

“FORRÓ: The Constitution of a Genre in Performance”.(1)

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Abstract: This article is about Forró dance music, a Brazilian popular genre. It discusses the definition of what is Forró on the light of the concept of genre. Taking into account its performance in the past and nowadays the article provides an analysis of musical genre in performance, and its relation to the audience, “the social environment” as the author calls it. The goal is to show Forró as an expression of subjectivities, as a tool to construct realities, to different groups of people in different time span and even inside the same time span.

Keywords: Forró – Music genre – Communication

This article was inspired by an ongoing controversy about the Forró music being performed, played and displayed around Brazil right now. The question is whether the groups that call themselves Forró bands are actually playing Forró music. It is thus a question about the definition of Forró. To answer it I am taking as an organizing principle the concept of *genre*, as Wellek and Warren define it for “modern times” (qtd by Camargo 5). Through an organizing tool that takes into account music’s constitutive elements—its sounds, its ways of performance and production—I hope to demonstrate that music, to be an expression of subjectivities, has to be elaborated in an interactive social environment. It must grow from there. It is possible for someone or something to reverse the process, that is, to impose a ready-made music creation, but such an imposition will have certain consequences. This is what we have today: a very complex frame with many “social environments” — those that were created by the cultural industry, which coexist with those based in social interaction. And to add a final touch to this difficult picture: the “frontiers” between these environments are very permeable. But let us proceed one step at a time, starting with an explanation of what Forró is .

I define *Forró* as a Brazilian dancing occasion accompanied by the live performance of a particular set of musical subgenres such as *baião*, *xote*, *arrasta-pé*, and *forró*.(2) Note that the genre or umbrella term “Forró” is also the name of a specific subgenre within the class. It began in the Northeastern hinterlands around the 19th century, but it spread out all over the country with the intense migration of people from the Northeast to the Southern states starting in the 1930s, and because it was taken up by the mass media at the end of the 1940s. Typically, Forró dance is heterosexual couple dancing; the accompanying music may be instrumental or sung. Instrumentation, style and lyrics (when present), are evocative in some way of the Northeast region and culture. Participants and consumers of Forró are for the most part of the lower, working class (though all classes participate), and the majority comes from the Northeast region, or descends from Northeasterners. Today, Forró music and dance occurs in Northeastern rural or urban areas, as well as among migrant populations in Southern cities. In the cities, Forró usually is found in working class neighborhoods; these festive occasions can be held in private backyards, or in Forró houses, usually as commercial ventures in rented spaces. In the latter case, like a

nightclub it is open to anyone who can pay the price of entrance. During my fieldwork in 2000, my informants described the social context of a Forró event as like an extended family party, where proper, respectful behavior is appreciated and valued. Nevertheless, as it spread via migration and the mass media, Forró has also been adopted by Southern urban middle classes in a variety of contexts, not always related to migrants.

About Genres and Styles

The discussion of genres in music is as painful as it is in literature (where it originated) because it involves categorizing and classification, which tends to be limited and isolating. Wellek and Warren (qtd by Camargo 4-5) assert that the modern theory of the genres, is descriptive, pragmatic, and allows mixtures and new species, and uses genre as an organizing principle. With some reservations to adapt the concept from literature to music, I can say that even nowadays, with sound recordings and written scores, handy means of retaining and registering sounds, studies about music genres still have to rely on repertory memory and definitely bear in mind the fluidity and permeability of genre's frontiers, mainly when considering that our object of investigation is quite "fluid" as sounds are.

The concept of genre that I have in mind here is influenced by Bakhtin (*Estética da Criação Verbal.*), who links genre with social interaction, and Todorov (*Os Gêneros do Discurso*), who points to the communication system organized by genres. They are "instruments that allow to know the communication constructions" as Irene Machado puts it ("Por que se ocupar dos Gêneros?" 6). Therefore, when treating Forró as a genre, I am saying that there is a communication system and I am trying to find out how it is organized, and how it was built as a dance music expression. If Forró is communication, I am saying this in the same sense as Steven Feld, who in my opinion synthesizes Bakhtin and Todorov's concepts in the realm of music:

"a socially interactive and subjective process of reality construction through message making and interpretation. Communication is a dialectical process. The dialectic between musical structure and extramusical history is central to the study of human musicality in evolutionary, cross-cultural, and symbolic perspective. A communications epistemology addresses this dialectic not by choosing sides but by focusing on its consequences." (Keil and Feld 94)

Extending this approach, I follow the interactive process of making and interpreting Forró as closely as I can (in the space allowed) in order to understand its formation as a genre. I am interested in the "reality construction" accomplished by music, and its consequences.

