

Past Presents

Uses of Oral History and Public History Initiatives
in a Historical Approach to Afro-Indigenous Heritage
and Memories in Minas Gerais

Passados presentes

Usos da história oral e iniciativas de história pública
em uma abordagem histórica sobre patrimônios
e memórias afro-indígenas em Minas Gerais

Pasados presentes

Usos de la historia oral e iniciativas de historia pública
en un enfoque histórico sobre el patrimonio
y las memorias afroindígenas en Minas Gerais

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ABSTRACT The article presents a reflection on shared authority, authorship, and the construction of historical knowledge within the scope of the project *Passados Presentes: Patrimônios e Memórias Negras (Africanas e Afro-Indígenas) em Minas Gerais* (Past Presents: Black Heritage and Memories (African and Afro-Indigenous) in Minas Gerais). The methodology of the collective research was organized based on attentive and horizontal listening to the history and memories of the holders of Black heritage in Minas Gerais, such as *quilombos*, *reinados/congados*, *jongos*, and *folias de reis*, to establish epistemic dialogues between socially and culturally localized knowledge, that is, between researchers from participating universities and the masters/holders of the heritage/memories focused. This article is based on four oral history interviews, conducted with genealogical and life history scripts, and featuring the four leading consultants/holders participating in the project. These interviews emphasised the relationships of each of the interviewees with the black territoriality of the cities in which they live and the historicity of slavery and Afro-indigenous interactions in their narratives. It also draws on the oral tradition of “*caboclo and pretos velhos*” (elderly black men) in “*umbandas*”, a religious phenomenon that permeates all the trajectories and groups studied, as a key to understanding the narratives examined. The conclusion seeks to demonstrate the importance of epistemic dialogue as a tool for renewing historiographical knowledge.

KEYWORDS afro-indigenous heritage, oral history, public history

RESUMO O artigo apresenta uma reflexão sobre autoridade compartilhada, autoria e construção do conhecimento histórico no âmbito do projeto *Passados Presentes: patrimônios e memórias negras (africanas e afro-indígenas) em Minas Gerais*. A metodologia da pesquisa coletiva se organizou a partir de uma escuta atenta e horizontal da história e da memória dos detentores de patrimônios negros mineiros como quilombos, reinados/congados, jongos e folias de reis, com o objetivo de estabelecer diálogos epistêmicos entre saberes social e culturalmente localizados, ou seja, entre os pesquisadores das universidades participantes e os mestres/detentores dos patrimônios/memórias em foco.

O presente artigo toma por base quatro entrevistas de história oral, com roteiros genealógicos e de história de vida, com os 4 principais consultores/detentores participantes do projeto. Essas entrevistas enfatizaram, em especial, as relações de cada um dos entrevistados com a territorialidade negra das cidades em que vivem e a historicidade da escravidão e das interações afro-indígenas em suas narrativas. O artigo mobiliza também a oralidade dos pontos de caboclo e de pretos velhos nas umbandas, fenômeno religioso que perpassa todas as trajetórias e grupos estudados, como chave de leitura das narrativas trabalhadas. A conclusão busca demonstrar a importância do diálogo epistêmico como ferramenta de renovação do conhecimento historiográfico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE patrimônios afro-indígenas, história oral, história pública

RESUMEN El artículo presenta una reflexión sobre la autoridad compartida, la autoría y la construcción del conocimiento histórico en el marco del proyecto *Pasados presentes: patrimonios y memorias negras (africanas y afroindígenas) en Minas Gerais*. La metodología de la investigación colectiva se organizó a partir de una escucha atenta y horizontal de la historia y la memoria de los detentores de patrimonios negros mineiros, como *quilombos*, *reinados/congados*, *jongos* y *folias de reis*, con el objetivo de establecer diálogos epistémicos entre conocimientos social y culturalmente localizados, es decir, entre los investigadores de las universidades participantes y los maestros/poseedores de los patrimonios/memorias en foco. El presente artículo se basa en cuatro entrevistas de historia oral, con guiones genealógicos y de historia de vida, con los cuatro principales consultores/titulares participantes en el proyecto. Estas entrevistas hicieron hincapié en las relaciones de cada uno de los entrevistados con la territorialidad negra de las ciudades en las que viven y la historicidad de la esclavitud y las interacciones afroindígenas en sus narrativas. También se recurre a la oralidad de los puntos de *caboclo* y de *pretos velhos* en las *umbandas*, fenómeno religioso que atraviesa todas las trayectorias y grupos estudiados, como clave para la lectura de las narrativas trabajadas. La conclusión busca demostrar la

importancia del diálogo epistémico como herramienta de renovación del conocimiento historiográfico.

PALABRAS CLAVE patrimonios afroindígenas, historia oral, historia pública

INTRODUCTION

We propose a reflection on shared authority (Frish, 1990) and the construction of historical knowledge within the scope of the research project *Passados Presentes: Patrimônios e Memórias Negras e Afro-Indígenas em Minas Gerais* [Past Presents: Black and Afro-Indigenous Heritage and Memories in Minas Gerais], which is currently being finalised.

The project originated from the desire to unite the results already achieved by researchers from the ANPUH and CNPq research group *Emancipações e Pós-abolição em Minas Gerais* (GTEP-MG) with the digital platforms of the collaborative project *Passados Presentes* [Present Pasts], through engagement with the educational network and heritage policies of Minas Gerais. This is essentially what is currently underway. We based our work on the hypothesis suggested in Lélia Gonzales' classic text on Amefricanity (1988), that blackness in Minas Gerais has significant African cultural roots and is also Afro-indigenous. This has also become our primary conclusion.

We knew from the beginning that we wanted to do more than gather the knowledge already produced by the group on post-abolition (Abreu et al., 2014; Cassoli, 2022). Our goal was to reflect on Afro-Indigenous interactions through attentive and egalitarian listening to the history and memories of those who preserve Minas Gerais' Black heritage, such as *quilombos*, *reinados/congados*, *jongos*, and *folias de reis*. Using this approach, we set out to examine the connections between these manifestations and their communities, drawing on indigenous history, African history, black associativism, and the contemporary history of African-based religions. We aimed to uncover new evidence on the importance of Afro-Indigenous interactions in shaping this heritage and

Blackness itself in Minas Gerais, as well as to incorporate Black cultures and experiences into the history of modernity in Minas Gerais during the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Passados Presentes network projects view history as a social science that raises questions about human beings over time, emphasizing reflection on its influence on shaping public narratives about the past (Grinberg, Abreu, Mattos, 2019; Mattos, 2016; Rolph-Trouillot, 1997[1995]). Therefore, historical research and public history are inseparable aspects of our practice, which broadly explores the possibilities of reinterpreting the trauma and potential of the forced diaspora of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic in Brazilian history. From the Mozambique exiles who started the 'Quilombo do Bracu', a former slave port and one of the network's most visible projects – archaeological research on the shipwreck of the slave brig Camargo in front of the current quilombo, in Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro – to the vibrancy of *Massambike* (Oliveira; Santos, 2022)/Mozambique during the *reina-dos/congados* of Minas Gerais, which represents the strongest sign of Africanity in the black heritage of this state in Southeast Brazil, and the focus of the project discussed here, the network has been creating digital platforms to share the collaborative results achieved.¹

