

Psychoanalytic listening and decolonization in rap circles in Quilombo dos Palmares

Escuta psicanalítica e decolonização nas rodas de rap no Quilombo dos Palmares

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Escucha psicoanalítica y descolonización en las rodas de rap del Quilombo dos Palmares

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Abstract

This paper is related to a master's research project that investigated the effects of rap circles, understood as an established clinical-political listening device. These circles were held in the territory of Quilombo dos Palmares with adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system in the state of Alagoas, Brazil. Rap circles in juvenile justice settings are an established device developed through research conducted by the Center for Research in Psychoanalysis, Education, and Culture at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (NUPPEC/UFRGS); in the present study, however, the device was characterized by its racialization. We argue that holding the circles within the Quilombo, grounded in an ethical-political position, enabled progress toward the decolonization of psychoanalytic practices in Brazil. From this perspective, we foreground the racializing effect of the device as well as the reclamation of Black culture as a form of intervention and listening to the sociopolitical suffering of Black adolescents in the Brazilian juvenile justice system, thereby fostering a form of aquilombamento.

Keywords: juvenile justice, race, psychoanalytic listening, Quilombo dos Palmares.

Resumo

O presente escrito está relacionado a uma pesquisa de mestrado que investigou as afetações das rodas de rap, compreendidas como um dispositivo clínico-político de escuta já estabelecido. Estas rodas foram realizadas no território do Quilombo dos Palmares, junto a adolescentes do sistema socioeducativo do Estado de Alagoas. As rodas de rap na socioeducação são um dispositivo já consagrado através das pesquisas do Núcleo de Pesquisa em Psicanálise, Educação e Cultura da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (NUPPEC/

UFRGS), havendo, na presente pesquisa, a característica de racialização. Defendemos que a realização das rodas no espaço do Quilombo, a partir de uma posição ético-política, possibilitou o avanço no processo de decolonização das práticas psicanalíticas no Brasil. Nessa perspectiva, apostamos no efeito de racialização do dispositivo, bem como no resgate da cultura negra como uma forma de intervenção e escuta do sofrimento sociopolítico de socioeducandos negros no Brasil, promovendo, dessa forma, um modo de aquilombamento.

Palavras-chave: socioeducação, raça, escuta psicanalítica, Quilombo dos Palmares.

Resumen

El presente escrito se vincula a una investigación de maestría que indagó las afectaciones de las rodas de rap, comprendidas como un dispositivo clínico-político de escucha ya consolidado. Dichas rodas fueron realizadas en el territorio del Quilombo dos Palmares, con adolescentes pertenecientes al sistema socioeducativo del estado de Alagoas. Las rodas de rap en el ámbito socioeducativo constituyen un dispositivo ya reconocido a partir de las investigaciones del Núcleo de Investigación en Psicoanálisis, Educación y Cultura de la Universidad Federal de Rio Grande do Sul (NUPPEC/UFRGS), y en la presente investigación se incorpora la característica de racialización. Se sostiene que la realización de las rodas en el espacio del Quilombo, desde una posición ético-política, permitió avances en el proceso de descolonización de las prácticas psicoanalíticas en Brasil. Desde esta perspectiva, se apuesta por el efecto de racialización del dispositivo, así como por el rescate de la cultura negra como una forma de intervención y de escucha del sufrimiento sociopolítico de los adolescentes negros en contexto socioeducativo en Brasil, promoviendo de este modo una forma de aquilombamiento.

Palabras clave: socioeducación, raza, escucha psicanalítica, Quilombo dos Palmares.

Résumé

Le présent écrit porte sur une recherche de master qui a examiné les effets des rodas de rap (batailles de rap en cercle), comprises comme un dispositif clinique et politique d'écoute déjà établi. Ces cercles ont été organisés sur le territoire du quilombo dos Palmares, avec des adolescents issus du système socio-éducatif de l'État d'Alagoas. Les cercles de rap dans le contexte socio-éducatif constituent un dispositif déjà reconnu grâce aux recherches menées par le Núcleo de Pesquisa em Psicanálise, Educação e Cultura de l'Université Fédérale du Rio Grande do Sul (NUPPEC/UFRGS). Dans la présente recherche, on note la particularité de la racialisation. On soutient que la tenue des cercles au sein de l'espace du quilombo, à partir d'une position éthico-politique, a permis une avancée dans le processus de décolonisation des pratiques psychanalytiques au Brésil. Dans cette perspective, nous misons sur l'effet de racialisation du dispositif, ainsi que sur la revalorisation de la culture noire comme moyen d'intervention et d'écoute de la souffrance sociopolitique des jeunes noirs en contexte socio-éducatif au Brésil, favorisant ainsi une dynamique de communauté solidaire de résistance noire.

Mots-clés : socio-éducation, race, écoute psychanalytique, Quilombo dos Palmares.

“Hey, miss, bring us some rap... that stuff that stays in your subconscious.”
(Researcher's diary, October 14, 2019).

This was how Alison, a 16-year-old Black adolescent serving a custodial juvenile justice measure, addressed the psychology intern during one of the workshops conducted by the Comprehensive Health Care Project for Prisons and Juvenile Detention (PAISPIS).

