liberdade trabalhou / E um pouco de terra ele comprou / Descobrimo ouro enriqueceu” (Under the sun of freedom he worked / And a little land he bought / Discovering gold he became rich; 00:02:50). Chico Rei is portrayed

as the leader who mobilises action, but the collection of gold is shared and so are the benefits of that collection (freedom). The fact that the locus of salvation was in the head, in the hair obsessively called “wicked” by racist repertoires, does not seem random either. However, this is outrightly a male collectivity. We must recognise how this typical narrative silences the existence of a female experience of captivity. From the very first stanzas, the song mentions the capture of “homens” (men) and does not change this ambiguous generalisation: when the king swears to “sua gente / que os libertaria” (his people / that he would free them; 00:01:20).

The story of Chico Rei, as presented in the song, follows a classical structure within an evolving timeline: from idyllic tranquillity in Africa to the agonising insult against the hero, which is overcome by his tenacity and cunning, making freedom and wealth possible, crowned by spiritual completeness. The church’s construction and the song praising Chico Rei represent the aspiration to immortality. It is also worth noting that the character is not called *Rei* [King] Chico but Chico Rei, as if the title acknowledges his nobility rather than the reverse. The memory woven in this way valorises a form of subversion to enslavement, which leaves not only the structures of power (monarchical) but also the economic hierarchy (supposedly accessible to those gifted with merit) untouched.

3. “ZUMBI” (1974)

Zumbi is the most famous figure of resistance to enslavement in Brazil. He lived in the Quilombo dos Palmares, a community of approximately 20,000 people in the Serra da Barriga in the present-day State of Alagoas. This community resisted at least eighteen state attacks and maintained independence for over a century. Zumbi was one of the Quilombo’s main leaders until its defeat, after which his head was allegedly displayed as a war trophy in Recife. Despite the limited knowledge about his life, he remains a symbol of the black struggle against the slave system, and his name needs no introduction in the Brazilian world. Although exploring representations of Zumbi in other cultural contexts would be enriching, such an endeavour exceeds the scope of this article.

“Zumbi” is one of Jorge Ben’s greatest hits. Initially released on the 1974 record *Tábua das Esmeraldas*, the song was given a new arrangement in 1976’s *África Brasil*, with the name “África Brasil (Zumbi)”, featuring a more aggressive interpretation (Oliveira, 2012). Since then, it has been re-recorded by countless renowned artists, including Cidade Negra (“Negro no Poder”, 1992), Caetano Veloso (“Noites do Norte”, 2000), Mariana Baltar (“Uma Dama Também Quer se Divertir”, 2006), Maquinado (“Mundialmente Anônimo: O Magnético Sangramento da Existência”, 2010) and Ellen Oléria (“Ellen Oléria e Pret.utu”, 2013)⁶.

As in “Chico Rei”, the song starts its narrative in Africa. The first stanzas list the major ports where slaves were traded along the African coast until the mid-19th century: “Angola, Congo, Benguela / Monjolo, Cabinda, Mina / Quiloa, Rebolo” (00:00:05). Collective identity

⁶ The musical group Planet Hemp also refers to “Zumbi” in their hit “Dig Di Dig” (Hempa) from their debut album *Usuário* (1995), reproducing the stanzas “Zumbi é o senhor das trevas, Zumbi é o senhor das demandas / Quando Zumbi chega, é Zumbi quem manda” (Zumbi is the lord of darkness, Zumbi is the lord of demands / When Zumbi arrives, it’s Zumbi who commands).

formation involves temporal and spatial contextualisation: “Aqui onde estão os homens / Há um grande leilão” (Here where the men are / There’s a big auction; 00:00:17). The term “homens” (men) could be interpreted in different ways: either as a synonym for humanity, masculinity (in contrast to the princess), whiteness (in contrast to the black hands) or even a concentration of interests (they are having a big auction). The multiplicity of meanings is one of the lyrics’ assets. Repetition is also a stylistic resource with a strong impact, especially the chorus “eu quero ver” (I want to see; 00:00:43), which expresses the challenge to the *status quo* implicit in memories of resistance.