We also consider the notions of situated knowledge and epistemic dialogues to be essential for the renewal of historiographical research, understanding that history, as a social science, should formulate research problems based on new social observation points and the dialogue between them (Ginzburg, [1979] 1989; Hansen; Oliveira, 2023; Haraway, 1988; Hooks, 1991; Morais, 2022). In this context, we engage in ongoing epistemic dialogues as a fruitful exchange between different forms of knowledge, including academic and non-academic, based on attentive listening and mutual respect. In this regard, the project currently underway in Minas Gerais has benefited from the important

1 Check out all the initiatives on the Passados Presentes portal, available at: <http://www.passadospresentes.com.br/>, accessed on September 13, 2025. The website for the project discussed here is currently being finalised and will be available at: <https://mg.passadospresentes.com.br/>.

advice of Ana Luzia da Silva Morais, *Rainha Konga in the Reinado de Nossa Senhora das Mercês*, in the city of Oliveira, our “Sá Rainha Ana Luzia”, a researcher on the project and member of its management team in 2023 and 2024. She proposed incorporating the holders of knowledge, who would form the basis of the research on black heritage and memories, as central interlocutors. Her suggestion was accepted. Since then, the project has come to understand the research subjects not as informants, but as epistemological interlocutors, thereby designating them as holders of the heritage and knowledge being studied. Ana Luzia also played a key role in selecting the four consultant holders, whose oral history interviews form the basis of this article.²

The collective work methodology was organised to establish epistemic dialogues between socially and culturally localised knowledge, that is, between researchers from participating universities and the masters/holders of the heritage and memories referenced here, reflecting in particular on the mediating role of some of the researchers who were themselves holders of this knowledge and who brought it as a reference to their research practice. Approved in a CNPq research call for proposals³ focused on the development of public policies, the project is also committed to producing subsidies for policies to safeguard and enhance the African and Afro-indigenous cultural heritage of Minas Gerais, in dialogue with schools and public managers.

2 There are four interviews conducted by researchers from the project's research group on cities and territorialities, led by co-authors Hebe Mattos and Josemeire Alves, recorded by Google Meet, respectively with Babalawo Fátolá, since Três Corações, on 05/20/2024; Mestre Pedrinho Cantarino, from Ponte Novas, on 10/28/2024; Mãe Ana de Iansã, from Poços de Caldas, on 02/17/2025, and Capitã Pedrina de Lourdes Santos, from Oliveira, on 03/18/2025. The transcribed, edited, and duly authorised interviews have already been published on the project website and archived in its digital repository, built on the ATOM/UNESCO platform, and will be published shortly at: <https://labhoi.net.br/>.

3 CNPq - Pro-Humanities Call for Proposals 2022 - 40/2022 - Line 5B - Network Projects - Public policies for the promotion of culture.

THE AUTHORS AND SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH SHARED AUTHORITIES

The team, comprising around 40 members from various universities across the state, not only shared their research materials in the project's digital archive but also divided itself into four working groups. Each group engaged in dialogue with a guest consultant, mediated by “Sá Rainha Ana Luzia”, to produce new content between the partner communities. These groups are:

Captain Pedrina de Lourdes Santos, born on February 21, 1961, captain of the *Terno de Massambike do Reinado de Nossa Senhora das Mercês*, from the city of Oliveira. She holds an Honorary Doctorate in Social Communication from UFMG (2022). She is a Caretaker of the *Santo Antônio de Pádua Umbanda* House, Priestess of *Nzo Atim Nkosi Kundé Meangy*, initiated in the *Candomblé Angola Nzo Atim Kaiango ua Mukongo* house; consultant and owner of the *Festas e Modos de Vida* (Festivals and Ways of Life) group (group 1), with 19 researchers, including historians and anthropologists.

Ana de Iansã (Ana Maria de Paula Cruz), born on February 24, 1967, is a priestess at the *Terreiro de Umbanda Caboclo Pedra Branca* in the city of Poços de Caldas. She is the president of the city's *Associação Afro-Ancestral* and a co-creator of *Projeto Curas*, a digital platform for research and documentation on the history of southern Minas Gerais. She is also a consultant and owner of the *Cultura Material* group (group 2), comprising 15 researchers, including historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists.

Pedro Antônio da Gama Cantarino, Mestre Pedrinho, born on 8 March 1948, president of the *Associação Quilombola da Comunidade do Bairro de Fátima e Território*, a long-standing activist in the black movement in the city of Ponte Nova, bachelor of law and railway worker, founder of the Afro Ganga Zumba group, in 1988, consultant and leader of the History Teaching and Teaching Materials group (group 3), with 20 researchers, mainly historians and history teachers.

Rhonnel Américo, Babalawo Fátolá, born on 16 March 1980, in the city of Varginha (MG), leader of the *Irosun Ajê-Ilê Orixá Emilá Temple* in Três Corações, geographer, master's degree holder, and doctoral candidate in history, project researcher, consultant for the *Cidades Negras, Territorialidades e Georreferenciamento* (group 4) group, with 32 members, mainly historians.

Developed by members of Group 4, this article is based on four oral history interviews conducted using genealogical and life history scripts with the four consultants/holders of the thematic groups. Specifically, these interviews emphasised each interviewee's relationship with the black territoriality of the Minas Gerais cities in which they live and the historicity of slavery and Afro-indigenous interactions in the genealogical memories narrated. Alongside the interview material, the oral tradition of *caboclo* and *pretos velhos* (old black men) in *umbandas*⁴, a religious phenomenon that permeates all the trajectories analysed, concludes our reflection and emphasises the contribution of epistemic dialogue to the discipline of history, as we will seek to demonstrate in the conclusion of this text.

The text was written six-handed, and we chose a narrative strategy that would not dilute the socially differentiated positions of the authors, which were essential to the results achieved and their fundamentally dialogical character. For this purpose, we have written the text in the first-person plural. The three authors present the project, its subjects, research problems, and the focus of this article, which unfolds from here on in three parts, in which each author assumes their own voice to present specific findings for which their trajectory and perspective were fundamental, even though we all sign the historiographical argument of each of the parts together. The principles of dialogue of times (Rios & Mattos, 2005, pp. 35-60) and epistemic dialogue (Mattos & Fernandes,

4 In this article, we use *Umbanda*, with a capital letter and in the singular, when referring to the name of the religion structured in federations since the beginning of the 20th century, and *umbandas*, in the plural, when referring to the multiple religious practices of terreiro involving percussion instruments and incorporation rituals, prior to or existing in parallel with the federalisation process.

2024; Rios & Mattos, 2005) establish the interlocution as an ongoing scientific challenge. We will return to this challenge, to the authorial “we” and to the production and publication of new scientific knowledge using the oral history methodology at the conclusion of the article.

**PRESENT TIME AND GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCE:
THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK HERITAGE
IN THE RELIGIOUS FIELD**

I begin my reflection in the first person as ‘Professor Hebe,’ a title I often hear, carrying the weight that academic seniority brings. This status emphasises my otherness as an observer, highlighted by the most typical signs of race and class within the unequal Brazilian academic environment. As the coordinator of a project with dozens of members, most of whom are Afro-Brazilians from Minas Gerais, I faced a primary question from the start: how and why has this white woman spent the last 30 years talking to Black people? I am a historian of Brazilian slave society who early on recognized how deeply the institution of slavery embedded a colonial mindset in our national experience—one that was continually reinvented through racism, with silence about slavery as a genealogical experience occupying a structural place for a long time. I have previously written extensively on the subject; however, the possibility of breaking this paradigm following the 1988 Constitution has intrigued me as a matter of contemporary history, motivating my work with oral history methodology. Since at least 2004, I have been interested in understanding how family narratives about slavery are transmitted and mobilised politically by different generations of direct descendants of the last Africans to arrive in Brazil in the 19th century.