Today, Alisson's statement can be understood as a decolonial demand. We understand this demand as decolonial because of the ethical and political dimensions it carries. His statement had the effect of repositioning the direction of an intervention taking place within the context of an extension project that, until then, had focused on Eurocentric forms of knowledge. Through the boy's question, we were able to hear a nuance of the social signifiers that continually emerged within the juvenile justice setting but had remained largely silent. This event reframed the conditions under which a listening device engaging with marginalized forms of knowledge could be offered.

Based on this statement, we further suggest that it became possible to intuit that the poetry and musicality of rap could provide young people with a means of expressing the “hardships of life.” As we began listening through the sharing of rap lyrics and songs, issues concerning the racial identities and experiences of young people in the juvenile justice system emerged: an aspect that had not surfaced in the various activities conducted within PAISPIS's Cultural Axis.

We emphasize that it was Alisson's observation – the young person mentioned above – that led us to discover NUPPEC's research and, in particular, the rap-circle device used in juvenile justice settings, which had been developed through the

Center's research and extension activities within the juvenile justice system in Rio Grande do Sul. As we became familiar with NUPPEC's writings on the intersections between psychoanalysis and juvenile justice, we identified similarities between the experiences in Maceió and those of the Center in listening to young people involved in the juvenile justice system. The request for rap made by the young person in Maceió had also emerged repeatedly in the conversation circles held by NUPPEC with adolescents at the Foundation for Socio-Educational Services of Rio Grande do Sul (FASE-RS).

Since 2015, particularly in response to the high rates of medicalization and criminalization of acts committed by young people living in situations of social vulnerability, NUPPEC has dedicated itself to developing clinical devices for psychoanalytic listening in the social field. Initially, requests for rap during the conversation circles led to the development of the rap-circle device (Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a; Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018b). This was followed by writing circles (Heissler & Gurski, 2020) and dream circles (Bayer & Gurski, 2023).

Having situated the rap-circle device (Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a), used as a mode of listening to young people in Maceió's juvenile justice system, we must now address rap in Brazil. We know that, since its arrival in the country, this musical genre has been criminalized, and attempts to depoliticize the movement are not uncommon:

Rap's relationship with young people is coveted by capitalism, which seeks to turn everything into a commodity... the market seeks to create an innocent, depoliticized hip hop, disconnected from inequality, violence, and the many social problems experienced by poor youth, especially Black youth (Zazo, 2014, p. 56).¹

Attempts to depoliticize and criminalize rap continue to this day. The power of its lyrics, the articulation of social contexts, and demands for better conditions affect not only the Brazilian elite but also the broader population who listen to these lyrics without understanding the contexts underlying the situations narrated in the songs. For example, during a circle held in the state of Alagoas, one young person asked whether the songs that he and his friends requested were screened in advance by the juvenile justice system's pedagogical staff. According to him, the question arose because he had noticed that the juvenile justice officers were uneasy about rap being played within the facility, as the coordinator had stated that listening to the genre was prohibited because it allegedly "glorified crime." When the boys were directly asked why they had requested rap during the activities, they replied:

Rap is commitment, miss; it talks about our lives, it gets through to us faster. Rap doesn't teach us to commit crimes; it tells us that we should get out of that life, that if we keep going, we'll end up facing death (Researcher's diary, June 29, 2022).

In the Circles, we provide a listening space in which adolescents can speak freely about their experiences, using rap lyrics as prompts. The central premise of the device has always been that these boys might experiment with other ways of articulating themselves beyond delinquent acts (Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a; Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018b). Within this intersection, Strzykowski and Gurski (2020, p. 22) observed that the rap lyrics they selected "addressed the experiences of young people living in close proximity to the war of drug trafficking, violent police encounters, and socioeconomic and racial inequalities."

In the circles held in Alagoas, we encountered various forms of symbolism embedded in the rap lyrics selected by the adolescents. Many narrated racial discrimination, while others referenced Zumbi and Quilombo dos Palmares. In this article, we seek to highlight the importance of a decolonial operation initially formulated by one of the adolescents: a matter that once heard was expanded into a broader perspective of racializing the rap-circle device. Thus, the rap-circle device, already well established in research conducted in Rio Grande do Sul, acquired new nuances when implemented in Maceió, with some circles taking place within Quilombo dos Palmares. Among these was the potential role of psychoanalysis as a form of decolonial listening.

The paths of psychoanalysis and the colonial structure in Brazil

In *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis & Social Justice*, New York historian Elizabeth Ann Danto (2020) allows us to witness the efforts of Freud and the first- and second-generation Viennese analysts to extend psychoanalytic care to low-income populations. At the Budapest Congress in 1918, toward the end of World War I, Freud expressed his desire for psychoanalytic treatment to become accessible to everyone and funded by the State. At the time, Freud spoke about the importance of social renewal, emphasizing three directions: "civil society, governmental responsibility, and social equality" (Danto, 2020, p. 37).

Attentive to the social conditions of his time, particularly the effects of the war, Freud recognized the complexity of the relationship between subjectivity, the social bond, and dominant economic forces, acknowledging that, amid struggles for power, "psychoanalysts could no longer insist on considering the individual's neurosis as the sole locus of intervention" (Danto, 2020, p. 12). He thus emphasized the importance of society awakening to social issues, reminding us:

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

(...) that the poor man should have just as much right to assistance for his mind as he now has to the life-saving help offered by surgery; and that the neuroses threaten public health no less than tuberculosis and can no more than the latter be left to the impotent care of individual members of the community. (...) Such treatments will be free. It may be a long time before the State comes to understand the urgency of these duties (Freud, 2018[2019]/2006, p. 173).

