

The Pedagogy of Mironga by Master Griot Dilermando Freitas: between enchantment and secrecy

Pedagogy of Mironga: Ancestry, Orality, Musicality and Secrecy in the Work of Mestre Griot Dilermando Freitas

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SUMMARY

This article presents an excerpt from the Mironga Pedagogy proposal, developed by Master Griô Dilermando Freitas, which combines enchantment and secrecy. The experience, conducted within the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Narrative, Art, Language, and Subjectivity (GIPNALS) and the Tutorial Education Program Fronteiras: Popular Knowledge and Practices (PET Fronteiras), is taken as a perspective for approaching and reflecting on knowledge that strains the boundaries between university and community, science and popular practices. The work is based on the journeys, reflections, and challenges undertaken by the groups over twenty years, grounded in surrealist ethnography (CLIFFORD, 2002), reworked as a "surrealization" of research writing (BUSSOLETTI, 2007), and in PET Fronteiras projects, which seek to establish connections between popular knowledge and the university, promoting knowledge exchange and reducing hierarchies that have historically given superior power to academic production. The research is framed within the perspective of non-colonial epistemologies, engaging with authors such as Walter Benjamin, Nego Bispo, Luiz Rufino, and Luiz Antônio Simas and, centrally, with the narrative experience of the Masters of Culture, represented in the practice of Master Griot Dilermando Freitas. The common thread connecting the teaching, research, and outreach work with Master Dilermando's work is the academic and political struggle against the impoverishment of narrative experience, as established by capitalist modernity. Based on the Master Griot's proposal, the article references the importance of mironga knowledge, recognizing its dimension of secrecy and its power of enchantment.

Keywords: Mironga Pedagogy. Griot. Popular Knowledge.

ABSTRACT

This article presents a segment of the Pedagogy of Mironga, developed by Griô Master Dilermando Freitas, articulating enchantment and secrecy. The experience, carried out within the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Narrative, Art, Language, and Subjectivity (GIPNALS) and the Tutorial Education Program Fronteiras: Popular Knowledge and Practices (PET Fronteiras), is taken as a perspective for approaching and reflecting on knowledge that challenges the boundaries between university and community, science and popular practices.

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² Lattes ID Available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/4115190263903268>

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⁴ Lattes ID. Available at: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3000225561008826>

The work is grounded in the trajectories, reflections, and challenges undertaken by these groups over the past twenty years, drawing upon surrealist ethnography (CLIFFORD, 2002), reworked as the “surrealization” of research writing (BUSSOLETTI, 2007), and on PET Fronteiras projects, which aim to establish connections between popular knowledge and academia, promoting the exchange of knowledge and reducing the hierarchies that have historically privileged academic production. This investigation is situated within the framework of non-colonial epistemologies, engaging with authors such as Walter Benjamin, Nego Bispo, Luiz Rufino, and Luiz Antônio Simas — and, centrally, with the narrative experience of the Culture Masters, represented in the practice of Griô Master Dilermando Freitas. The thread that connects the teaching, research, and extension activities with Master Dilermando's work is the academic and political struggle against the impoverishment of narrative experience as instituted by capitalist modernity. Based on the Griô Master's approach, the article underscores the importance of the knowledge of mironga, recognizing its secretive nature and its power of enchantment.

Keywords: Pedagogy of Mironga. Griô. Popular Knowledge.

1. THE “ENCHANTED SCIENCE OF MACUMBARIA”

This work is part of the perspective of an epistemology of enchantment, which recognizes in macumbaria not only religious or cultural practices, but also the modes of production knowledge rooted in African and Afro-Brazilian ancestry. Macumba, as a science enchanted, challenges the Western paradigm that separates body and thought, rite and theory, secret and knowledge. It proposes another relationship with life and knowledge, in which learning can be understood as a process of “untying the knots of thought” in search of enchantment “like a breath of word”.

Macumba is a science, an enchanted science, and a binding of multiple knowledges. This is how it is versed in the secrets of jurema, catimbós, torés, babaçuês, and enchantments. We are not the ones who say this; the words are spoken by the ajured and caboclo masters in the enchanted cities and in the textuality of the pages. Therefore, for what is enunciated/claimed from macumbas, every demand has a winning demand, and for us, a caboclo's house is an enchanted settlement. The perspective of enchantment is an indispensable element and practice in the production of knowledge. It is from enchantment that knowledge becomes dynamic and rides the wings of the wind, crossing paths, tying verses, designing gestures, blowing sounds, laying grounds, and embodying bodies. In the minutiae of ordinary life, knowledge becomes enchanted, and the meanings of the world are reinvented. (SIMAS AND RUFINO, 2018, p. 12-13).