Let me give you an example: family narratives about the time of captivity take on different political meanings when we listen to old peasants who were traversed by the cultural policies of the Vargas era or their children and nephews, peasant militants fighting for land during the worst phase of the civil-military dictatorship, such as Mr. Manoel Moraes, leader of *Quilombo do Bracuí, in Angra dos Reis*, who saw his

lands taken by the force of the construction of the Rio-Santos highway, and Antônio Nascimento Fernandes, who witnessed the precariousness of work in the territory of *Quilombo São José da Serra*, in Valença, Rio de Janeiro, in the 1970s.⁵ Thus, it became the collaborative public history project *Passados Presentes* (Present Pasts), which seeks to shed light on familiar narratives transmitted within the family experience of descendants of the last generation of enslaved Africans in nineteenth-century Brazil, discussing the political inflection of this legacy over time, based on the legal possibility of recognising *quilombola* territories and acknowledging African cultural heritage as part of the country's cultural heritage. Since meeting our four consultants/holders, I realised that the generational bias was an interesting theme to continue thinking about the issue. Therefore, I will conduct an initial analysis of the interviews highlighted here through this perspective.

Pedro da Gama Cantarino was 77 years of age at the time of our interview in October 2024. He is the oldest of our consultants and was born 60 years after the Golden Law. I could not help but compare Pedrinho's trajectory with that of other quilombo leaders of his generation whom I had interviewed. He vividly recalled his grandmother, Geraldina, who believed she was born even before the Golden Law was established. This conviction stems from the fact that she was born and raised as a domestic servant on a former slave plantation, which she left behind when she married Grandfather Domingos (*Vô Domingos*), a railway worker who died later in a work accident, but with whom she arrived on the outskirts of Ponte Nova, in the classic black migrations of the 20th century, so well characterised by Ana Lugão and Carlos Eduardo Coutinho (Rios; Mattos, 2005, chap. 2; Coutinho da Costa, 2020). The family narrative's dialogue with the memory of slavery stems from the decision to break with the subordination experienced by her grandparents on the farm, which led to migration to the outskirts of cities and

5 The oral history interviews with annotated narratives, duly authorised, have been digitised and made available in the LABHOI/UFF oral history archive (soon to be available at: <https://labhoi.net.br/>); see also Rios and Mattos (2005) (part 3); Mattos (2006a) and Mattos (2022).

the construction of an independent and communal life. In fact, it is the experience of black workers that marks Pedrinho's memories and the formation of the *urban quilombo* of the *Sapé* community, now known as *Quilombo de Fátima*, in the city of Ponte Nova.

In the 1980s, Sapé gained access to schooling and stood out for his community leadership, from his participation in the *Samba* school to the creation of university entrance exams for black and underprivileged students and, above all, the founding of the *Centro Cultural Afro Ganga Zumba* [Afro Ganga Zumba Cultural Centre] in 1988 — the year of the vote on the new Brazilian Constitution, the centenary of the *Lei Áurea* [Golden Law], and the Fraternity Campaign of the CNBB [National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, linked to the Catholic Church] entitled 'Fraternity and Black People.' Pedrinho presents all these facts as his own experiences, with particular emphasis on the CNBB campaign, given the Catholic Church's political influence in Minas Gerais.

An occupational safety technician and civil servant employed by the railway network, Pedrinho established connections with the black and trade union movements in the city of Juiz de Fora (Lopes, 2024) and, as a result of these contacts, he travelled to Belo Horizonte, São Paulo and Brasília and joined the *quilombola* movement in the 1990s, also establishing strong ties with the University of Viçosa.

Married to Efigênia de Castro da Gama Catarino, from an old family with roots in black culture, he is a father of two, a community leader, a samba leader, a union leader, a quilombo leader, and an environmental and anti-racist activist. He defines himself as a 'man of the left.' A man who helped develop the language of rights proposed by black movements for the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, including cultural rights linked to black heritage in Minas Gerais, has built and continues to develop his political grammar on this basis. His public discourse is similar to that of other *quilombo* leaders of the same generation whom I have been following for many years. He speaks on behalf of the 'black people,' understood as the direct descendants of African captives and their legacy. Thus, he has expressed the political discourse of the *quilombola* movement over the last 30 years, which has

successfully upheld the constitutionality of self-attribution criteria for the acknowledgement of remaining *quilombo* communities throughout Brazil (Abreu; Mattos, 2011; Mattos, 2006). Drawing on Ganga Zumba's territorialised and negotiated resistance to enslavement (Lara, 2021), Pedrinho claims the African roots of his anti-racist struggle as a right and a demand for citizenship inscribed in the cultural sphere, in contrast to the religious bias of the other consultants.

By continuing this generational analysis of the interview series, I would like to suggest that the undeniable political victory of Pedrinho's generation (despite the continued racist violence that black people still face) produced a counter-colonial shift in the political discourse of traditional black communities, in the sense proposed by Nego Bispo (Santos, 2015), which assumes the growing use of religious language, as the dialogue established around the trajectory of Captain Pedrina de Lourdes Santos allows for better enunciation.

Capitã Pedrina is a black intellectual of my generation, actually younger, born in 1961, whom I heard about very early on, as I had the opportunity to tell her, due to her importance as the holder of knowledge about the *Reinado* of the city of Oliveira. First, as a subject of theses and dissertations in the field of History on the *Festa de Rosário*, especially Rubião (2010), where I learned that she was the first woman to become Captain of the *Reinado*, inheriting the *Terno de Massambike* from her father Leonídio, born in 1894. Later on, hearing her impressive voice and the power of her *Massambike* in theatrical performances directed by João das Neves, in outdoor performances in the Paraíba Valley, or in special appearances in João's revival of the classic *Arena Conta Zumbi*, or in the play entitled *Zumbi*, in 2012, a black cast and musical direction by Titane, a well-known singer from Minas Gerais who is part of *Massambike*. Pedrina married, divorced, and had children. She graduated from university, retired as a senior accounting analyst and employee of *Caixa Econômica*, and completed a postgraduate degree in public accounting. She was involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Kardecist spiritism. She witnessed the expansion of neo-Pentecostal religions among participants in the *Reinado* festival, including one of

her sisters. She read African and Afrocentric intellectuals, philosophers, and writers. With João and Titane, Pedrina took the *Reinado* of Minas Gerais to the celebration of the Year of Brazil in France in 2005 – or, as she states in the interview: ‘*It was the Massambike of Mercês that took it...*’. Throughout this time, Pedrina told us in the interview referred to here that holding the *Rosário* festival and keeping the *Reinado* and its traditions alive was her primary mission, and that it was in this practice involving contact with spiritual forces and dialogue between worlds, as she states was also present there, that she recognised herself as a Priestess of three religious practices: The *Umbanda* she inherited from her parents; the *Reinado*, which is itself, according to her, a Bantu-based religious practice, even though people of various beliefs celebrate the *Rosário* festival (Morais, 2022), and *Candomblé Congo/Angola*, which she began practising in 2015 and became a Priestess of the *Nzó Atim Nkosi* house in Juatuba, in the Greater Belo Horizonte area. She is the author of two books, both published by UFMG in 2022: *Eu tenho a África dentro de mim* [I have Africa inside me] (Santos, 2022) and *Meu Rosário, Minha Guia* [My Rosary, My Guide], a memoir organised on the occasion of her honorary doctorate in Social Communication at that university (Oliveira [ed.], Santos [ed.], Santos, 2022). I recommend reading both and watching or reading the interview transcript to gain insight into the complexity of her thoughts.