Forró emerged as a genre slowly throughout the years, starting probably in the mid-19th century, as a pastime at the end of a hard workday. I know from my informants that the music at that time was instrumental music. It is possible that the dance began together with this music, but we do not know for sure. All that I could get from fieldwork is that the "traditional" way of dancing to Forró is the "easiest" way, which means, just following the flow of the music. The instruments played could be *pifanos* (cane fife), or *rabecas* (folk violins) or *oito baixos* (button accordions with eight bass buttons). At the end of the 1940s this music was taken to the mass media by the Northeastern singer, composer and accordionist Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1989) who added lyrics to it, replaced the button accordion with piano accordion and created a trio to play his music, formed by triangle, *zabumba* drum (double-headed bass drum) and piano accordion.

Gonzaga popularized this type of dance music not only in Brazil but also internationally. A good example comes from Lieber and Stoller, respectively lyricist and composer of Rhythm & Blues of the 1950-60s who produced The Drifters, The Coasters, and others. In an interview (Fox), they described how, after seeing an Italian movie where Silvana Mangano sang a *baião*, they and others used this Brazilian beat extensively in rock and roll and soul records.(3)

Another key reference in the history of Forró is Jackson do Pandeiro (1919-1982). He is associated with the creation of the subgenre forró, to which he brought his background in coco (a call-and-response dance music expression of the Northeast), which is accompanied by pandeiro (a large tambourine with jingles). After migrating from the Northeast to Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s, Jackson do Pandeiro immersed himself in the samba culture of Rio de Janeiro and learned carioca samba, mixing its swing and rhythmic patterns into the overall structure of Forró. To create the subgenre forró, Jackson do Pandeiro increased the tempo, added percussion instruments, and gave more swing to the Forró sound structure, consistent with his point of view and musical experience.(4)

It is easy to deduce that the styles of Luiz Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro are quite different. By style I am addressing their mode of interpretation, how they impart a personal stamp to the whole. Style would be a microstructure and personal take, “engraved and ingrained in cultures” as Feld says (Keil and Feld 111). Gonzaga’s style sounds old to our ears today. His voice is strong, loud, articulated and prominent like an opera or circus singer. The accompaniment has a secondary role and it is there to support Gonzaga’s performance. If I had to rank their importance, Gonzaga’s voice would come first, his accordion would come second, and then zabumba and triangle would come in third place.

Jackson do Pandeiro’s style is based on fragments (as we hear it nowadays). His voice is very articulated because words are used in their rhythmic potential. As a consequence, his voice combines with the accompaniment, which is richly percussive. Hence in his style I cannot trace a hierarchy of sounds, as all are densely intertwined in the whole.(5)

These two styles are the basis for the development of Forró music throughout the years in the mass media. Every time that there is a “need” to recall the origins of Forró, their names and styles are brought back and held up as the “ideal” Forró music. Thus the “real” origin of Forró music was forgotten, even though people continued to throw parties in their backyards and dance to *baião*, *xote*, and *arrasta-pé*, played by live musicians. But public discourse was dominated by the mass mediated Forró music of Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro which, to some extent, was a creation of the cultural industry.

Forró and its meanings

The origins and meaning of the term “Forró” are unclear. Neither my informants nor scholars are consistent in their use of the word. The flexibility of popular culture, where the term “Forró” originated and is used, should be borne in mind.

Initially, when doing my fieldwork, many of my informants cited Luís da Câmara Cascudo, a Brazilian folklorist, to the effect that Forró is short for “Forrobodó.” What I found in his Dictionary of Brazilian Folklore (*Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro*) was a link between the entry Forró and Forrobodó, both of which can mean “entertainment” or “party.” It is possible that Forró and Forrobodó once had the same meaning, but in any case this equation is now taken for granted, because of the wide dissemination of Cascudo’s information. I was also often told that

the word came from English “for all” (which sounds similar to Portuguese ears) – referring to parties thrown for the workers of the Great Western Railroad Company in the last quarter of the 19th century in Pernambuco state. In my opinion this information lacks credibility, since by that period the words *forró* or *forrobodó* would have already been in use.