The watershed of World War I led Freud to declare his willingness to reconsider the therapeutic procedures developed up to that point, “mapping out some new paths that psychoanalysis could pursue in the post-World War I global landscape” (Gurski & Debieux-Rosa, 2023, p. 182). It is important to emphasize that, within the Brazilian social context, the rise of conservatism and fascist discourses, the dismantling of public health and education networks, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, and televised racism intensified debates regarding psychoanalytic practice beyond the analyst’s consulting room. These circumstances have called upon contemporary psychoanalysts to accelerate efforts toward developing a form of psychoanalysis responsive to Brazil’s demands while sustaining an ethical-political position. This direction culminated in the expansion and creation of various movements that propose a form of psychoanalysis committed to the clinical-political dimension and practiced outside private consulting rooms, establishing a presence in diverse spaces throughout the city.

Considering Brazil’s colonial structure and its legacy, which continues to resonate today, we encounter racial structures that affect a substantial portion of the population. In this regard, Silvio Almeida argues that “racism is always structural; that is, it is an element that forms part of society’s economic and political organization” (Almeida, 2019, p. 15). The author distinguishes among the different forms through which racism operates (i.e., individual, institutional, and structural) while emphasizing that race constitutes a foundational element underpinning Brazil and its political and historical formation.

Data from the *Synthesis of Social Indicators* report (IBGE, 2019) corroborate the framework described by Silvio Almeida (2019). According to the data, 56.2% of Brazil’s overall population is Black, with the category Black encompassing those identified as *preto* and *pardo*. The data indicate that the Black population ranks highest across all indicators related to social vulnerability. Given this reality, one might argue that, because Black people constitute the majority of Brazil’s population, it would be unsurprising for them to rank highest on such indicators. This point is important because, when we examine data concerning social mobility, such as senior positions within companies, we find that only 29.9% of these positions are held by Black people, whereas 68.6% are held by White people; moreover, Black people hold fewer than 27% of political offices in Brazil.

Cida Bento (2022) portrays this reality by describing manifestations of the pact of Whiteness encountered throughout her career and how this silent pact sustains and perpetuates racist structures within the social bond. For psychologist and psychoanalyst Maria Lucia Silva (2020), racial issues have always generated discomfort within psychoanalytic discussions. According to the author, it is necessary to recognize that racism permeates relationships within Brazilian society and that we must “know the history of our country in order to understand how relationships are structured and to listen to others from within their historical context” (Silva, 2020, p. 75).

This issue also emerges in the experience of psychoanalyst Isildinha Baptista Nogueira (2021), who, when speaking about the racism she experienced in her daily life, heard from her first analyst, by way of intervention, that racism did not exist in Brazil, that she was experiencing persecutory feelings, and that she should seek medication to alleviate the paranoid processes she was experiencing. This account confronts us with the responsibility to create racialized spaces for listening; that is, we must establish conditions in which subjects who experience racial discrimination can speak about their suffering – or, more precisely, about the sociopolitical dimension of their suffering (Rosa, 2015). What can psychoanalysis, its mode of listening, and its ethics do in the face of these contexts?

When confronted with institutional racism across multiple spheres, Andréa Guerra (2020) began addressing raciality. For her, “one of the pivotal aspects of discussing racism in the country from a psychoanalytic perspective has been the call for the psychoanalyst to take a position” (Guerra, 2020, p. 2). According to the author, this is possible only insofar as the psychoanalyst recognizes the Real of their own body and the forces that traverse and implicate it; after all, psychoanalytic work unfolds amid the tensions of disalienation and disidentification: “as political subjects, we cannot deny the social and symbolic effects of racism that rigidly and stigmatizingly position Black people as inferior and primitive beings” (Guerra, 2020, p. 3).

In this regard, we agree with Aimé Césaire (2006): a “civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates through its own functioning is a decadent civilization” (Césaire, 2006, p. 9). Put differently, and returning to the words of the young Alysson, we are called upon to reflect on and intervene in the “hardships of life.” For Alysson, the experiences arising from racial trauma, social vulnerability, and the suffering shared by young people from marginalized communities embodied these hardships. Thus, just as Freud did in his own time, we must bring psychoanalytic listening and its ethics into dialogue with contemporary demands.

Psychoanalytic listening and decoloniality

When addressing the intricacies of colonial rationality, we need to better understand its modes of knowledge production within the social bond, as well as identify the marks of domination and how they remain present in contemporary social

organization. According to Quijano (2005), colonization in Latin America weakened the cultures of colonized peoples, whose identities underwent an intense process of erosion.

Three hundred years later, all of them had been reduced to a single identity: Indians. This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative. The same occurred with the peoples forcibly brought as slaves from what would later become Africa. Over the course of those three hundred years, they became nothing other than Black people (Quijano, 2005, p. 127).

In this sense, racism emerges as a means of annihilating other possibilities of existence by deploying mechanisms capable of stripping people of economic power, subordinating subjectivities, erasing cultures, and sustaining racial hierarchies. “This coloniality of the control of labor determined the geographical distribution of each of the forms integrated into global capitalism. In other words, it determined the social geography of capitalism” (Quijano, 2005, p. 120).