The lyrics allude to economic activities based on slave labour, particularly the large plantations for export: sugar, coffee and cotton. These crops represent the last strongholds of slavery: sugar production in Cuba, coffee in southwestern Brazil, and cotton in the southern United States (Cooper et al., 2005). The creation of the image contrasting those who carry out and those who watch over the cotton harvest exposes the racial dimension of exploitation by emphasising the masters *sitting and watching* “o algodão branco” (white cotton) being “colhidos por mãos negras” (picked by black hands; 00:01:29). On analysing the second version of “Zumbi”, Luciana Xavier Oliveira (2012) relates sound representation tropes to the tune, highlighting the military allusions in the description of Zumbi:

throughout the track, the vocals adopt figurative contours marked by their declamatory and discursive tone, which deviates from the song’s melodic and rhythmic trajectory. Notably, there is a deliberate adherence to rhyme in certain verses, such as the bridge, where grammatical agreement is subverted to facilitate rhyme (...). Thus, the “s” of the word “demandas” (demands) is omitted in pronunciation to harmonise with the ending of the verb “manda” (sends) (...). Meanwhile, the wind instruments, reminiscent of military bands, gain prominence, heralding the hero’s arrival. During the chorus’ repetition, these wind instruments emerge, calling upon the black people to stand and fight. (pp. 169–170)

It is worth noting that the composition was written during the Brazilian military dictatorship, which promoted racial democracy as a state ideology. In this context, explicitly addressing racial exploitation held particular significance, requiring an understanding of racism’s mechanisms. All the more so because Jorge Ben uses the present tense, situating the experience of slavery “aqui” (here) and projecting an uncertain future. This adds weight to the chorus as a threat: “eu quero ver / quando Zumbi chegar / o que vai acontecer” (I want to see / when Zumbi arrives / what will happen; 00:01:55).

The sentence “eu quero ver” (I want to see) takes on a layered meaning, simultaneously conveying anticipation and challenge, launching the possibility of a change in the lifetimes of those who “vê” ([see] amplified by the fact that the chorus is sung collectively in the first version). At the same time, as Seligmann-Silva (2008, p. 69) argues, in trauma testimony, “past time is present time (...). More specifically, trauma encapsulates a memory of the past that does not disappear”. Confronted with the outrageous racial inequality of contemporary Brazil, there are multiple interpretations to understand “a past that does not disappear”. Hence, the longing for Zumbi resonates powerfully within the tune.

Meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge that the presumed subversive perspective upholds the male ethos of courage and power (“Zumbi é quem manda” [it’s Zumbi who commands]) when compared to the portrayal of a “Princesa à venda” (Princess for sale; 00:00:28), which implies a sense of passivity. The romanticisation of aristocratic figures (also evident in “Chico Rei”) is deeply paradoxical, as it responds to the injustices of the white elite by claiming a black elite. Furthermore, it seems to suggest that enslavement was harsher for princes and princesses, disregarding the rearrangement required in captivity.

In spite of occasional mentions of former status distinctions being observed in the case of particular slaves around them – the much romanticized idea of the enslaved prince or princess – it is not at all difficult to perceive why antecedent distinctions of rank would tend to become irrelevant or totally transformed in the plantation setting. (Mintz & Price, 2003, p. 104)

The type of enunciation explored in “Zumbi” differs significantly from the approach of the samba singers in “Chico Rei”, who prioritise nationality over racial identity. Jorge Ben has consistently highlighted blackness as a central theme, employing images where colour predominates, like the contrast between white cotton and black hands. This aligns with aesthetic expectations shared by black movements. In this sense, Oliveira (2012) explores Jorge Ben’s relationship with American black music, particularly soul and funk.

The wider circulation of Jorge Ben’s early works in the mainstream allowed these fusions between Afro-Brazilian music and American black music, which were never stable or definitive, to become more frequent in the 1960s and gain more visibility. [...] This strategy proved effective, reaching 60,000 records sold upon release, an impressive figure for that era. It confirmed a new marketing strategy, also targeting the international *World Music* market later on, especially by adopting a more danceable and commercially appealing sound. This shift accompanied the Brazilian MPB phonographic market’s transition from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. (Oliveira, 2012, p. 160)

Jorge Ben’s transition towards a more pop-oriented style and international market alignment coincided with record labels’ vested interest in promoting cultural expressions of the black diaspora. The strategies of representation and commercialisation aligned itself with the ethos of “Black is beautiful,” partially in response to the entertainment industry’s interests, and was able to transform blackness into the business of an aseptic and highly profitable multiculturalism (Gilroy, 2004/2007).

Despite Jorge Ben’s production being shaped within the music industry and appropriated by different, potentially exoticising conceptions, it does not exhaust the provocative and subversive dimension that “Zumbi” (re)percusses, especially when it blends temporalities, intertwining the past and present as a time of rebellion, war and demand. The unexpected yet to be seen is an aspiration, a collective call to action.