From a generational perspective and concerning the transformations in contemporary history, which I assume in this article, I would like to highlight just one aspect of this rich trajectory. From 2015 onwards, alongside her initiation into *Candomblé*, Pedrina publicly reinforced an African-based religious interpretation of the *Reinado*, ensuring that the *Rosário* festival no longer referred solely to the period of slavery and its abolition by Princess Isabel (Daibert Junior, 2004), a memory still very much present in the festival, nor even with the time of the Catholic conversion of the ancient Kingdom of Kongo (Kiddy, 2005; Mello & Souza, 2002), but with the spiralling time of the traditions of the Bantu worldview (Craemer; Vansina; Fox, 1976; Martins, 2021), therefore, before the process of enslavement and the conversion of the

King of Kongo himself, who would have bequeathed to the *Reinadeiros* their practices and ways of being and existing in the world.

The debate over the meanings surrounding the *Rosário* festival, between the fable of the princess's gift, Catholic tradition, and the strength of Afrocentric black culture, is ongoing, as it always has been, as I witnessed during my visit to the Oliveira festival in 2024. However, in the most recent context, the counter-colonial shift in Pedrina's practice and thought has taken effect, above all, in the religious discourse, partially revealing what was previously experienced as a secret. In this shift, the development of new public forms of religious institutionalisation is also a political choice for new generations of black people, as Mestre Pedrinho explains.

The trajectory of Mãe Ana de Iansã sheds light on possibilities that are more than open; in fact, they are liberated by this shift. She introduced herself this way at the beginning of our interview:

My name is Mãe Ana de Iansã, and I am from the city of Poços de Caldas. I am 57 years old, and I am the caretaker of the *Umbanda do Caboclo Pedra Branca terreiro* [a place of worship for the Umbanda religion] and president of the *Associação Afro-Ancestral* [Afro-Ancestral Association] here in the city of Poços de Caldas. I am at your disposal.

In this humble presentation, there are a few points worth noting. To begin with, the generational gap: a few years younger than the Captain, Ana was born in 1967. Then, the mobilisation, in presenting herself as an indigenous person with African ancestry in the religious field, without immediate reference to slavery, even though in an *Umbanda* Temple, a religion often remembered in this field for its worship of the *Pretos Velhos* (Old Black Men). I would also like to highlight the choice to emphasise, alongside her religious role, her anti-racist activism in the cultural field.

Interviewing is always a dialogical and relational practice. However, I was struck by how Mãe Ana established as her starting point

what, in Capitã Pedrina's interview, was the point of arrival: the public emergence of political dispute in the religious field.

Of all the interviews, Mãe Ana's was the one that paradoxically brought forth the most historical family memories of the experience of slavery, mobilized by the interviewees.

So, that is the memory I have of my grandmother saying that she was born under the *Lei do Ventre Livre* (Free Womb Law), that she was a farm owner, that she was an indoor slave, that her mother – who in this case is my grandmother, Sabina – was a wet nurse for the children of the owner of that farm. Therefore, it is a story in which slavery was a prominent presence. I have the history of black people, slavery, up to liberation, and even further, much further ahead. I have a memory; I recall my mother saying that they went... They worked... My mother was one of my grandmother's oldest daughters. She was the fourth of 11 siblings. Furthermore, she said that they exchanged their labour for food; there was no money, and they were not paid. And then, at the time, when it really seemed that the owner of that farm died, in the division of assets, they got this piece of land, which is called Cambraia, which is still there today. This small piece of land is where we were raised, and it is where we have our cherished memories. Moreover, my mother came to Poços.

In fact, Grandmother Josefina was born in 1900, a few years after the formal abolition of slavery, but she continued to live on the farm with little change until the farmer's death, as described in the excerpt above.

On her father's side, Mãe Ana says she is 'the granddaughter of an indigenous woman and a man who spoke, who went to find this indigenous woman – we know how that works', conveying one of the familiar narratives in countless black and white families in the state of Minas Gerais, of an indigenous ancestor "caught by the lasso", a practice that was common until well into the 20th century. This white

grandfather one day ‘went out to buy bread and never came back,’ and the indigenous grandmother, Dica, raised her children alone and died at the age of 53.

The youngest of six siblings, Mother Ana is from the city of Poços de Caldas, where her father worked in a dairy factory. She had access to education, attended the Catholic church, and had a godfather who practised *Umbanda*. She recounts her life since childhood in dialogue with an indigenous man, whom she now understands to be *Caboclo Pedra-Branca*, an imaginary childhood friend and entity of her godfather, whom she would embody in her religious practice after many years.

I invite everyone to read the transcript of her rich interview. Here, I would like to highlight a few points: her militant relationship with the painful memory of slavery in her family and city, her feminism built during a complicated marriage which she had the strength to leave, her openness to *Umbanda* and her own mediumship based on the practice of blessings after the illness of one of her children, followed by her approach to *Candomblé*. She was guided by them, as well as her anti-racist political activism in the city, and the opening of her *Umbanda* religious house, which incorporated elements of the cult of the orishas.

I am not a religious person, nor am I an expert in religious history. My interpretation is based on political history. According to the cases analysed here, I consider religious discourse to be an extremely contemporary pursuit, embedded in Western modernity, because it gives “meaning”, to use an expression common in the language of the *Reinados*, to non-Western, African, and indigenous knowledge. Because they reinvented themselves, they remained as ways of living, understanding, and being in the world, despite colonial violence and enslavement. The reading and re-reading of these experiences, knowledge, and cultural practices took on various meanings and were always subject to dispute from a political perspective (Barth, 2005). Throughout the 20th century, these meanings were constructed primarily in the religious field, at least in Minas Gerais. Beyond coexisting with Catholic practices (Brasileiro, 2023; Douxami & Brasileiro, 2024), these meanings were often provided by Kardecist spiritism, and above all, by the experience

of the umbandas. Now, in the 21st century, knowledge and practices are beginning to be viewed through new religious perspectives, opening up to *Candomblé* and the influence of widely circulated African or Afrocentric philosophies, not only in the religious field, but also in philosophy and communication (Hansen; Oliveira, 2023; Lopes; Simas, 2020).

This is the ideal introduction to our last interviewee, a Babalawo of the Ifá cult, which originated in Africa, a researcher who has developed his intellectual and religious journeys in a wholly integrated manner. He transitioned from *Umbanda* and blessing practices, which were present in his family alongside Catholicism and the memory of African and indigenous ancestors, to *Candomblé*, which he was initiated into far from home, initially in the city of Brasília. While studying and pursuing a career as a professor in higher education, he also began practising the Ifá cult in Ijero in the state of Ekiti, Nigeria, which today organises his religious practice, which he affectionately calls Yorubanda. He is also a researcher of the history of African-based religions in Brazil.

Like the other consultants, his interview is vibrant and helpful in concluding my argument in this section: the current counter-colonial endeavour of the search for Africa (Capone, 2018 [2004]) in the intellectual discourse of terreiro religions and its impact on the reinterpretation of traditional African and indigenous knowledge. Given the advances of neo-Pentecostalism in Brazilian society, the pursuit of the African-based religions to give meaning to and disseminate ancestral practices and experiences is not merely a coincidence. It is part of a political trend in 21st-century modernity.