From a similar perspective, Fanon (2022) argues that racism and colonialism should be understood as social positions in which the colonized world is divided into two: “The dividing line, the border, is indicated by the barracks and police stations. In the colonies, the legitimate and institutional interlocutor of the colonized, the spokesperson for the settler and the regime of oppression, is the police officer or the soldier” (Fanon, 2022, p. 28).

Let us consider how this issue emerged in one of the circles held at a juvenile justice facility in Alagoas. An adolescent living on the outskirts of Maceió described a day when he was on his way to school and was stopped by police officers: “I had my backpack and was going to school, you know? Then the cop came over yelling, saying, ‘Come on, Black boy, put your fucking hands on your head,’ grabbed my bag, and threw my books on the ground” (Researcher’s diary, June 5, 2022). Recalling the incident, the young person commented that this was commonplace in the favela and that no one was surprised by the aggression with which police officers approached the community because, for “the cops, everyone from the favela is a criminal.”

Another adolescent pointed out the difference in police treatment “when things go wrong for a White young person living in an affluent part of the city and when they go wrong for a Black young person living on the outskirts.” In his view, the contrast existed in every respect: while residents of affluent areas enjoyed numerous privileges, they had to contend with open sewers, makeshift plywood homes, children playing in garbage, and “our daily gunfire.” The adolescent’s words evoke the celebrated rhythmic poetry of Racionais MC’s: “the world is different on this side of the bridge” (Racionais MC’s, 1997).

In an effort to understand the differences between these worlds, we present some data concerning the realities experienced by Black youth in Brazil. According to data published in the 2020 Atlas of Violence, deaths among Black people accounted for 77% of the total, corresponding to a rate of 29.2 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. In other words, a Black person was 2.6 times more likely to die than a White person. Achille Mbembe (2018) argues that necropolitics does not operate solely upon life itself but extends to a range of measures that produce conditions for death, supporting the theory that racism and capitalist practices are embedded within its mechanisms.

In addition to the survey conducted by the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook (FBSP, 2022), which portrays rates of lethal violence resulting from police interventions, data from 2021 show that 52.4% of those killed were boys and young men aged 24 years or younger. Within these figures, statistics on the deaths of White youth declined to 30.9% in 2021. By contrast, the proportion of Black people killed by police increased by 5.8% over the same period. It is important to problematize this disparity, as it reveals who is disproportionately targeted by police violence. Another significant issue concerns the locations in which these interventions occur in particularly brutalized forms.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses the relationship between colonization and attempts at emancipation. In addition to Fanon, Mbembe understands “the Western enterprise as a political project of domination and exclusion” (Nogueira, 2018, p. 64). According to Fanon, this political project produces both objective and subjective effects. Authors such as Aníbal Quijano (2005), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2017), Edgard Lander (2005), Fanon (2022), and Enrique Dussel (1998) discuss the process of decoloniality, understanding it as a path of resistance and the dismantling of socially imposed labels and standards applied to subalternized people. In Santos’s (2022) words:

Decolonization requires the end of a world, the world as we know it, because coloniality and raciality remain operative within contemporary capitalism. Decolonization cannot be explained through colonization, because if it defines itself through coloniality, decolonial practice will remain entangled in that which it opposes. For decolonization to move beyond this web, it must be understood through its own immanent, rigorous, clinical, and ethical process, which we will call the *aquilombamento* of the clinic (Santos, 2022, p. 28).

At this point, we encounter the power of quilombos in Brazilian history. Since the period of slavery, quilombos have represented spaces of freedom, resistance, and Black affirmation. The quilombola movement intervened in the colonial order by disrupting some of the colonial structures of slavery. It is therefore no coincidence that, with the rise of the far right in Brazil, society has increasingly turned its attention to the contemporary effects and power of quilombos. In 2017, former president Jair Bolsonaro, then a federal deputy, made racist remarks when referring to Black people and quilombola communities living

in Brazil: “I visited a quilombo. The lightest Afro-descendant there weighed seven *arrobas*. They do nothing! I don’t think they’re even useful for breeding anymore. More than one billion reais a year is spent on them” (Xavier, 2022).

Commenting on the incident, Bolsonaro suggests that the enemy of the Brazilian far right is not simply the Black person, but the quilombola Black person – the one who refuses subjugation:

(...) it is not just any Afro-Brazilian person; the quilombola is articulated as the one who resists, the one who refuses to be enslaved, the one who establishes their identity through resistance. It is therefore no coincidence that the far right invokes the quilombola through a dehumanizing frame. The quilombola does not bow down (TV UFSC, 2022).

Quilombola thinker Clóvis Moura had already drawn attention to attempts to erase the history of quilombos in Brazil. His work portrays the period of slavery through the lived experience of Black people, dismantling the fallacy that enslaved Black people passively accepted submission under slavery. For Moura (1992), the quilombo was a space of organization and resistance for Black people. He termed this movement *quilombagem*, referring to the Black movement during the colonial era. According to Moura, *quilombagem* took shape through actions led by Black people in pursuit of freedom, with its main characteristic being a radicalism “without any mediating element between its dynamic behavior and the interests of the slaveholding class [...]. On one side, the rebellious enslaved people; on the other, their masters and the apparatus of repression directed against this rebellion” (Moura, 1992, pp. 22–23).