4. “O MESTRE SALA DOS MARES” (1975)

Before it was censored, the lyrics of *O Mestre Sala dos Mares*, composed by João Bosco and Aldir Blanc, began with a direct tribute to two pivotal figures in Brazil’s black rebellions, the “almirante negro” (black admiral; João Cândido Felisberto) and the “líder jangadeiro e abolicionista” (raftsman and abolitionist leader; Francisco José do Nascimento), known as the Dragão do Mar (Dragon of the Sea). Both figures’ stories share common ground. Perhaps this explicit allusion connecting emancipation struggles unsettled censors, referring them to the context of democratic movements against Brazil’s military dictatorship in the 1970s. To clear the song of the censors’ veto, the lyricists ultimately replaced “bravo marinheiro” (brave sailor) and “Almirante Negro” (black admiral) with “bravo feiticeiro” (brave sorcerer) and “Navegante Negro” (black navigator).

The Dragão do Mar, also known as Chico da Matilde, played a pivotal role in the abolitionist movement, particularly in Ceará. In 1881, he led a collective protest among Fortaleza’s raftsmen, refusing to transport enslaved black people to slave ships in the interprovincial trade. This abolitionist struggle contributed significantly to Ceará becoming the first Brazilian province to abolish slavery in 1884. The lyrics of “Mestre Sala dos Mares” pay homage not only to this resistance against slavery but also commemorate the Revolta da Chibata, a popular uprising led by sailor João Cândido Felisberto in 1910, in the then federal capital, Rio de Janeiro. This connection between the struggles for freedom is explicit in the passage that emphasises the need to produce a contemporary *memory* of “todas as lutas inglórias” (all the inglorious struggles; 00:01:27).

During the early 20th century, when the Brazilian elite was struggling between keeping the colonial privileges of European descent white oligarchies intact and projecting abroad an image of an avant-garde country investing in technology, a group of Brazilian sailors was sent on a mission to England. The aim was to retrieve two battleships recently acquired by the Brazilian navy, the *São Paulo* and the *Minas Gerais*, which would guarantee the renewal of the national fleet. The contact between the Brazilians — including João Cândido — and their international counterparts profoundly impacted them. The Brazilian sailors learnt that the harsh disciplinary practices customary in Brazil, including severe corporal punishment for faults and dissent, had been abolished in the British navy. Despite Brazil having officially repealed it in the 19th century, the lash was still part of the punishment repertoire for the military corps, predominantly comprising white admirals and black sailors. However, as the sailors noted through transcontinental dialogues in 1910, the lash had already been banned almost everywhere in the world.

Following Bakhtin’s insights in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Gilroy views the ship as a “chronotope”: a unit of analysis that allows access to spatial and temporal categories of representation. He notes that ships were dynamic conduits connecting the points between the Atlantic (and, we might add, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean). The mobility of this “chronotope” represented the transformations between the connected static points. That is why they embodied cultural and political units, extending beyond the transnational trade role:

they were something more – a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production. The ship provides a chance to explore the articulations between the discontinuous histories of English's ports, its interfaces with the wider world. (p. 61)

The resonance of micro-political experiences in this dynamic space of tensions between modernisation, colonialism and industrialisation certainly influenced the long journey home. The successful experiences of the international struggles undertaken by English, African⁷, Caribbean and Russian sailors who, by organising, had achieved improvements in their working conditions encouraged and strengthened the spirits of the Brazilian sailors. On November 23, 1910, they took the first step in the fight to abolish corporal punishment in the national navy by seizing the battleship *Minas Gerais*.

The end of corporal punishment, improved food quality and amnesty for the mutineers were the main demands of the Revolta da Chibata led by João Cândido (Morel, 2009). Hermes da Fonseca's government had to accept the demands of the mutinous sailors on four ships in Guanabara Bay in full, or they would bomb the federal capital. With the government's opposition bench on the side of the insurgents on November 26, the president accepted the conditions imposed by the sailors, who laid down their arms the same day. However, the government counterstroke four days later: reneged on the surrender agreement, Hermes da Fonseca published both a decree allowing the summary dismissal of the navy for "lack of discipline" and ordering the arrest of the sailors identified as the mutiny leaders, including João Cândido. The two years of imprisonment left indelible consequences for the "black admiral", and after the trial resulting in his acquittal in 1912, he was unable to return to his occupation because, considered a conspirator, he was expelled from the navy⁸. João Cândido lived until 1969, witnessing two dictatorships in Brazil and ultimately passing away as a fishmonger in Rio de Janeiro.