Also, in *Quilombo do Bracuí*, in *Angra dos Reis*, mentioned at the beginning of this text, whose older leaders are traditionally linked to the Catholic Church and the practice of *Jongo*, an intangible heritage of Bantu origin, a *Candomblé* terreiro was founded under the leadership of Babalorisha Emerson Mec, from the same generation as our consultant and co-author Babalawo Fátolá Rhonnel Américo. I had the opportunity to visit the terreiro, and there, as in the case of the terreiro in the state of Minas Gerais, the Umbanda entities keep their space. The *Candomblé* terreiro of *Quilombo do Bracuí* is a relatively new religious space that

has played a central role in dialogue with ongoing international historical and archaeological research in the area, having received a visit from Lonnie Bunch, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in 2024. The phenomenon is replicated in relation to the epistemic dialogues established by this project. Our final seminar took place on 31 October and 1 November 2025 at the *terreiro* or temple, as he prefers to call it, led by researcher/holder and co-author of this article, Babalawo Fátolá Rhonnel Américo, whose contribution was absolutely crucial to the arguments developed here, as readers will be able to see in the rest of the text.

ORAL HISTORY AND THE AFRO-INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE HISTORY OF CITIES

Josemeire Alves Pereira, a historian who has investigated the role of black people and communities in the development of urban spaces in Brazilian cities, now writes.

My participation in the project, and in particular, the interviews with the four holders using oral History methodology, allowed me to broaden my perspective on this topic. In this section, considering the narratives of the masters and mistresses holders, concerning their family trajectories, I will address aspects of the formation of the main cities in which each of them lives and works, highlighting how they show the impact of racism on their trajectories, but also the power of the black and indigenous presence in the constitution of these territories.

The 2022 census showed significant percentages of black population (sum of black and mixed-race people, according to categories of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE) for the municipalities of origin and activity of our holders: 65.1% in Ponte Nova; 55.9% in Três Corações; 49.8% in Oliveira; 34.4% in Poços de Caldas; as well as the presence of indigenous people in all of them; and *quilombolas* in Oliveira, Ponte Nova – where the *Quilombo do Sapé* is located, in the community of *Fátima*, of Mestre Pedrinho – and Três Corações; as can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 1: Oliveira, Poços de Caldas, Ponte Nova and Três Corações – MG
Population and Territory (2022)**

	Oliveira	Poços de Caldas	Ponte Nova	Três Corações
Area (Km ²)	897.29	546.96	470.64	828.04
Population	39.262	163.742	57.776	75.485
<i>Black</i>	5.964	12.518	10.700	10.960
<i>Mixed race</i>	13.599	43.926	26.941	31.281
<i>Indigenous</i>	17	94	31	24
<i>White</i>	19.658	106.557	20.059	33.107
<i>Asian</i>	24	573	43	110
<i>Situation by household (Urban area)</i>	36.261	160.094	52.848	69.324
<i>Situation by household (Rural area)</i>	3.001	3.648	4.928	6.161
<i>Quilombola people</i>	11	-	3751	302

Source: IBGE – 2022 Census.

Despite the demographic changes that affected these regions in the post-abolition period – including internal and external migration processes – the contemporary preponderance of these populations is still evident, given the trends towards the effective and symbolic annihilation of their presence in these territories with the advent of the modernisation processes experienced by Brazilian cities since the late 19th century. (Barone; Rios, 2019).

The narratives of Capitã Pedrina, Mestre Pedrinho, Mãe Ana, and Babalawo Fátolá about the African and indigenous ancestry of their families highlight the trajectories of Afro-indigenous families deeply impacted by racism, constituting the very experience of producing territories. The ‘raciality device’ operates, as defined by Sueli Carneiro (2023), is observed here in the labour conditions similar to those of slavery experienced by the ancestors of Mãe Ana, Capitã Pedrina, and Mestre Pedrinho, even after 1888, or in the denial of access to formal education for these individuals and their descendants for many generations. Alternatively, further, on the racial discrimination that affected many of the children of these generations – including one of

our interviewees – in the school environment, when they were able to access it; and on the prohibitions on continuing their studies, due to the need to dedicate themselves to work to support their families, as referenced by Jerry Dávila (2006) when analysing the phenomenon of the whitening of education in Rio de Janeiro in the first half of the 20th century. However, the reality is that religious racism persists in Brazil, both in the experiences of the first generations who lived under the yoke of criminalisation imposed by the 1890 Penal Code on African-based religious and cultural practices, and in the need for daily struggles and reaffirmation of the right to freedom of belief guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, in the face of attacks suffered by African-based religious communities, even in the 21st century.

An important aspect shared in the narratives of the four holders concerns the indigenous presence in their family ancestry and, in the case of the priestesses and priests interviewed above, in their experiences of the sacred.

According to canonical narratives, the territories of the four municipalities considered here were inhabited by peoples who were violently decimated or expelled in the confrontations resulting from the actions of the *bandeirantes* in the 17th and 18th centuries; actions chosen as a milestone in the beginning of the formation of the settlements that gave rise to these cities. Núbia Braga considers that the expansion of the borders of the Minas Gerais territory was directly related to the extermination of the indigenous populations, because “where there was gold, there were indigenous people” (Ribeiro, 2022, pos 3772). Genocide and enslavement were common, but ethnocide was the main result of the narrative process that ensued. In fact, the survivors and descendants of the original populations were made invisible (Almeida, 2012).

It is quite common in historiographical narratives about these and other Brazilian cities for the presence of indigenous peoples to disappear after the information, when it exists, about their struggle against the colonisers; a fact that is generally narrated in a laudatory manner, as in the historiography of Diogo de Vasconcellos (1904, 1918). A similar process occurred with narratives about the presence and agency of Black

people in the same cities after the Abolition of Slavery. Thus, the presence of these indigenous ancestors in the manifestation of the caboclos, in African-based cults – such as *Umbanda*, which is part of the experiences of Mãe Ana, Capitã Pedrina and Babalawo Fátolá, and in Yorumbanda, practised by the same Babalawo – is reaffirmed as an important sign of the defence of their right to exist in the face of the colonisation violence.

Oliveira, a municipality located in southwestern Minas Gerais but politically and administratively belonging to the western region of the state, preserves the memory of the Tapajó, Carijó, and, later, Cataguases peoples; nevertheless, emphasis is placed on the chronicle of their expulsion by *bandeirantes* such as Lourenço Castanho Taques around 1670 in the region then known as *Campo Grande da Picada de Goiás*. In fact, remnants of the original populations remained at the base of the development of the district of Nossa Senhora da Oliveira, belonging to the Comarca do Rio das Mortes, in the 18th century, which emerged due to its favourable location as a trading post and stopping point for travellers going from São Paulo, with enslaved black people in their possession, towards the west of the province of Minas Gerais and Goiás, via the *Caminho Novo* (or *Picada de Goiás*). Before this, Carvalho (2019, p. 10) highlights that the region was the scene of attacks on several quilombos that had been established in the Campo Grande region, including that of Ambrósio, which was suppressed by government military campaigns between 1746 and 1758; and that, until 1760, ‘the governors of Minas Gerais still sent troops to attack quilombos in the “Campo Grande” area,’ with 1769 considered the year of the annihilation of the Campo Grande quilombos. Once again, the chronicle of extinction renders invisible the Afro-indigenous black territory, which would resist, during the reigns of the 19th and 20th centuries, the modernity of the modern era. Captain Pedrina’s parents, with their *Terno de Massambike* and their *Umbanda* terreiro open and functioning in the city amid repression in the first half of the 20th century, bequeathed to her the foundations from which she set out to build herself as the anti-colonial intellectual she is today.