For historian Beatriz Nascimento (1977), however, the quilombo did not disappear with the abolition of slavery, as conventional historical narratives often suggest. On the contrary, quilombos assumed new forms, including modes of life in marginalized urban areas. It is important to note that, despite historical transformations over time, the central characteristic of the quilombo – its ethical, political, and social organization – continues into the present. “As a form of social organization, it projected itself into the twentieth century as a way of life for Black people that persists to this day” (Nascimento, 1977, p. 129).

The documentary *Óri* (Gerber, 1989), narrated by Beatriz Nascimento (2022), invites us to think of the quilombo beyond a geographical space and to understand it through a symbolic lens. For Nascimento, Black subjects need to experience theory through the body, reclaiming history and using the quilombo as a metaphor: the “physical quilombo is also our body as a material and existential space” (Gerber, 1989).

Another valuable perspective is found in the term *quilombismo*, coined by Abdias do Nascimento (2020). For him, the methodological structure of *quilombismo* gives it an active function, defining it as a political-social practice through which the community collectively assumes agency over its own history. This idea – “this complex of meanings, (...) this Afro-Brazilian praxis that I call *quilombismo*” – grounds his conceptualization (Nascimento, 2020, p. 282).

In developing our work with adolescents in the juvenile justice system in Alagoas, we found in Abdias a particular concern with Black youth. In *ABC do Quilombismo*, Nascimento (2020) emphasizes the importance of shifting how the concept of the quilombo is understood. For him, it is essential to stop thinking of the quilombo as something belonging solely to the past, because “Quilombo does not mean runaway slave. Quilombo means a free and fraternal gathering, solidarity, coexistence, existential communion” (Nascimento, 2020, pp. 289–290). He argues that, in order to keep the essence of the quilombo alive today:

Black people today must preserve and expand the Afro-Brazilian culture of resistance to genocide and affirmation of their own truth. As a method for analyzing, understanding, and defining a concrete experience, *quilombismo* expresses the knowledge forged through enslaved blood and the sweat shed by those whose hands and feet built this country’s economy. A better future for the Afro-Brazilian population can only be achieved through vigorous efforts toward collective organization and mobilization, both among the Black population and among its educated intellectual and professional capacities, in the immense battle on the front lines of theoretical and scientific creation (Nascimento, 2020, p. 290).

The foundations proposed by Abdias gained momentum among psychoanalysts working in the social field who seek to deconstruct Brazilian cultural practices shaped by what they identify as colonialism. Among these, we highlight the work of researcher and psychoanalyst Emiliano David (2018), conducted at a Child and Adolescent Psychosocial Care Center (CAPSij) in São Paulo. David understands racism as a power relation and examines the production of subjectivities and psychological suffering among Black children and adolescents as well as the effects of racism within their territories. To this end, the author chose to “develop theoretical and healthcare tools for the Black population from an anti-racist ethical-political position” (David, 2018, p. 23). In the same direction, Santos (2022) argues that “racism imposes ways in which bodies are affected, including ways of feeling, thinking, imagining, dreaming, and acting. It is therefore necessary to analyze how we are positioned in relation to the colonial-slaveholding apparatus” (Santos, 2022, p. 156).

The project of decolonizing listening in public spaces through *aquilombamento* has increasingly spread, whether through research projects such as those of Santos (2022), David (2018), and Almeida (2022), or through other initiatives within the Black community that invite us to rethink the quilombo, its history, and its contemporary social function.

Drawing on these concepts, we proposed holding rap circles with boys involved in the juvenile justice system in Alagoas within the space of Quilombo dos Palmares – in other words, approaching it as a quilombo in action, whether

through the principles set forth in *ABC do Quilombismo*, the programming of Afro-Brazilian Memory Week, or the principles and purposes established by Nascimento (2020). We understand that the rap circles held within Quilombo dos Palmares assumed an important sociopolitical function for these young people, producing ethical, aesthetic, and political effects for Black youth culture. The racialization of the rap circles was fundamental to realizing the potential of the circle beyond colonial walls.

The rap-circle device and its racialization

To discuss the racialization of the rap circles, we need to trace the path taken by NUPPEC before reaching the juvenile justice facilities in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. It is also important to discuss the implications and effects of this new experience, particularly how the rap-circle project gradually took shape at the juvenile justice facility in Alagoas.

In 2012, when NUPPEC began its field research, an extension project titled “Cinema at School: Between the Boundaries of Education and Mental Health” was conducted in partnership with one of the Family Health Strategy (ESF) teams in the Ilha da Pintada area, a highly socially vulnerable community in Porto Alegre.

In this project, the researchers used cinema as a tool to stimulate conversations among adolescents. At that time, they were able to observe, through the various meanings that emerged from the discussions, “the possibility of enabling the adolescents who came to us to put words into circulation and develop new and alternative narratives about themselves” (Gurski, 2015, p. 6).

Initially, there was no predetermined topic for the conversation circles at FASE/RS. Rather than defining a topic before listening to the subjects, the researchers adopted a position of evenly suspended attention while encouraging free association among the adolescents. This position contrasted with some traditional research approaches in which researchers enter the field with a predefined set of questions.

This approach created space for the boys to express themselves freely, allowing their words to be heard beyond the offenses they had committed. Notably, the young people were surprised by the researchers’ growing interest in hearing their life stories rather than focusing exclusively on their offenses (Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a). As the conversation circles continued, the adolescents began requesting rap music. During the circles, the researchers began associating the lyrics of the songs selected by the adolescents – which “addressed the experiences of young people living in close proximity to the war of drug trafficking, violent police encounters, and socioeconomic and racial inequalities” (Strzykowski & Gurski, 2020, p. 22) – with their everyday experiences. According to the researchers, the experience of using rap circles in juvenile justice settings enabled the group to understand the sociopolitical dimension of suffering from a different perspective.