Among lower class people living in the rural areas of the Brazilian Northeast, where the term originated, *Forró* (like *samba* and *choro*) designates a dance party in someone’s house. Usually they call the party by the name of the owner of the house or host, or by the site where it is taking place: for example, “*Forró de Mané Vito*” (Mané Vito’s *Forró*), or “*Forró em Limoeiro*” (*Forró* at Limoeiro). In a small rural community where everybody knows each other, *Forró* is a bonding occasion in a familiar place such as someone’s home, where music, dance, food and drink are offered and enjoyed. One of my informants told me that *Forró* could be held for specific occasions, such as communal activities like house building (using clay and sticks) where the whole community helps. At the close of the construction, it is necessary to make the dirt floor inside the new house very compact; they throw a dance party at night and, as everybody dances, they pound the soil and finish the work.

When talking about *Forró* in Brazil, one name continually comes up in conversation: Luiz Gonzaga, the artist responsible for bringing Northeastern dance music into the mainstream of Brazilian popular culture. In an interview for the newspaper *Jornal da Tarde* in 1980 Gonzaga said that:

"*Forró é dança de ponta de rua, de cabaré, de cachaça, de fole de oito baixos. Era bom. Mas hoje não frequento mais, porque sou cantor de juízo, e Forró é pra cabra mais novo.*" (*Vozes do Brasil*)

Forró is street-corner dancing, cabaret dancing, with alcoholic drinks, and button accordion. It was good. But today I do not go anymore, because I am a mature singer, and *Forró* is for a young man (my translation)

Gonzaga uses the adjective “*juízo*” to describe himself, which means having the ability to make balanced judgments, and it seems that young people, in his opinion, lack this wisdom, and so continue to patronize *Forró*. His comments about *Forró* suggest a derogatory view of it as a somewhat vulgar event (these are the connotations of the words *ponta de rua* and *cabaré* in Portuguese) where participants are mostly looking for a good time, easy sex (*cabaré* is a place for sexual encounters) and not necessarily great music or dancing. For Gonzaga, the participants of a *Forró* are too young, and go there primarily to dance, drink and have sex. For him, as a mature man in 1980, this time was over, although he confessed that he went to *Forrós* when he was younger. Therefore, Gonzaga’s view of *Forró* is in accordance with the definitions provided by Cascudo; *forró* is a popular event, and he adds, a risky place because people there would not be capable of good judgment since they are young, and often drunk. It is worth noting Gonzaga’s specificity about the instrument played in a *Forró*: button accordion, which was his father’s instrument in the Northeastern hinterland. Also, note that in the 1980s Gonzaga was pointing to the existence of *Forró* in places for sexual encounters such as a *cabaré*. This is very important to keep in mind because of later developments of the genre. The association of *Forró* with sex was established at least by Gonzaga’s father’s time (the beginning of the 20th century).

In my investigation of the meaning of the term “*Forró*,” I interviewed Ari Batera (Aristóteles de Almeida Silva), the son of Pedro Sertanejo—a leading *Forró* authority in São Paulo. *Forró* do

Pedro Sertanejo (Pedro Sertanejo's Forró) was the first and longest surviving Forró house in São Paulo. It opened in 1965 and lasted until 1992, on Catumbi street, in the Belenzinho neighborhood (it was also known as Catumbi's Forró, Catumbi being a working class neighborhood). Because of its long life, it passed through many phases following mainstream vogues.

For Ari Batera the definition of Forró is threefold: 1) it is a specific "rhythm"; 2) it is a musical 'genre'; 3) it is a business. Dance is the common denominator. Forró involves dance, most commonly couple dancing, although there are exceptions. The "rhythm" is the fuel for the dance, and is included in a variety of musical "genres" (*forró, xote, baião, coco, xaxado, and arrasta-pé*), depending on the times and fashions. Dances in which these Northeastern "rhythms" are prominent are designated as the "genre"- Forró - by Ari Batera (here a "layman" definition of genre: he defines that the 'genre' is "*aquilo que dá vertente*"—something that allows subdivisions). When this Forró settled in the city, within the context of a nightclub (admission charges, the selling of food and drinks, hired musicians,) it turned into a business—the Forró house (Fernandes, Personal Interview).