Poços de Caldas, in the south-west of the state, was the Cataguases’ land in official accounts when it was settled by the bandeiras in 1765.

The new settlement was formed around the discovery of thermal waters with therapeutic properties in 1780, and from then on, accounts of the indigenous presence are silenced. Between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the locality experienced an influx of former prospectors from mining villages, drawn by the thermal waters; among them were the Junqueira family and their numerous African slaves, who received a land grant in the region in 1819. The provincial president expropriated the lands of the sulphurous thermal springs in 1872, making them public property. This fact, associated with the donation by Captain Joaquim Bernardes of 96 hectares of his farm, on which the village was formed, is considered a milestone in the founding of the city, followed by urbanisation (Barbosa, 1995; Brazil, n.d.), which focused heavily on the healing power of its waters. In 1886, the Mogiana Railway branch line was inaugurated in the then Parish of *N. Sra. Da Saúde das Águas de Caldas*, with a visit from Emperor D. Pedro II and Empress Teresa Cristina. The establishment of the railway significantly boosted the development of the municipality of Poços de Caldas, attracting black and white railway workers, as well as newly freed former slaves and Italian immigrants, due to the presence of coffee plantations. The history of African and indigenous presence in the city, which has been rendered invisible in this narrative, is revisited through the healing power of the *benzendeiras* [healers] and the uncomfortable memory of slavery in the 19th-century urban space mobilised by Mãe Ana de Iansã. These actions form the basis of the counter-modernity engendered by the *Projeto Curas* [Cures Project], which she coordinates. Afro-indigenous cures that contrast with the sanitised medicinal power of thermal waters.

Located in the *Zona da Mata* region of Minas Gerais, about 180 km from the capital, on the banks of the Piranga River, Ponte Nova was initially inhabited by the Puri and Aimoré peoples, whose extinction was caused by colonisation (according to official accounts), which led to the construction of the Chapel of São Sebastião e Almas in 1770. The re-emergence of the Puri today is a phenomenon that runs through almost all of their former areas of origin (Ferreira, 2023). In the 19th century, the municipality was swept away by the slave-based modernity

of the Brazilian Empire, exacerbating the indigenous ethnocide that began in the colonial period. The village, which belonged to Mariana, was established as the parish of São Sebastião da Ponte Nova in 1832, elevated to a town in 1857, and became a municipality in 1866; its name was shortened to Ponte Nova in 1883. The region was a major centre of the province's sugar economy between the second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, bringing together a vast contingent of African and indigenous descendants who were illegally enslaved during the formation of the municipality and the surrounding slave economy under the laws of the Brazilian Empire. Local economic activity intensified with the inauguration of the Leopoldina Railway in 1886. It was on the outskirts of this post-slavery urban environment that the *Sapé* community emerged as a black territory, a form of resistance and resilience, now known as *Quilombo de Fátima* and recognised as part of the country's cultural heritage, despite the brutal environmental racism it has suffered. Nowadays, *Quilombo de Fátima* is a locus of ecological and anti-racist struggle under the leadership of Mestre Pedrinho.

Located in the Rio Verde basin, approximately 287 km from Belo Horizonte, Três Corações was the territory of the Puri and Cataguases peoples, among others, who were affected by mining-based colonisation in the region. It also forged its history through the violence of imperial, slave-based modernity. The Emperor visited the town for the inauguration of the *Minas & Rio* railway in June 1884, built by enslaved people supervised by English engineers. The original settlement was already a parish within the municipality of Campanha, becoming independent three months later and forming the city of Três Corações do Rio Verde. This city was elevated in 1886 to the status of a town of the same name, only changing to Três Corações in 1923. Even in the 21st century, religious racism still markedly influences the city's history. While the Ifá Temple there now connects with followers from around the world, the city continues to witness racist attacks against the sacred space and its priest.

An attack on the sacred space of the *Reinado* in the famous *Casa Azul de Oliveira* was the initial subject of the interview with Captain Pedrina. Environmental racism against the *Sapé* quilombo seeks

to undermine its ancestral strength by polluting its waters. Mãe Ana's struggle is no less complicated amid the illusion of whiteness among the elites of southern Minas Gerais. After two years of dialogue and learning, the four consultants, with our assistance, filed complaint dossiers with the Brazilian Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship in 2025.

AFRO-INDIGENOUS INTERACTIONS AND ORALITY EXTEND FAR BEYOND INTERVIEWS – MEMORIES OF SLAVERY AND INDIGENOUS MEMORIES PRESENT IN UMBANDA SONGS

As mentioned in the previous sections, slavery and indigenous memories are elements explored in the narratives of the four consultant-holders, and they are not based solely on their family histories, but also on their religious beliefs, especially their experience with *Umbanda*, which permeates all four trajectories. Written in the first person by Rhonnel Américo, co-author of dual identity in this project, as a researcher and holder of knowledge organised in the religious field, this last item addresses the centrality of Umbanda in the trajectories and interviews analysed here, based on the verses and songs of *caboclos* and *pretos velhos* [old black men], understood as a practice and collective memory that connect the experiences of the holders interviewed.

Before analysing how *Umbanda* permeates the life trajectory of consultant-holders, it is necessary to understand this religion within the Brazilian religious landscape. Umbanda is a Brazilian religion of controversial origin, possibly related to calundus (Capone, 2018 [2004]), that gained prominence and legitimacy in the figure of the medium Zélio Fernandino de Moraes in the early 20th century, with the manifestation of an indigenous entity called *Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas* on 15 November 1908 in the city of São Gonçalo, Rio de Janeiro. In line with what is widely reported (Alexandria; Trindade, 2020; Floriano, 2024; Rezende, 2021; Simas, 2021), the medium Zélio also manifested an entity called 'Pai Antônio,' a *preto velho* ("old black man," the spirit of an enslaved individual) who likewise conveyed messages of welcome and charity. *Umbanda*, whose motto is 'peace, love and charity,' comprises

a ‘syncretism’ between Catholicism, Kardecist spiritism, and African beliefs of Bantu origin; through mediumistic trance, mediums incorporate spirits of indigenous people, enslaved Black people, *baianos* [a category of spirits who represent the people and culture of the state of Bahia, a region with a strong African heritage], cowboys, children, eshu, *pombagiras*, and various other entities that serve devotees, offering their ancestral wisdom (Rezende, 2021; Simas, 2021). The violence of African enslavement and indigenous deterritorialisation is evident in the deep memory accessed by *umbandas*, represented in the figures of caboclos and *pretos velhos*.