The tone of the lyrics, from the very beginning, conveys the solemn nature of producing *memories* about the black rebellions, which resist the systematic erasure from official history: "há muito tempo nas águas da Guanabara / O Dragão do Mar reapareceu" (a long time ago in the waters of Guanabara / The Dragon of the Sea reappeared; 00:00:08). The homage paid to Chico da Matilde underlines the historical inscription of the Revolta da Chibata, "a quem a história não esqueceu" (whom history has not forgotten; 00:00:22), within the ongoing daily struggles for freedom.

The concept of *memory* referenced here aligns with the perspectives of Brazil's black movements, which actively reinscribe belonging and produce analyses of racial hierarchies. Our position shares the insights of Lélia Gonzalez (1984): "we see memory as *the not-knowing that knows* [emphasis added], that place of inscriptions that restore

⁷ Identifying the ship as a microsystem of linguistic and political hybridity, Gilroy (1993/2001, p.53) notes that at the end of the 18th century, a quarter of the British navy was composed of Africans, for whom the experience of slavery was a powerful orientation to the ideologies of liberty and justice.

⁸ João Cândido would never enjoy the amnesty negotiated — and agreed upon — during the Revolta da Chibata. This amnesty (proposed in 2002 by Senator Marina Silva) was granted posthumously in 2008, almost a hundred years after his surrender in Guanabara Bay.

a history that has not been written, *the place where truth emerges* [emphasis added], that truth that is structured as fiction” (p. 226).

While the deliberate acts of concealment and systematic erasure are *conscious* productions of historical agents of whiteness to uphold dominant power structures, the production of *memory*, encapsulated in “the not-knowing that knows”, subverts and reverses the context, working as a counterforce, reinstating narratives that should *never be forgotten*, even when unwritten. Thus, the lyrics serve as a powerful strategy for inscribing memory: “conhecido como / Navegante negro / Tinha a dignidade de um / Mestre-sala” (known as / Black navigator / He had the dignity of a / Master of ceremonies; 00:00:27). The struggle dignifies the black sailor bestowing upon him the grace and dignity akin to a master of ceremonies⁹ who captivates diverse audiences with warm greetings, as articulated in the song.

However, the stark reality of inequalities persists. It is imperative to remember what must be fought against and cannot be forgotten: “rubras cascatas jorravam / Das costas / Dos santos entre cantos / E chibatas / Inundando o coração, / Do pessoal do porão / Que a exemplo do feiticeiro / Gritava então” (red waterfalls gushed / From the backs / Of the saints between songs / And lashings / Flooding the heart, / Of the people in the hold / Who, like the sorcerer, / Cried out then (00:00:50). The brutal cruelty of corporal punishment, the lash, and the martyrdom endured: it is against this background of degrading torture that the sailors rebel, against the brutal force that sustains exploitation. The hold is also a remembrance of the harrowing experiences aboard slave ships, echoing deeply with Paul Gilroy’s (1993/2001) arguments when describing the *Atlântico Negro*. The flow of ideas and people, symbolic struggles over cultural models and subjective, diasporic constructions form a “living intellectual resource” (p. 99), is an expressive political counterculture of its own capable of embodying ethics and politics, dichotomised by modernity that once naturalised racial terror.

How can we not cry out? How can we remain silent to such intense suffering? How can we denounce the tearing apart of these black bodies that, despite newly thrust into wage labour relations, remain sub-citizens, if not through a metaphor that makes the “red waterfalls” less painful? And how can we not make a *memory* of what excess and pain were when these were the catalysts that sparked the black rebellion? Music grants a collective chorus to protest against injustice. A counterculture that offers solace and activates “politics of transfiguration” (Gilroy, 1993/2001, p. 96).

That is how the lyrics of “Mestre Sala dos Mares” can be approached from the perspective of a “politics of transfiguration”, in which “the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance and between that group and its erstwhile oppressors” (Gilroy, 1993/2001, p. 96) are emphasised.

⁹ The figure of the master of ceremonies refers to the carnival character who, alongside the flag bearer, is responsible for carrying the samba school’s standard. Many contemporary studies have traced the genesis of this character back to the aristocratic tradition of the Portuguese courts, which appointed a lifetime assistant to the nobleman for bureaucratic advisory work, known as the “Grand Master of Ceremonies”.

A direct remembrance of a historical event, the politics of transfiguration within the lyrics deliberately invokes an opaque and subterranean resistance that broadly exalts the diasporic experience — the chronotope of the Black Atlantic — reaffirming its continuity and persistence. This non-naive politics of transfiguration, rekindled with every rendition of the song, is not a counterdiscourse but a powerful critical counterculture that “defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own” (Gilroy, 1993/2001, p. 96).