Ari Batera's definition addresses the dynamic involved in the word, diachronically and synchronically. Diachronically it tracks the formation of Forró as a musical 'genre' adapting itself to the big city environment. In the Northeast there were no Forró houses (in the sense of nightclubs). They begin to exist there after their "invention" among migrant communities in the South. Synchronically, it shows how the three aspects—"rhythm", genre and business—go hand in hand.

According to Dominique Dreyfus, the main biographer of Gonzaga, Forró is an abbreviation of "forrobodó"; according to her, the word originally designated a dance party, but at the end of the 1970s came to mean a rhythm played during a Forró party, influenced by disco and funk vogues. For Dreyfus, Forró represented another choice of dance among urban people, and Gonzaga became a pioneer of the style when he composed "Forró de Mané Vito" in 1949, describing a Forró context. She calls the 1980s the "Forró years" (Dreyfus 274-77). Another researcher, Elba Braga Ramalho, analyzes Luiz Gonzaga's career and music. She says about Forró:

"...Gonzaga also created for his audience's mind, songs which are sketches of Forrós in the *sertão*, mainly some of those over-lively events which ended in the intervention of the police because of the excess of cachaça drinking, and the introduction of certain forbidden dance genres. (Ramalho 119)

After this, Ramalho quotes and translates "Forró de Mané Vito," as an example of a Forró that ended (probably) because of excessive drinking, and *Forró do Quelemente* (by Luiz Gonzaga and Zédantas, 1951) as an example of "forbidden" dances in the "family parties" (Ramalho 120). Ramalho also calls attention to the region where Forrós take place: the *sertão*, the semi-arid area in the hinterland.

This location is relevant, because people in the Northeastern *sertão* commonly carry weapons (mainly knives). So, if they are the main participants in a Forró situation, where dance and drink are combined, their weapons bring a threat of violence to a Forró context. This "dramatic" aspect, when comically described in lyrics, contributes greatly to the popular stereotypes of the event (Forró as a violent place), which are exploited and fed by the mass media. However, among Northeasterners, the insiders, a very strong characteristic of Forró is the link with the family unit,

with its morals and ethic of self-control. In all my fieldwork and interviews it was clear that the existence and endurance of Forró was bound up with strong extended family ties, and that “family” can be understood as a migrant community from the same region, the Northeast, or a group of people with the same goal: to dance and have fun. Although my informants emphasize the family context of the Forró party, once in a while I heard of “transgressions” – whether in a family party as described by Ramalho above, or in a “non-family” environment, such as a *cabaré*, as Gonzaga told us earlier. I think that this shows an openness in the process, a reminder of the permeability of the popular realm. Nevertheless, the discourse of the insiders is focused in re-asserting the family ties as it used to be, in a rural and distant version of a Forró event. Maybe this is a protective and even preventive way of describing Forró to themselves and to others, as a reminder of its origins and roots that should be valued.

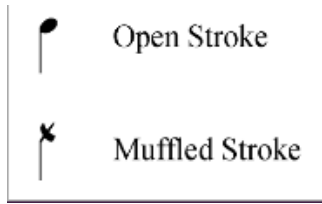
When I asked my younger informants about the contemporary meaning of the term “Forró,” many of them told me that it is simply a dance party, where any genre of music is welcome. I should say that this openness and flexibility is itself part of Forró’s identity. Thus, a basic, generic definition of Forró today would describe an informal dance party, with live music featuring an accordion (or the sound of an accordion provided by a keyboard), where the musicians play mainly subgenres known in and associated with the Northeast, such as *xote*, *arrasta-pé*, *baião*, and *forró*, as accompaniment for dancing.

The subgenres

Rhythm cannot be the only reference to define Forró music because they are very close to each other and it is easy to cross boundaries, making Forró subgenres flexible and fluid. Hence, the key when classifying this music is the overall sound complex. This is the reason that there is not “the rhythm” for *baião*, for example, but a system showing a rhythmic complex. For clarity, I will discuss each of the main Forró subgenres separately; however, they are so close to each other in their particulars that when the word Forró is mentioned it should effectively evoke all these subgenres together.