Far from attempting to discuss faith or belief from a long-term historical perspective, I believe that *Umbanda* represents the strength of an ancestry violated by white colonisers and is a strategy to prevent the erasure of Afro-indigenous history. Therefore, it is a religious practice, but also a form of reflection on colonial relations of domination and subordination, in which African and indigenous cultures are relegated to inferior and almost non-existent positions (Hall, 2003). The ‘ghosts of colonialism’ experienced by the Afro-indigenous population in Brazil – especially concerning African-based religions – are similar to those experienced by Black Americans, who are also, in many cases, Afro-indigenous, in the face of whiteness and its discourses that reinforce differences (Hooks, 2019). In addition to its religious aspect, *Umbanda* emerges as a space for reframing, in which differences in racial origin act to deconstruct the negative perceptions imposed on African and indigenous beliefs during the colonial period. In this regard, it consolidates itself not only as a religious element of empowerment for peoples stigmatised by the racialisation of the post-abolition period, but also as a ‘political-social’ force to confront the eugenics movement, which sought to obliterate the Afro-indigenous presence in Brazilian history (Sodré, 2023), proposing an ‘inclusion of the subalterns,’ especially descendants of Africans and indigenous peoples relegated to positions of inferiority in the hierarchy of Brazilian society (Simas, 2021).

Umbanda and its followers faced constant legal persecution in their struggle for legitimacy in the Brazilian religious landscape.

Although African-based religions gained prominence on the national scene in the 1940s and 1950s, during the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas, which imposed sanctions classified as “faith healing or charlatanism”, directly affecting the therapeutic prescriptions of *Umbanda* entities (Capone, 2018 [2004]; Simas, 2021). In 1946, the Brazilian Constitution guaranteed freedom of belief and the free exercise of religious worship. In 1951, the Afonso Arinos Law was enacted, which included acts resulting from discrimination based on race or color as crimes. Finally, it was after the 1988 Constitution that laws and safeguards became effective, allowing greater freedom to practitioners of *Umbanda* and other African-based religions.

Against this backdrop, I propose to mobilise a new key to understanding, derived from the Afro-indigenous oral tradition of *Umbanda*, to shed light on the historical interpretation of the interviewees’ narratives that underpin this text. For this purpose, I use the so-called *Umbanda* points⁶ – songs in praise of the deities, with special attention to the points and songs of *pretos velhos* (old black men) and *caboclos*. This co-author drafted the following question: Can the ethics of the holders’ trajectories of those who contributed significantly with their knowledge to the work carried out by the *Passados Presentes Project* be better understood in light of the wisdom linked to the teachings of *caboclos* and *pretos velhos* [‘old black men’] of the *Umbandas*?

Considering that the *pretos velhos* constitute groups of spirits that recall the experience of captivity, and carry in their narratives the pain and suffering experienced during the era of slavery, it should be noted that, even though in their mediumistic manifestations they present themselves as kind and fragile elders, they impose authority, transmit values about community unity and, above all, resilience (Concone, 2001; Rezende, 2021). The *caboclos* evoke indigenous memory, representing the indigenous warrior, free and possibly endowed with strength superior to that of the white coloniser. They manifest themselves with vigour and haughtiness, wielding their arrows and spears with energy, clearing

⁶ The *Umbanda* points and songs are in the public domain.

paths in the face of difficulties. They symbolize nature, justice, leadership, and, above all, freedom (Concone, 2001; Simas & Rufino, 2018).

*Grandma does not want coconut shells in the terreiro [Umbanda yard] because they remind her of the days of captivity!*⁷

The above point refers to spirits called *pretas velhas* [old black women], often evoked in *Umbanda* terreiros to emphasise the painful memories of the era of slavery (Rios; Mattos, 2005). This *Umbanda* point is relevant in the initial analyses of Mestre Pedrinho's trajectory. In his narrative, he evokes a strong memory of slavery by recalling the stories of his grandmother, called Geraldina, and the '*angu salgadinho* [a type of cornmeal porridge]' that she used to prepare to eat with milk or bean broth. This affective memory certainly harks back to the hard times experienced by his enslaved black ancestors. Mestre Pedrinho is the only holder/consultant with an anti-racist militancy and in defence of black rights who distances himself from the *Umbanda* faith common to the other holders; nevertheless, *Umbanda* is inscribed in his life story. In another interview given to the Project⁸, Mestre Pedrinho recounted that during his childhood, he was drawn to the *Umbanda* terreiros located in the old community of *Sapé* (now Quilombo de Fátima), but that he ended up distancing himself from those religious practices due to pressure from his family and the Catholic community, which prejudicially labelled that faith as evil. Although *Umbanda* did not drive his activism in defence of black rights,⁹ it was through the religiousness of

7 Point of evocation of entities known as *pretas velhas* [old black women].

8 The interview "*Manifestações religiosas do bairro de Fátima* [Religious manifestations in the Fátima neighbourhood]" was given by "Mestre Pedrinho" (Pedro da Gama Antônio Catarino) to Tayane Aparecida Rodrigues and Rhonnel Américo, researchers from the *Passados Presentes MG* project, by WhatsApp, between 9 and 18 June 2024. The full transcript will be available on the project website <https://mg.passadospresentes.com.br/>, which is currently being finalised.

9 The theme of the 1988 Fraternity Campaign was 'Fraternity and Black People' in the context of the abolition of slavery. The main objective was to take up the fight for justice and against all forms of prejudice, racism and discrimination, with the slogan 'Hear the cry of this people!'.

the 1988 Fraternity Campaign that he found a way to get involved with the black movement and defend the territory of the *Quilombo do Sapé* community. With the apparent serenity evoked by the strength of the *pretos velhos*, the activism and struggles in defence of his community and in favour of the anti-racist movement, Mestre Pedrinho's trajectory can also be associated with another *pretos velhos* point and song:

I am going to call it the Black Line [preto velho line], black is in charge now. Anyone who is black joins the circle. Any white people stay outside. I am going to call it the Black Line...

This *Umbanda* point carries much meaning and can be understood hermeneutically (Ricoeur, 1987) when we recall the countless battles Mestre Pedrinho fought in defence of the ancestral memory of *Quilombo do Sapé* – now known as *Quilombo de Fátima*. In literal defence of the territory of the “pretos” (blacks), Pedrinho asserted his actions in favour of his community, culminating in the achievement, in 2007, of the *Quilombola Community* certificate. This expression denotes a new protagonism - “blacks are in charge now”!

Cambinda¹⁰ was sleeping at the corral gate. Those who have enemies do not sleep. Cambinda, wake up and come to work!

Although Captain Pedrina also has indigenous ancestry, as recorded in her narrative – her maternal grandfather, ‘Panhé,’ was originally from the Purí tribe – she inscribes her life story in a striking way in her African ancestry. In her words, the wisdom of the *pretos* and *pretas velhas* [old black men and women] is manifested and, at the same time, their commitment to perpetuating the spiritual work of their ancestors is observed. The *Umbanda* song evokes the tireless struggle of enslaved Africans, who remained in a constant state of alert and called their

10 Grandmother Cambinda is considered a highly respected *preta velha* [old black woman] in *Umbanda* for her vigorous actions and vehement defence of family values.

community to work. By analogy, this labour is associated with Captain Pedrina's dedication to preserving ancestral traditions. According to Stuart Hall (2003), active labour on traditions, in addition to enabling cultural reconfigurations, is a form of persistence for a people or community. By reconciling knowledge from different religious traditions – a characteristic inherited from her Bantu ancestors (Daibert Junior, 2015) – she sets herself apart in the cultural and religious scene, mainly by reinterpreting the family tradition of the *Reinado* (Hall, 2003), whose origin she attributes to Angola, which brings us to another point often sung in *Umbanda*:

*Preto velho comes from Angola to work, he comes, he comes,
he comes, he hits the mironga, he's going to spin!*

Certainly, Capitã Pedrina uses her wisdom and strength to defend the ancestry of black people.