The verses “glória aos piratas, às / Mulatas, às sereias / Glória à farofa, à cachaça, / Às baleias” (glory to the pirates, to the / Mulattas, to the mermaids / Glory to farofa, to cachaça, / To the whales; 00:01:09) also express a form of cultural solace (Gilroy, 1993/2001). This stanza abruptly disrupts the pain produced by the memory of the martyrdom recounted in the previous lines. It celebrates a fusion of different codes: pirates, mulattas, mermaids, farofa, cachaça, and whales are blended as elements sharing the same universe of inscription. This ambiguous interplay within the politics of transfiguration aligns with Gonzalez’s (1984) notion of the ambivalence between consciousness and memory:

consciousness excludes what memory includes. Hence, insofar as it is the place of rejection, [consciousness] expresses itself as the dominant discourse (or repercussions of this discourse) in a given culture, concealing memory by imposing what it, consciousness, claims to be true. However, memory has its cunning, its game of wits: that is why it speaks through the manoeuvres of the consciousness discourse. (p. 226)

Thus, while in the previous stanza of the song, the *memory* embraces the suffering and solidarity experienced in the hold, reclaiming these aspects as integral parts of narratives about the struggles of black people, the subsequent stanza takes a more irreverent approach, seemingly exalting symbols associated with the prevailing *consciousness*. By equating whales, pirates, mulattas, mermaids, farofa and cachaça in the same sentence, the authors challenge where the narratives of black resistance are inscribed through fabulation and irony. This poetic and melodic structure, noted by scholars like Gilroy (1993/2001) and Davis (2011), encodes unspeakable elements of the enslaved experience within the tradition of black music. These encoded elements share senses and meanings with diasporic communities in different latitudes. This dominant perspective, which disregards the memory of the rebellions to shape an opportunistic consciousness, attempts to forge a simulacrum that circumscribes black participation — in the construction of Brazilian society — within the folklore of a few ‘traditional’ dishes and the insidious sexuality of the ‘mulatta’, a term that has always objectified black women. The mocking tone thus seeks to deconstruct these mentioned symbols, positioning them as products of a prevailing consciousness that opposes the emancipation of black people.

The concluding stanzas of the song, however, pay the most poignant homage, not only to the mutinous sailors of the Revolta da Chibata, but to all who fight: “glórias a todas as lutas inglórias / Que através da nossa história / Não esquecemos jamais”

(Glory to all the inglorious struggles / That throughout our history / We will never forget; 00:01:27). A monument to João Cândido, long demanded by black movement activists and vehemently rejected by government and navy officials, took almost a century to be erected in Rio de Janeiro's Praça XV. Thus, it had not been built when the song was written. However, it seems to us that there is no more powerful way of inscribing a *memory* of struggles than through tangible deeds and active resistance, or as Aldir Blanc and João Bosco would say, the "monumento" (monument) of the "pedras pisadas do cais" (stones trodden on the quay). It symbolises *memory* inscribed in the world through action. The transfiguration of imposed suffering into acts of resistance.

5. "MORENA DE ANGOLA" (1980)

Luanda, Benguela and Lobito welcomed representatives of the Kalunga Project¹⁰ in 1980. Led by producer Fernando Faro and singer-songwriter Chico Buarque, Brazilian singers and songwriters such as Dona Ivone Lara, Dorival Caymmi, Martinho da Vila, Djavan, Clara Nunes, and Edu Lobo performed in Angola, a country embroiled in civil war five years after the long struggle for national liberation. The Kalunga project's ambition was to (re)affirm the cooperation, collaboration and solidarity that, despite the forces of repression in both countries, were trying to consolidate the bridges of dialogue between the two shores of the Atlantic. The colonial structure severely restricted this dialogue, organised as "triangles without a base" (Cotler, 1969; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Its apex monopolised communication processes and hindered South-South connections. Interestingly, research by Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva (2012) identifies a "kind of discovery of the African continent" (p. 110) among São Paulo's black movement activists in the early 1960s. These repertoires produced in the Black Atlantic are even more invaluable as they forge bonds of solidarity curtailed by power structures.