As their work in juvenile justice settings progressed, and through listening to both young people and juvenile justice officers, the research group advanced its engagement with aspects of intersectionality and issues of class, race, and gender, identifying further nuances based on the work of Gurski (2008). Gurski’s thesis (2008), as well as her book (Gurski, 2008), demonstrates that middle-class adolescents also commit offenses. However, because of class and racial prejudice, this label is applied only to poor and Black youth. “One of the aspects that appears to distinguish adolescents from young offenders is the way in which such acts have traditionally been treated by society” (Strzykowski & Gurski, 2020, p. 23): young people in the juvenile justice system who are socially marked as delinquent are Black boys from marginalized urban areas, who are commonly viewed by society as offenders fully aware of what they are doing when they commit an offense, whereas middle-class young offenders are regarded simply as adolescents going through a difficult phase (Strzykowski & Gurski, 2020).

Experience diaries and rap circles in Alagoas

We now turn to the main focus of this paper: our work with adolescents in the juvenile justice system in Alagoas. The intervention research with these adolescents initially took place through PAISPIS, but their requests led us to seek tools capable of methodologically supporting the rap circles within the male juvenile justice facility.

In this regard, we highlight two moments that were fundamental to the trajectory of this research. The first version of the project – or, more precisely, the preliminary research proposal – was titled “Rap in Juvenile Justice Measures: The Construction of Blackness in the Land of Zumbi dos Palmares.” Although Palmares appeared in the title, there was no articulation connecting the figure or social role of Zumbi to the young people in the juvenile justice system or to the rap circles. It was through supervision and discussions with the research group that we began to develop a connection between what emerged from the writing as a form of “unknown knowledge” and what would later emerge as the effects of racialization in listening to the boys in the juvenile justice system, based on the proposal to hold the rap circles within Quilombo dos Palmares.

Notably, this was still a blind spot in the study, whose meaning could only be constructed retrospectively. As the research unfolded, in addition to listening to what emerged from the title of the preliminary master’s research proposal, we also began to listen more closely to the adolescents’ statements, many of which concerned meanings associated with Palmares. Curiously, although many of them spoke about the Quilombo, they had never visited it.

By adopting the research-recording device known as the Experience Diary (Zachello et al., 2015; Gurski, 2017; Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a; Gurski et al., 2021), we were able to systematize records of the experiences arising from the research according to a temporality belonging to the research subjects themselves – the boys and the researcher.

To better understand this device for recording field experience, it is important to emphasize that the Experience Diary was developed during research conducted by NUPPEC. Its structure follows the logic of the concept of free association, as proposed by Freud (1914/2010). The diary's format may therefore appear somewhat unusual at first, as it consists of fragmented and seemingly unfinished writing, as discussed by Gurski (2017) and Gurski and Strzykowski (2018a).

Regarding the Experience Diary device, we further emphasize that it constitutes a method for recording psychoanalytic research inspired by three sources: field diaries used in ethnographic and anthropological studies; Walter Benjamin's brief commentaries and notebooks (Arendt, 1987), which convey to the reader "his fragmentary gaze, not because it renounces totality, but because it seeks it in almost invisible details" (Sarlo, 2013, p. 35); and, finally, Sigmund Freud's (2004) brief notes written during the final years of his life, in which he articulated everyday events with concepts from psychoanalytic theory (Gurski, 2017; Gurski & Strzykowski, 2018a).

With regard to reading the diaries and analyzing the experience, we have used the reading-listening approach proposed by Caon (1997), thereby privileging an interpretation of the research experience through evenly suspended attention (Caon, 1997; Iribarry, 2003). It was through this reading-listening of the Experience Diaries that we began to attend to certain issues emerging in the circles: the issue was not the construction of Blackness in the land of Zumbi dos Palmares, but rather the ethical-political dimension that conversations held in circles within the Quilombo could evoke among the young people. It was through writing the diaries, discussions within the research group, and supervision that we began to concretely recognize the need to racialize the existing device.

Upon rereading the diaries, we realized that the music requested by the adolescents spoke directly to the contexts in which they lived. This insight only became intelligible retrospectively, which is why the diary is directly connected to the temporality of the *a posteriori*.

As the present research progressed, we realized that the diaries written over the preceding years revealed an awakening to racial issues that had previously been less apparent, even though they were already present within the juvenile justice system. In this sense, the Experience Diary offered "a means of helping the researcher navigate the harshness of certain situations experienced within the institution during listening-*flânerie* or the circles" (Gurski et al., 2021, p. 7).

By writing the diaries in a temporality and form that allowed other meanings to emerge, it became possible to recognize that the young people's references to the researcher's Blackness, their accounts of the violence they experienced daily because of their skin color, and the powerful figure of Zumbi dos Palmares were all interconnected. This articulation, which involves precisely the recognition of the Black young person's status as a subject within society, was already taking shape. What, then, could we propose to these adolescents through the rap circles?

Based on the reflections arising from the records documented in the Experience Diaries, we reached the second turning point in our project: the adolescents at the facility where the research was conducted regarded Zumbi dos Palmares as a heroic figure, yet they knew relatively little about the life of the Black man who led the largest quilombo in Brazilian history. We therefore began to ask ourselves: what would it be like to take these adolescents to the city of União dos Palmares and hold the rap circles within Quilombo dos Palmares?