Among these individual subgenres falling under the general Forró rubric, there are common elements. Most are in 2/4 meter, and they employ forms comprised of alternating refrains and verses. There is, likewise, typically an alternation between sung and instrumental sections. Instrumentation is based on the trio of *zabumba*, accordion and triangle (or at least having this trio as a basic reference). It is usually tonal music, but the use of church modes is a commonly recurring characteristic. Most Forró songs begin with a textual anacrusis set to a musical upbeat, or simply with a musical upbeat if it begins with an instrumental solo. The main chord sequences used are V-I, IV-V-I, sometimes with the minor seventh added to the dominant triad; ii-V-I progressions can also be found. Chords built on the third and sixth scale degrees appear sporadically, as well as interchange between major and minor modes (I-i, IV-iv). Lyrics tend to express Northeasterners’ worldview—their memories, observations, their habitus (to use Bourdieu’s term). There is always room for virtuosic improvised passages, depending on the skill of the performers. Forró performance typically has an informal aura; the musicians talk to friends among the dancers and audience from the stage, invite other musicians that are not officially performing to join them, and tell picturesque/funny stories over instrumental accompaniments.

In the rhythmic transcriptions below, there is a coded pattern notating the different types of attacks on percussion instruments; it is to be read as follows:



Baião

Baião music is in 2/4 meter with a distinguishing rhythmic pattern played by the rhythm section, as seen below. The tempo of the baião was typically somewhat slower in the 1950s, ranging between 75 and 130 beats per minute, with an average speed of 90 beats per minute. It got faster throughout the years. Melodies tend to be sung with longer held notes, which does not bring rhythmic contrast between vocal line and the accompaniment,(6) in contrast to other genres. Baião melodies move smoothly through arpeggios and stepwise motion, they do not require demanding vocal technique, and are easily memorized. In general, lyrics tend to describe very specific elements found in the Northeast, such as a tree, a road, a dialect, and the way they see things like love and sex. Gonzaga was the main interpreter and composer of baião music, which is the most recorded subgenre in his discography. Nowadays, it is rare to have new baião compositions. Below, a sample of the rhythmic complex of Baião as found in Juazeiro (1949). Attention to the inter-rhythm /inter-texture played by the ensemble that gives the whole swing.

Xote

Xote is in 2/4 meter, with a distinguishing rhythmic pattern played in the rhythm section, as notated below. Xote is the slowest of all Forró subgenres, with tempos around 70 bpm. It can be played faster nowadays, but not faster than 78-80 bpm. As in baião, there is a tendency to alternate vocal and instrumental sections, solo and choir. Xotes tend to have rests (stops) that can last from one to three beats in length. These interruptions are more likely to happen in a xote than in any other subgenre under the Forró umbrella. The melody tends to be sung in arpeggios and repeated notes, and interpreted in a smooth fashion. Most of its lyrics talk about love and love-related themes, in the way that Northeasterners see and feel it, which means that the metaphors

and images recalled are strongly associated with their environment and lifestyle. The rhythmic complex used in a recording of “Cintura Fina” (1950) is below.

The image displays a musical score for the recording "Cintura Fina" (1950). It consists of four staves: Agogô, Triangle (variation), Zabumba, and Zabumba (variation). The score is divided into four measures, each labeled with a variation: Variation 1, Variation 3, Variation 3, and Variation 3. The Agogô staff shows a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Triangle staff shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them. The Zabumba staff shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them. The Zabumba (variation) staff shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them.

Arrasta-pé (or *marcha junina*, or *marchinha junina* [June march])

Arrasta-pé (literally “foot-dragging”) seems to be the oldest subgenre of Forró music. It is associated with the festivals of June, when three Catholic saints have their feast days. In all likelihood, it was mainly an instrumental piece in the past, although it became a vocal genre after Gonzaga. It is associated with harvesting, and with the rainy season in the Northeast. The dance suggests the influence of the French *pas-des-quatre* or quadrille dance. Arrasta-pés usually are in 4/4 (the only Forró subgenre in this meter) and faster tempos (around 112-158 bpm). Unlike some other Forró subgenres, the typical tempo of arrasta-pés did not change over the years. The characteristic rhythm notated below is basically a type of march. There is here, more than in the other genres, an emphasized alternation of vocal solo and choir parts, resembling the quadrille dance, with its two lines of dancers who perform some steps separated, by themselves, and others together, embraced or hand in hand, as in antiphonal singing. Instrumental interludes, usually with accordion solos, are a necessary section in arrasta-pé, probably a holdover from its instrumental origins and an influence of Luiz Gonzaga’s main instrument. Melody tends to be sung smoothly, with a nostalgic air for Brazilians who participated in Saint John’s parties in their youth. Lyrics address a variety of topics associated with Northeastern contexts; many of them tend to describe a Saint John’s party, or a Saint John’s night, which contributes to the nostalgic feelings that it may provoke. Instrumentation is based on the standard trio, with guitars added. This genre is a favorite of accordion players, since it allows virtuosic displays although it is more popular among musicians in live performances than in the mass media. The rhythmic complex below is found in São João na Roça (1952).