In 1980, Brazil was still under the yoke of the military dictatorship marked by state terrorism that aimed to suppress any form of movement or action perceived as "subversive" against the regime. Due to the military forces' acts of terror and permanent surveillance, many composers wrote ciphered songs to bypass official censorship and thus get their message across to the public. At the same time, the regime sought to consolidate a narrative of "unity in diversity", portraying samba and African cultural expressions as a synthesis of successful miscegenation (Bakke, 2007; Meihy, 2004; Soares, 2016). This narrative, projected internationally, sought to hide the severe human rights violations and sell the image of a 'harmonious', egalitarian country devoid of social and racial tensions. The proposal to celebrate miscegenation as a societal model and conceal the country's deep-rooted inequalities had been implemented under Getúlio Vargas in the 1940s. However, the military dictatorship after the 1964 coup reshaped the field of cultural production — production, mediation and reception — based on state policies as a consequence of an "official" Brazilian identity project. This project included

¹⁰ The Museu Afro in São Paulo (Brazil) showcases an extensive collection related to the Kalunga project on its website: <http://museuafrodigitalrio.org/s2/?work=memoria-do-projeto-kalunga>.

appropriating elements from Bantu and Yoruba African cultures — rhythms, flavours, history, language — and their dissemination as part of Brazilian popular identity.

“Morena de Angola”, composed in the same year as the Kalunga Project, was a gift from Chico Buarque to Clara Nunes, who had just started recording her album *Brasil Mestiço* (1980) after her return from Angola. Bakke (2007), Brügger (2008, 2009) and Soares (2016), who have explored Clara Nunes’ phonographic output, unanimously agree that while the singer’s artistic career was outlined by Adelzon Alves and emphasised miscegenation as a fundamental symbol, the exalted mestizo Brazil was fundamentally black. This Brazil, which honours ancestry and connections with the black diaspora and African culture, is evident in Nunes’ repertoire, her performances, and the public *persona* the artist has created. She openly shared her religious beliefs and active participation in Afro-Brazilian religions, offering a notion of miscegenation that diverged from the prevailing official narrative.

The concept and inspiration for the music took shape in Benguela, particularly on Catumbela Beach, referenced in the lines: “Eu acho que deixei um cacho do meu coração na Catumbela” (I think I left a bunch of my heart in Catumbela; 00:02:14). Despite the evident references to Angola’s social, cultural, and political landscapes, Chico Buarque penned rhythmic lyrics that at first glance, seem disconnected from Angola’s violent civil war. In fact, the tune emphasises the sounds of “CH” or “X”, mimicking a rattle. However, our reading of “Morena de Angola” diverges from interpretations that see it as “alienated” and disengaged from the war¹¹. Perhaps it is not irrelevant to recall the Brazilian political context itself, of continuous persecution and surveillance, where any allusion to revolutionary initiatives was immediately identified as a threat to the regime and liable to summary censorship. The ties between Brazilian popular music and Clara Nunes with Angola, however, are well documented (Meihy, 2004; Silva & Oliveira Filho, 1983; Soares, 2016) and reflect the vibrant cultural exchanges across the Black Atlantic over time and how these exchanges influenced the phonographic production of both countries. As Meihy (2004) notes, the “existence of a common language, Portuguese, and the long history that connected the two sides through sophisticated adaptation, represent a journey of mutual influences in which elements of the two manifestations are woven together” (p.122).

“Morena de Angola” is one of the most emblematic sambas in Brazilian popular music and, according to researcher José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy (2004), it epitomises the affective cultural exchange that birthed this tune. In the text “O Samba é *Morena de Angola*: Oralidade e Música” (Samba is Morena de Angola: Orality and Music), the author revisits the historiography of Brazilian samba to demonstrate that Africanity is its most notable feature and that it is a cultural expression that embodies “a history of black culture which is not solely defined by the painful aspects of black oppression” (Meihy,

¹¹ According to Marco Polli (2009), for example, the verses: “será que no meio da mata, na moita, a morena inda chocalha? Será que ela não fica afoita pra dançar na chama da batalha?” (I wonder if the morena in the middle of the forest, in the bushes, still rattle? I wonder if she doesn’t get eager to dance in the flame of battle?) do not accurately portray the brutality of the civil war scenes. He suggests these lines could be among the ten worst verses in Brazilian popular music.

2004, p. 139). Brazilian samba and its interconnections with Bantu oral traditions, particularly with the batuque used in religious celebrations in Angola, reflects what Gilroy (1993/2001) called “politics of fulfilment” (p. 95) in another historical-political context. It suggests that beyond the dramatic experience of abduction and enslavement, many samba songs convey a vision of a future society able to fulfil the promise of freedom and justice for all.