By the “science of macumbaria, the point is crossed out: one must read the poetics to understand politics, one must read the enchantment to understand science.” (SIMAS and RUFINO, 2018, p.16). A poetics and a politics that demands knowing that “living is a trick that is cultivated between what can be seen and what lives in the invisible, we follow the trail of the arrow that crosses time: the opposite of life is not death, the opposite of life is disenchantment”

(SIMAS and RUFINO, 2018, p.9). Finally, according to the authors, all of this is, first and foremost, a poetic and political project that defends:

Enchantment as a capacity to transit through the countless turns of time, invoke spiritualities of battle and healing, strive for community-based politics and education among all beings and ancestors, inscribe everyday life as a rite of reading and writing in different poetic systems, and strive for the intelligibility of cycles is a struggle against the paradigm of disenchantment established here. In other words, enchantment is a political foundation that confronts the limitations of the so-called consciousness of Westernized mentalities (SIMAS AND RUFINO, 2018, p. 7).

Thus, by taking enchanted science as an epistemological horizon, this article links to the knowledge produced by the work of Master Griô Dilermando Freitas and in his proposal entitled “Pedagogy of Mironga”. If macumbaria, as Simas and Rufino, it is science that is born from enchantment and is based on secrecy, the mironga presents itself as one of its strengths. A mironga that is made on the basis of an ancestral culture and by the knowledge of Master Griô Dilermando, as an expression of the necessary tension of everything that separates the university from the community, reducing popular knowledge to object. What we intend here is to make academic acts, rites and gestures spaces in which presence and the strength of the enchantment of a historically silenced culture, from the degrading process of enslavement, to the most perverse forms in which racism structures the annihilation and the impossibility of socially just and egalitarian ways of being.

2 THE MIRONGA

2.1 The Mironga and the Griot

The word “mironga” has roots in Bantu languages, especially Kimbundu and Umbundu, where it means mystery, secret (LOPES, 2012, p. 172). In Afro-Brazilian practices, Brazilians, the term shifts to also mean ways of knowing and caring that carry the *axé* and the power of that which does not need to be said. “Mironga” is therefore not something that can be objectified in teachable content, or translated into primers or manuals: it is fundamental that is realized in the body, in song, in silence, in the resignification of experience, in the struggle for historical and cultural resistance.

The knowledge of mironga is part of the fight against what Walter Benjamin (1994) highlighted the “impoverishment of experience” as the process by which modernity capitalist transforms living narratives into information detached from the lived experience, reproducing the same and pushing away the deeper meanings that allow us to find our way again of history and memory.

The word “Griô” is a “Portuguese form of *griot*, a Franco-African term, created in colonial times to designate the narrator, singer, chronicler and genealogist who, by oral tradition, transmits the history of important characters and families, of which, in general, is at service” (LOPES, 2014, p. 132).

We approximate the image of Benjamin’s “narrator” (1994) with the figure of the Griot, to reinforce the sense that the Griot is a narrator, a storyteller who transmits his experiences like those who sew time with their hands, or plant grapes to drink the wine of memory, or even like someone who talks about a ship voyage without the rush of information, but with the confidence that the richness and continuity of history are not in the facts, but in the sharing.

2.2 The Griot Master Dilermando Freitas

Dilermando Freitas is a 66-year-old black man from the city of Pelotas (RS). His trajectory is marked by the articulation between orality, musicality and Afro-Brazilian ancestry, having as axles the wheel, the drum and coexistence as spaces for the production of knowledge and memory collective.

He received the title of Master Griot, alongside Master Batista and Master Sirley Amaro, through the National Policy of Griot Masters and Public Policy of Masters of Popular Culture, which recognize and value the guardians of traditional knowledge in Brazil.

Over the last twenty years, he has built experiences with the Interdisciplinary Group of Research in Narrative, Art, Language and Subjectivity (GIPNALS) and the Education Program Frontiers Tutorial: Popular Knowledge and Practices (PET Fronteiras), proposing bridges between the university and the community. Recognized as a Master of Culture, Dilermando has dedicated himself to creating practices educational activities that express enchantment, the body and ancestry.