The circles held within the facility took place weekly and lasted two hours. Within the juvenile justice setting, we listened to the lyrics written and requested by the adolescents, during which they constructed their own narrative about the Quilombo, Zumbi as a hero, and their experiences in Alagoas.

The circles held within Quilombo dos Palmares were organized into four groups of three boys, with each session lasting 5 hours. This arrangement was determined by the facility and involved a total of 12 boys (the others were unable to participate because of measures intended to ensure the safety of adolescents who lived in União dos Palmares). At the adolescents' request, we divided their time at the Quilombo into two parts. During the first part, they explored the space, asked questions, debated among themselves, and encountered its history and living memory through their embodied experience. After a snack, we sat in a circle beneath a tree – a white fig tree, sacred to Black communities. During this second part, we gathered to further explore the impressions and experiences elicited by the space of the Quilombo.

The *aquilombamento* of Black adolescents and juvenile justice

"'Did Zumbi come here?' 'He lived here; this was the place where he led the 12 tribes.' 'Am I walking where Zumbi walked?'" (Account of a visit to Quilombo dos Palmares, excerpt from the researcher's Experience Diary, October 13, 2023). This dialogue took place during the first visit to the Quilombo dos Palmares Memorial. When we arrived at the *muxima*, a space located within Quilombo dos Palmares, the adolescents decided to explore the Memorial. In the past, the *muxima* was used as a meeting place for the council members of the 12 tribes of Palmares. In Kimbundu, *muxima* means heart. The narrative the adolescents constructed through the objects and spaces of the Quilombo was associated with the

music of Neurônio Sub-Consciente (NSC), a rap group from Alagoas (Neurônio Sub-Consciente, s.d.).

Standing before the watchtowers – strategic locations from which quilombola communities could observe advancing troops and organize the defense of the Quilombo – the boys sang about freedom in that very place. Passing by the cassava flour house, the huts, and strategic defensive positions, we reached the Sacred Lake of Black People and the white fig tree, the only site that remained intact following the European invasion and destruction of the Quilombo. For the Black community, the white fig tree represents the dwelling place of Irôko, the orisha of time.

It was striking to observe that, upon encountering this part of history, the adolescents fell silent and then began commenting on the age of the tree and the burn marks on its trunk. It was before these marks, while sitting on the ground in the space dedicated to Aqualtune, that one of the adolescents asked whether the researcher had seen the film *Besouro* and whether she believed in the spiritual power of the *terreiro*. This question elicited a reprimanding reaction from the officers. One officer remarked, “even when it comes to religion, he chose the bad side” (Researcher’s Experience Diary, October 13, 2022). Rafael continued speaking about his beliefs and how they were perceived within the juvenile justice system. In response to the officer’s comment, the group was asked what had shaped each person’s religious choice, since every time Rafael spoke about his religion, the others made the sign of the cross, saying that it was not of God and that liberation was possible only through Christian conversion. Rafael then said:

Religion is identity. You choose it because you feel connected to it, you know? Look at these guys, miss – they write these amazing rap lyrics, talk about Black freedom, but then they make the sign of the cross when I talk about my religion. Who said there are only bad people there and only good people in the Gospel? We gotta think about that, if we’re writing about what we live, you feel me, miss? (Researcher’s diary, October 13, 2022).

In discussing religion, Abdias do Nascimento argues that attempts to separate Afro-Brazilian art from religious ritual cause its elaboration to emerge from a void, because “art cannot exist apart from worship, nor can it be detached from the broader context that conditions it: the birth and evolution of Brazil itself” (Nascimento, 2020, pp. 109–110).

When Rafael points out that rap lyrics risk being written and performed without the soul and essence of those who compose them – since the rapper’s work consists of writing in the form of denunciation about realities on the urban periphery – it is important to consider that Black ethnic identity, as expressed in manifestations such as religion, finds its symbolic elements in the reaffirmation of the existence of a Black Brazilian culture (Campos, 2006).

As the work unfolded, we encountered expressions of unease among members of the juvenile justice team, particularly the juvenile justice officers, who believed that the boys did not have “the intellectual capacity to follow what was being proposed.” It was common to hear them say that the lyrics written and performed by the adolescents could arouse hatred in each young person. Nevertheless, a few weeks later, questions resurfaced about the “classes” held within the Quilombo, accompanied by the same argument that they could foster hatred among the adolescents because they presented a cruel past that, according to them, no longer existed.

As we became increasingly involved in organizing the rap circles within the Quilombo, tensions between the adolescents and the juvenile justice staff intensified. The researcher was constantly called upon to take a position – on one side, the adolescents; on the other, the demands made by the officers. Within this dichotomy, we began to reflect on the transferential position in the circles held within the juvenile justice system and on the possibilities for working with it. After all, the transferential operation in the social field does not occur on a one-to-one basis, as it does in the consulting room; institutional paradoxes must also be considered.

In this context, one of the boys remarked:

Miss, the officers don’t like it when you come. They know you’re going to listen to us, that we’re gonna talk about what happens here every day. They want to win you over so you’ll take their side. (Researcher’s diary, October 20, 2022).