The lyrics, initially seeming to tie a “black” woman to the idea of “rattling,” suggest an equation of woman-black-body reinforcing an essentialist view. On the other hand, a black feminist perspective reveals that this same woman embodies disorder and leads a female response against prevailing domination. The “Morena de Angola”, epitomised in the seemingly incoherent verses, is the working class woman who walks, interacts, loves, fights and resists in the black revolutionary city. Freire and Queiroz (2011) have already highlighted how these seemingly disparate verses introduce an element of disorder:

Morena de Angola “sai chocalhando pro trabalho” (leaving rattling for work), “batucando na panela” (drumming on the pot), “afoita pra dançar na chama da batalha” (eager to dance in the flame of battle), “faz requebrar a sentinela” (making the sentinel shake), “fazendo buchincho com seus penduricalhos” (making a fuss with her pendants), and “tá no remelexo” (is in a state of turmoil). These verses encapsulate the disruption of order, the mess. That which undoes the predictable customs and agreements belongs to difference, otherness, and strangeness. (p. 689)

Unlike the other songs analysed in this article, “Morena de Angola” does not focus on a specific figure, heroic deeds, or a particular historical event. “Chico Rei”, “Zumbi”, and “O Mestre Sala dos Mares” all praise leaders for their accomplishments. Even though no social movement is solely driven by leaders or devoid of female involvement, as in other cultural dimensions, popular songs often reflect and perpetuate the structures that prioritise and highlight the accomplishments of men, making most of them visible while actively erasing female contributions. The same way that it hierarchises racially and geographically by readily legitimising the narratives of white heterosexual European men among all the others. However, the disruptive song “Morena de Angola” diverges from this norm by portraying the everyday life of an unnamed woman, someone “ordinary” deeply engaged in actively transforming the world. Like “Zumbi”, Morena carries the rattle on her shin in the present: her time is open to possibilities. A horizon that the final stanza celebrates — almost imperceptibly for those who do not have the code — the political engagement of Morena de Angola, with whom the song sympathises: “morena bichinha danada / Minha camarada do MPLA” (naughty *morena* / My comrade from the MPLA; 00:02:31), by using the term “comrade,” denoting both a typically communist greeting and support for the armed struggle for independence undertaken by the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola).

Another dimension often overlooked in these analyses is the indistinction between domestic and public spaces¹² in the lives of black women and how the absence of this dichotomy is represented in the verses. The movements and spaces occupied by Morena de Angola reflect the non-negotiable aspirations for freedom resonating with other Black Atlantic traditions, such as blues singers. It is interesting to note that though it was not written by a black woman¹³, the song evokes bonds of solidarity that demand a spatiality free of conventions and determinations. The blues singers, in producing a counterculture that operated “politics of transfiguration” (Gilroy, 1993/2001), used humour, satire, and irony to address taboos, the silence surrounding misogynistic violence, the immobility imposed on black women in the post-emancipation period in the United States, who were not allowed to travel on trains, for example (Barboza et al., 2021). For Angela Davis (2012), the women of the blues “redefined women’s ‘place’. They forged and memorialized images of tough, resilient and independent women who were afraid neither of their own vulnerability nor of defending their right to be respected as autonomous human beings” (p. 185).

We understand that labour — not described in the lyrics as paid or unpaid, but always subject to someone else’s orders — is central to the life of this Angolan *morena* “será que a morena cochila escutando o cochicho do chocalho / Será que desperta ginguando e já sai chocalhando pro trabalho” (I wonder if the *morena* naps listening to the rattle / I wonder if she wakes up waddling and leaves to work rattling; 00:00:28). This portrayal depicts an independent *morena*, who even at work maintains her political position — since we consider the “rattle” in the song to be the symbol representing the female political position against the established order. A symbol of disorder, of transformation, which black women insist on imprinting on their space and time, subverting labour relations: “será que ela tá na cozinha guisando a galinha à cabidela / Será que esqueceu da galinha e ficou batucando na panela” (I wonder if she’s in the kitchen stewing the chicken / I wonder if she forgot the chicken and kept drumming on the pot; 00:00:44). However, the stanzas carry yet another symbolic weight: while the deterministic and linear version of history expects the *morena*’s place to be in the kitchen — like her enslaved ancestors — performing the duties to which black women were subject, it remains uncertain whether the *morena* is really in the kitchen, conforming to this *role* imposed on her within the logic of capitalist production and power structures. Her feisty personality hints at rebellion when she suggests she has joined a demonstration to drum against the regime.

In *Mulheres, Raça e Classe* (Women, Race and Class), Angela Davis provides a thought-provoking analysis of the constitution of labour’s fundamental dimension in the lives of black women. Across the eras of slavery and post-emancipation, the enormous

¹² Acknowledgements are due to the anonymous reviewer who highlighted this crucial aspect.