Dilermando, however, asks to be recognized by himself:

I incorporate Afrocentricity as the political and epistemological basis of my story. I write from the Black body that lived, learned, resisted, and resists. Afrocentricity offers me the tools to affirm that the knowledges of mironga—experienced in the body, in axé, in orality, in practices of care and enchantment—are also legitimate forms of knowing and educating. Through Afrocentricity, my place is that of a subject of a tradition that surpasses me. I am part of it. I was formed in the crosses, the points, the circles. Afrocentricity, for me, is not a distant theory: it is the right to think with my own people, by us, for us. It is the choice to write as a Black man who knows where he comes from—and who, now, on the path to becoming a Master of Education, refuses to renounce the knowledge that formed him (GRIÔ DILERMANDO,

FREITAS, 2025, p. 17).

And through the beating of the drum, it also tells a little of its history:

Before words came sound. Before any speech, rhythm. Music was, for me, my first language. As a musician and percussionist, I learned in the terreiro that sound is knowledge, that rhythm is memory. It was there that I understood the drum as a language: each beat is a speech, each beat summons meanings that cannot be contained in the grammar of written language. The drum speaks. The berimbau speaks. Music speaks—with strength and silence. The circularity of the terreiro, the Sopapo, the biriba, the tamborim that the miuçalha could play—all these were not just sounds, they were codes, signals, sensitive formations of an ancestral knowledge. Learning was and has been, above all, knowing how to listen, to tune in, to let the body follow the rhythm of what vibrates. And it was, among other things, thanks to this musical path, ingrained in my mother's womb, that I was able to reach college at the age of 52. The degree in Physical Education wasn't just a title: it was the formalization of a knowledge that had long permeated me—in samba school rehearsals, in terreiro circles, in the danced gestures of everyday life. Music as a language predates writing and the norm. It expresses what cannot be said, sustains what words cannot reach, rewrites stories where everything seemed ruined. It was in the silence broken by the berimbau that the Guri da Vila Carpena found his voice. It was in the samba circle, after the terreiro ceremony, that I understood: my Black way of being is made of sound, of body, of rhythm. My story didn't begin with words. It began with the beat. And in the pulse of the drum (GRIÔ DILERMANDO, FREITAS, 2025, p. 71).

Dilermando's narrative shows that knowledge is not born only from verbalized or written, but emerges primarily from everything that comes before the word, sound and rhythm, ancestral forms of communication that carry memories and deep senses. The drum, as a pulsating language, inaugurates a pedagogical space where body and spirit meet, where knowledge is woven between silence and speech, between the visible and the invisible. It is precisely from this sonorous and incarnate matrix that the “Pedagogy of Mironga” recognizes itself as a secret and an enchantment.

By valuing what cannot be fully expressed by words, the “Pedagogy of Mironga” is anchored in the principle that learning takes place in ritual encounters, in



bodily and affective experiences that mobilize the mystery and the invisible — what Dilermando so well portrays when talking about the berimbau, the sopapo, the samba circle and the pulse of the drum as original sources of their knowledge. This pedagogy reveals that to educate is to participate in a process of deep listening, of opening up to the secret that protects and strengthens, of a relationship live and circulate between master and apprentice, between past and present, between the sacred and the everyday.

3 THE PEDAGOGY OF MIRONGA BY DILERMANDO FREITAS

The “Pedagogy of Mironga” was born and articulated through the experience of the Master Griô Dilermando Freitas and is based on the strength of the ancestry of the word mironga, as a secret, foundation and enchantment. More than a method, it is a vision of education that understands knowledge as body, music and celebration.

In dialogue with Nego Bispo (2015), “Pedagogy of Mironga” is established as a practice of “confluences”: a place where the knowledge of a people meets and is recreated as science alive, inseparable from the community that produces them. Pedagogy, in this sense, does not seek to translate knowledge to fit into academic logic, but creates space for the university to dialogue with them, recognizing their own strength.

The proposal of the Pedagogy of Confluences, inspired by the teachings of Nego Bispo, understands education as a field in constant movement, marked by intersections, dialogues and encounters that circulate and transform knowledge. Instead of conceiving the knowledge as something fixed, this perspective values the transit of ideas, cultures and practices, recognizing that it is in the organic interweaving of experiences that it is constituted.

This pedagogy relies on the strength of hybridizations and the articulation of multiple voices, that weave a living network capable of breaking down boundaries between institutionalized knowledge and popular traditions, between local and global contexts, between memory and the present. The confluence thus becomes a territory of collective creation, in which differences are not canceled out, but rather strengthen each other, generating learning that welcomes and expands. As Nego reminds us Bishop, when two rivers meet, neither ceases to be what it is: both flow, mingled, yet retaining their essence. It is in this principle that the power of confluence resides.