It is impossible to discuss Mãe Ana de Iansã without linking her journey to the strength of the caboclos of *Umbanda*. *Caboclo Pedra-Branca*, an indigenous entity, has been part of her life story since childhood and continues to drive her political activism and spiritual leadership. Two *caboclo* points often chanted in *Umbanda* represent Mãe Ana's strength:

1. *Caboclo has no path to walk on; he walks on top of leaves, under leaves, anywhere.*
2. *Caboclo affirms his point at the tip of the vine. It was midnight under the moon; it was noon under the sun. Caboclo affirms his point at the tip of the vine!*

The first point in praise of the *caboclos* does not record the *caboclo's* lack of direction, but rather his cunning and perspicacity in moving around anywhere and in different circumstances. This cunning, the pioneering and warrior-like strength of the *caboclo* are depicted in the skill and energy employed by Mãe Ana in the struggle for the

legitimacy of *Umbanda* practice and in the vindication of the rights of the terreiro peoples and black people in the city of Poços de Caldas. This aspect is also portrayed in the second point of the *caboclo*, and despite the difficulties, her tireless work – day in and day out – has one goal: the realisation of her rights, even in the face of obstacles and with the steadfastness of faith – she certainly stands firm “on the tip of the vine”. Mãe Ana’s actions, in line with Hooks’ (2019) proposition, are based on ancestral redemptive visions that sustain her existence.

Lastly, still discussing *caboclos*, I analyse my own narrative as a researcher/holder, like Babalawo Fátolá, in the oral history document compiled by the *Passados Presentes Minas Gerais* project, which serves as the basis for this article. Although I am primarily dedicated to the worship of Nigerian orishas and Ifá, the interview emphasises the continuity of the practice and worship of *Umbanda* entities, naming this practice, in an attempt to construct a religious identity, ‘Yorumbanda’.

The narrative embodied in the oral history interview conducted by the two co-authors of this article is also characterised by indigenous memory, inscribed not only in family stories, but also in my initiation into *Umbanda*, in a terreiro whose chief entity was a *caboclo* – *Caboclo Flecheiro* (*Caboclo Archer*).

*Oh Juremí, oh Juremá, your arrow hit the target, Jurema,¹¹
right inside that gongá!*

The song in praise of *Jurema* and her ability to hit the target, to connect the spiritual world and the sacred space of the ‘gongá’ – the name given to altars in *Umbanda* temples – significantly portray the relentless pursuit of knowledge by Fátolá and also his desire to direct traditional knowledge towards goals that place followers of African-based

11 *Cabocla Jurema* is a female spirit from the line of *caboclos*, who are highly prominent in *Umbanda*. *Jurema* is also a term used in African-based religions to refer to an enchanted city where the *caboclos* live; sacred smoke; a specific herb; a ritualistic drink; or a religion more focused on indigenous shamanism, widely practised in the Northeast region of Brazil.

religions on an equal footing and in a position of respect in society, through the dissemination of knowledge in academic circles.

I saw rain, I saw lightning, but even so, the sky was blue. Hold on to your point on the jurema leaf, that Oshosi reigns in maracatu!

Like other holders of this article, as a priest of Ifá, I have been the victim of violent acts of prejudice and religious racism. It is difficult to continue here in the first person, so I invite readers to watch the video of the oral history document produced as an interview by the project. Even in the face of adversity, even though I have ‘seen rain and lightning,’ imbued with the caboclo’s energy and strength, as a priest, I persevere in the struggle to defend my faith and my sacred territoriality.

Finally, the effort made here sought to discern how the narratives presented by the holders could be represented and closely associated with the identities constructed around *caboclos* and *pretos velhos*. This investigative exercise did not consist of a mere manipulation of identities and representations but sought to identify how blacks and indigenous peoples converged in distinct traditions (Hall, 2003; Hooks, 2019) in a cultural and, above all, religious interaction that materialises in *Umbandas*. In this regard, beyond the realm of faith, we observe that Afro-indigenous religiosity conveys in its systems of representation the preservation of ethnic diversity in the struggle against the ideology of whiteness (Sodré, 2023). Like the *Umbandas*, Afro-indigenous religions are not dichotomised into ‘memory of slavery’ or ‘indigenous memory,’ but rather unite both in what can be called ‘memory of resistance.’ And, to paraphrase bell hooks (2019), the decolonisation of minds through ancestral stories and traditions is an act of resistance. Transcending the religious sphere, *Umbanda* should be understood as historiographical readings and a significant system of counter-colonial resistance.

AS A FORM OF CONCLUSION

Present Pasts: Black and Afro-Indigenous Heritage and Memories in Minas Gerais is a collaborative public history project that sought to create a methodology of epistemic dialogues to produce new historical knowledge during its development. We invite everyone to learn about its results on our collaborative digital platforms. We started from the premise that the public and collective dissemination of individual research with holders of black heritage in Minas Gerais would not only produce political effects such as the return of the knowledge produced, but would also be enhanced by this dialogue, generating new historiographical knowledge.

The purpose of this article is to clarify this dialogue and its potential not only as knowledge/action but also as reflection on theoretical issues central to historical knowledge, such as the debate on authorship and the different dimensions of time in the construction of a historiographical problem. Beyond the authorities shared with the subjects of our research, the choice of a multi-voiced text signed collectively was a theoretically constructed decision.

Therefore, we resorted to the most classic oral history methodology, with a semi-structured model of genealogical interview, developed since the 1990s by Ana Maria Lugão Rios in the *Memórias do Cativo* [Memories of Captivity] project, to conduct interviews led by two co-authors of this text, which became public documents comprising the project's digital archive. The decision to invite one of the interviewees, a researcher and consultant involved in the project, to become a co-author of the scientific article produced here sought to highlight the richness of the oral history document archived as a source and the epistemic dialogue with the religious field, in which most of our consultants are involved, as a historiographical reflection tool. The interviews, transcribed, edited, and authorised for publication, are an invaluable historiographical product. Furthermore, we revisit Verena Alberti's classic question. After all, what does the oral source document? (Alberti, 1996)

We hope that the article, as a whole, has provided a good answer to the infinite possibilities of the method. The first part of the text addressed the dialogical relationship established with the four interviewees as a source for thinking about the construction of their memories/narratives as political meanings of the so-called traditional Afro-Minas Gerais culture and their anti-racist struggle since the 1988 Constitution. Subsequently, the same interviews were revisited as sources to shed light on the social history in which the groups that hold this cultural heritage, now politically recognised, are embedded. Our holders' memories are also the history of a counter-modernity in Minas Gerais, which is embedded in the social history of their cities. To this end, we mobilised above all the family memory of indigenous and Afro-diasporic origins and the unfinished meaning of the abolition of slavery in Brazil, evident in the naturalisation of racism in 20th-century Minas Gerais, as well as the enduring indigenous ethnocide that marks the history of the region. The violence of African enslavement and indigenous deterritorialisation are also present in the deep memory accessed by the umbandas, a shared practice among all interviewees. At this point, we seek to engage in dialogue with a long-time frame, not Braudel's long duration (Braudel, 1965), but rather the spiralling time (Martins, 2021) of Afro-indigenous cultural heritage, which is reinterpreted and modified without losing its counter-colonial power.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The entire dataset underpinning the results of this study has been published in the article itself.

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