¹³ The portrayal of a black woman referred to as a “morena” penned by a white composer, holds multifaceted implications that warrant a comprehensive analysis, which unfortunately is beyond the purpose of this text. However, we acknowledge the intricacies within the composer’s work, particularly the recurring use of female “lyrical selves”. See, for example: Araújo (2018).

space occupied by forced or super-exploited labour “overshadowed every other aspect” (Davis, 2016, p. 17) of women’s existence. The detailed study on the integration of black women into the slave mode of production allowed Davis to construct a theoretical framework that articulates central aspects of the conditions experienced by these women. This includes the place of work in their lives, the construction of slavery as a persisting historical force that dictated ways of ‘being a woman’ and being oppressed within a patriarchal system, and how gender markers operated in the specific condition of being enslaved, ambiguously shifting the repressive content according to the needs of white supremacy: exploiting black women both as labourers in the fields akin to men and as targets of sexual abuse rooted in their gender (Barboza et al., 2021). Although Marxist theories have extensively addressed the subject of work, Davis’s ground-breaking contribution lies in claiming the centrality of work in the lives of black women compared to other women.

Although many perspectives of the song remain open to interpretation within black feminisms, by way of conclusion, we can see how the line “passando pelo regimento ela faz requebrar a sentinela” (passing through the regiment she makes the sentinel shake; 00:01:06), reinforces the bonds of complicity forged in the fight against oppression. The “morena”, rattling order with her walking feet, transforms the armed struggle into her trench. The sentry’s solidarity illustrates one of the great fears of the white city towards the black city, as historian Sidney Chalhoub (1988) pointed out, reminiscent of life in pre-abolition Rio de Janeiro: “and the black city, the hiding city, became definitely threatening even when it was possibly showing solidarity” (p. 101). This fear stemmed from the deep networks of mutual support woven within the black city, horizontal networks rejecting the white codes of kinship and collaboration. These networks fostered affective connections among wage labourers, freed black men and women and those pursuing freedom: “such horizontal network is dense, meticulously woven, giving meaning to these black lives and establishing social places impenetrable to the white city” (Chalhoub, 1988, p. 102), in webs of sociability recently labelled as belonging to the *undercommons* (Moten & Harney, 2004).

The networks of mutual aid in the black diaspora are not closed systems; they are open to the incessant movement of dialogue and exchange, creating lasting resistance and favouring transatlantic connections that challenge ready-made discourses of submission. Unlike Marco Polli (2009), we do not think that referring to Morena de Angola as “bichinha danada” (naughty) and capturing her rattling in tune indicates a misunderstanding of the Angolan civil war context as if the composer had not seen “the rawness of the images in the newspapers”. Instead, it seems to be a deliberate affirmation of complicity with the black code, then recently translated, appropriated and incorporated by Chico Buarque and the interpreter Clara Nunes. Subverting the order, challenging the structures of domination, and confronting privilege from a female, black, working-class and fearless voice was a “damned” lesson shared with “the comrades of the MPLA” and explicitly inspired by the ongoing anti-colonial movements of the Black Atlantic (Pacific and Indian).

6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the great black uprisings of history are crucial for retrieving memory menaced by the systematic erasure of official history, which pretends to be the only one, examining the everyday relationships experienced by black populations becomes crucial in understanding how active resistance was, and is, engendered in everyday tasks, ways of life and the appropriation of the city. Observing the relationships of mutual help and affection, cultural productions and leisure of the black population, as in the songs presented here, provides essential insights for deconstructing the narrative often associated with the descendants of those who endured the horrors of slavery.

Producing and inscribing an oppositional *memory* — that claims space and place while challenging established narratives — is a constant endeavour closely related to shaping new avenues for resistance. That is not to say that we should not inscribe our *memories* within the ongoing debates over historical versions; on the contrary, our current struggles drive us to reinterpret the past and re-dimension it. Without the past struggles and resistance, we are certain that our present would be drastically different (and worse). However, these historical struggles must be the starting point for our actions and never the end. As we have seen in the rhythms analysed here, *never forgetting* means making politically situated and explicit decisions, creating links, building networks and, above all, *disrupting structures*, multiplying the records of the past in order to recover the memories of resistance. This also requires an active *engagement* with the world, daily and ongoing, much like the “black admiral” monument’s significance lies in the stones trodden on the quayside. In this endeavour, we all hold responsibility: if we have to dance to the music, we must choose the tune carefully. We encourage more investigations of the musical repertoire of the *Black Atlantic*, framing it as an intellectual collection worth *studying* and sharing. A collective initiative would offer the opportunity to delve into fundamental issues that have slipped beyond the scope of this article, such as interracial solidarity tactics, the place of black women in artistic production and the role of black feminism in shaping narratives of protest.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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