Converging, through Walter Benjamin (1994), it is possible to understand that mironga is also an antidote to the “impoverishment of experience”: it reconnects the word to the lived, the narrative to the body, returning to education the time of listening, sharing and memory. Scoring with the Master:

The Pedagogy of Mironga is both secret and foundational. In it, all the knowledge evoked here—of liberation, of borders, of confluences, of crossroads, of slaps and gossip—meet like rivers flowing into a single sea of enchantment. Mironga is the secret learned with the body, with the silence that speaks, with the drum that teaches. It is the knowledge that cannot be explained, but shared. Its strength lies in what is transmitted through the knowledge of experience. It is the pedagogy that recognizes that there are knowledges that are built with bread, with prayer, with sung verses, with tears and laughter. Mironga is what is learned between one gesture and another, in the intervals between words, in the details of everyday life, in what is revealed and what is saved for the right moment. The radical nature of what I propose here is based on black, ancestral, popular and enchanted epistemologies, which recognize in the mironga strength and mystery, secret and charm, magic and dream, gesture of Guri and Preto Velho (GRIO DILERMANDO/FREITAS, 2025).

Finally, “Pedagogy of Mironga” is, above all, a call. A call to rethinking what it means to learn, what it means to teach, what it means to live. A call to recognize that there is knowledge that only flourishes in presence, in collectivity, in shared silence. As he teaches us Nego Bispo (2015), “it is not about integrating traditional knowledge into the university, but about reverse the logic: let traditional knowledge affect and transform the university from within.” Dilermando does this with beauty and firmness. His knowledge does not seek explanation; it seeks connection. And in this connection, mirongada and enchanted, it invites us to another way of being in world, by, with and through the secret.

Muniz Sodré, in *The Seduced Truth* (1983), understands the secret in Afro-Brazilian traditions. Brazilians not as arbitrary concealment, but as a technology for preserving life and knowledge. In the universe of orality, the secret structures its own pedagogy, in which the knowledge is not given immediately, but is permeated by rites, bodily experiences and contexts of initiation that legitimize it. For the author, preserving is a way of keeping it alive: when revealed outside its time and space, knowledge loses strength and meaning. The secret, thus, breaks with the Western logic of transparency and writing, creating a dynamic in which the unsaid is as powerful as the spoken word. At the same time, it constitutes an act of

political and cultural resistance, because by keeping certain dimensions inaccessible to rationality colonial, ensures Afro-Brazilian communities autonomy over their own ways of existence and transmission of knowledge.

Mironga Pedagogy, by inscribing secrecy and enchantment as foundations of knowledge, found resonance and support with the proposal of surrealist ethnography⁵ and the surrealization exercises⁶ developed through research, teaching and extension work of GIPNALS AND PET FRONTEIRAS. This meeting is marked by the displacements of look from reality to what pulses between the visible and the invisible, between the lived and the dreamed. Both perspectives reject the linearity and false transparency of knowledge, betting on a pedagogy that is built in the in-between place: between body and memory, between rite and creation, between word and silence. In this confluence, learning is not just an accumulation of information, but experience that transforms and is transformed; a practice that, at the same time time, keeps and reinvents, echoing what Muniz Sodré calls “technologies of secrecy” and the that Nego Bispo sees as the living force of confluence. Thus, surrealism and mironga touch each other in what both have most powerful: the ability to make worlds emerge from encounters, affections and enchantments.

Finally, in times of disenchantment, Dilermando's work, through his “Pedagogy da Mironga” becomes a dream come true through the big wheel, where university and community come together meet without hierarchies, to the sound of the drum, which marks the ground of knowledge as territory between enchantment and secret, shared. In this sense, Mironga not only resists: it re-enchants the gesture of knowing and feeds the secret of living – so necessary.

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5 This contribution is from James Clifford, by the author: "The term ethnography, as I am using it here, is evidently different from the empirical research technique of a human science that in France was called ethnology, in England social anthropology, and in America cultural anthropology. I am referring to a more general cultural predisposition that runs through modern anthropology and that this science shares with twentieth-century art and writing. The label ethnographic suggests a characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a cultural reality made strange. The Surrealists were intensely interested in exotic worlds, among which they included a certain Paris. Their attitude, though comparable to that of the fieldworker who tries to make the unfamiliar comprehensible, tended to work in reverse, making the familiar strange. The contrast is in fact generated by a continuous interplay between the familiar and the strange, of which ethnography and Surrealism were two elements" (CLIFFORD, 2002, p. 136-137).

6 “Surrealization” postulates another conception of reason that incorporates into thought the exercise of creative freedom, just as surrealism operates in the arts.



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