At that moment, it became possible to perceive the movement circulating within this relationship and its triangular configuration. Oliveira (2021), in working with listening-flânerie among juvenile justice officers at FASE-RS, emphasizes the importance of avoiding the potential transferential traps that arise in the social field.

During the second visit to the Quilombo, following a disagreement between the officers and the adolescents, the young people were handcuffed. The entire ethical-political construction they had developed was there, materialized in the form of handcuffs – a scene with a symbolic dimension, but not only a symbolic one. We decided to share our distress with the officer in charge and explain what was at stake, requesting that the handcuffs be removed, particularly because 15 officers had been assigned to accompany four adolescents. Upon recognizing the distress, the officer replied, “It’s something you feel in your skin, professor. I understand it, and I feel it too. I’ll ask them to remove the boys’ handcuffs” (Researcher’s Experience Diary, October 12, 2022). All the officers present on the grounds of Palmares were also Black.

The journeys from the facility to the Quilombo prompted the adolescents to recall experiences, sensations, and perceptions related both to the Quilombo and to their own lives. It was significant to observe that, little by little, the circle expanded to

include the juvenile justice officers, who began bringing their own impressions into the conversations: “Professor, thank you so much for this activity. I’ve lived here for more than 30 years and had never been to the Quilombo; I didn’t even know our history.” Sitting nearby, another staff member said:

Imagine being able to live in a place like this today, with this kind of peace. It feels like another world. Beyond the history, you feel free here, and if we feel this way, imagine the boys, who are inside the housing unit all the time. (Researcher’s Experience Diary, October 28, 2022).

When we realized that a collective of Black boys and men had formed there, exchanging experiences of Palmares, we thought that Beatriz Nascimento (1977) was right: the quilombo is a space so deeply Black that Black people can be themselves within it.

After this episode, the boys encountered a capoeira instructor and asked if they could play the instruments. As the capoeira circle was organized, the sounds of the berimbau and *atabaque* filled the Memorial. On the return journey to the juvenile justice facility, the officers placed the handcuffs back on the adolescents’ wrists, and one young person immediately said:

The sound of these handcuffs is ruining the mood. It won’t let me completely forget that I’m locked up. I wish I could call my mother and tell her everything I experienced today, how free I felt, and that when I get out of jail, I’m going to bring her here so she can learn about our roots. I want to tell her that the quilombo is like a mother; it is land that embraces you. (Researcher’s diary, October 13, 2022).

After he said this, everyone looked at one another, and the officer in charge requested that the adolescents’ handcuffs be removed. The educator accompanying the rap circles decided to allow each of the young people to make a video call to their mother. During each call, the mothers commented when they saw their sons sitting in the car without handcuffs. Then Rafael’s mother, who had a close relationship with Palmares, began to cry as her son described the experience he had just had:

My son, I always dreamed of this – of seeing you come home from school telling me how your day went and everything you learned. I’m crying with happiness because you’re happy, you’re not wearing handcuffs; you’re just my baby, the baby I dreamed of and planned for so much. I need to go back to the Quilombo and give thanks for being able to see you like this. (Researcher’s diary, October 13, 2022).

Their conversation resonated with everyone in the car. The tears and the silence that followed confronted the Black researcher with the bond connecting the figure of the mother and the place of the quilombo, when Rafael said, “Miss, the quilombo is like a mother.” Indeed, from their earliest formations, quilombos represented a new world, constituted through strategies:

(...) used by Africans who, while enslaved, longed for freedom and thus established alternatives to the hegemonic slave system then in force. The underlying principle in the formation of quilombos consisted of seeking places that were difficult to access and that enabled the establishment of structural barriers, whether natural or social. (Costa, 2008, p. 25).

As we can see, decoloniality would not be possible without the foundational principles of quilombos (Sodré, 2019); that is, “decoloniality must be reaffirmed as a political and collective project aimed at imploding colonial structures, led by subalternized body-territories” (Miranda, 2021, p. 48). In Santos’s words, the “quilombo is a world without the walls of coloniality, such that *aquilombado* practices have always constituted a confrontation with oppression” (Santos, 2022, p. 141).

We understand that, although the boys in the juvenile justice system are victims of Brazil’s genocidal processes, they refuse the place assigned to them at the margins, on the urban peripheries – a position that all too often leads to premature death. The paths narrated by these young people affirm that the specter of exclusion and death constantly surrounds them: “My path has already been laid out, miss” (Researcher’s diary, August 5, 2022).

Finally, as Beatriz Nascimento (2022) aptly noted, the memory of the quilombo belongs not only to Black subjects, but to the entire nation. Historically, whenever colonialism enters the scene, the quilombo emerges as its counterpoint. Those who refuse to recognize themselves as the property of an Other turn to the political structure of *quilombismo*.

In this direction, it is incumbent upon us, as psychoanalytic researchers working in the social field, to create and sustain spaces for speaking and listening through decolonial approaches, because, as we have observed, the politicization of rap can help provide a space of recognition and support for these subjects. The turn toward the image of the quilombo and of Zumbi dos Palmares appears to point toward an alternative path of identification—one not grounded in subalternity. The survival of these boys is narrated through their music; they appear to be searching for an ethical meaning through which to live in community. We therefore continue to invest in the racialization of the rap-circle device and other listening devices, as well as in the reclamation of Black culture as a form of intervention and listening to the sociopolitical suffering of Black youth in Brazil, thereby promoting the continuum of the quilombo without losing sight of its decolonial effects.

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