Triangle

Zabumba

Forró

The specific subgenre forró, which shares its name with the broader umbrella term, is in 2/4 meter, and tends toward faster tempos (around 100 bpm or faster); the average tempos of forró pieces have gradually increased over the years. The influence of Jackson do Pandeiro on the genre is evident in that there are several layers of different rhythms, played by different instruments. There is a lot of swing in the forró, and rhythmic contrasts between timbre layers. There is a loose alternation among solo and choir, and vocal and instrumental sections. Lyrics usually refer to a Forró dance situation, interpolating strophes that are sung with others that are rendered in a speech-like declamation. Instrumentation varies, but when Luiz Gonzaga interprets forró he uses accordion. When Jackson do Pandeiro performs it, accordion can be used along with other instruments, and there are typically more percussion instruments in his recordings. During my fieldwork, I observed that forró was as popular as xote, which together comprised the two main genres played during a Forró night. Below is the rhythmic complex as found in “Mané Gardino” (1959), a forró interpreted by Jackson do Pandeiro.

Ganzá

Pandeiro

Triangle

Zabumba

Performance

Studies of music as performance are beginning to expand their horizons beyond issues of interpretation (Madrid). I would like to call attention to two works in particular. The older one is Anthony Seeger’s article in Portuguese called “Por que os Índios Suyá Cantam para suas Irmãs?”-1977 (Why Suyá Sing to their Sisters) based on a manuscript that was later published by Norma McLeod and Marcia Herdon (editors) called "Sing for your Sister: The Structure and Performance of Suyá Akia". The more recent work is a book by Carlos Calado called *O Jazz como Espetáculo*

1990, *(Jazz as Spectacle)*). Both were published in Portuguese, and both address the issue of music performance by taking into consideration the “actors” who produce the music and the intended reactions those “actors” want to elicit from their audience. In my view, these are two seminal works in Brazilian music studies. By asking “what happens when music happens” (Madrid), they contribute to an approach to performance as a dramatic, engaged event, where what happens on stage (or among those who present the performance) and in the public (or those to whom the performance is presented) and between them is taken into consideration in a dialogic, self-reinforcing dynamics. From this point of view, it is during performance that communication takes place, and Forró functions as a tool in an organized system, as a genre.

In their performances, Luiz Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro maintain distinctly different behavior as musicians, towards their companions on stage, and toward their public. Gonzaga stands with his accordion in front of the band, usually dressed in Northeastern cowboy outfits such as a leather hat and jacket. He positions himself in front of the microphone and sings loudly to the audience while playing his accordion. The other musicians are positioned some distance behind him. He assumes the soloist role and the other musicians are there to accompany him, in a secondary role. His voice is quite potent and he explores its resonance usually prolonging the endings of musical phrases. The interludes are filled with his accordion solos. His movements on stage are subtle, because the accordion is heavy, making it difficult to dance, and the microphones are usually fixed in place. Therefore, his performance is centered in his figure as a musician – a singer and an accordion player. Even when sometimes he tells stories, usually accompanied by few sounds on the accordion, he is still relying on his vocal abilities and his presence on stage. His interaction with his public is through the microphone. He sings, he smiles, he says something funny about someone in the audience, or comments about his musicians, but the microphone is fixed and he is behind it.

The audience interacts with his music by staring at the stage, or, most commonly, by dancing to it (in couples or alone), applauding, laughing at his jokes, whistling, screaming, shouting words, asking for particular songs, or drinking.

In the case of Jackson do Pandeiro, his behavior on stage is a little different. He presents himself in the midst of the other musicians, usually dressed in a long sleeve shirt and pants, and a small hat. His main instrument is the pandeiro, which is a very versatile percussion instrument, easy to carry, but not played all the time. His voice is inside a small range and its main characteristic is the articulation that is very careful in relation to the consonants. Jackson do Pandeiro uses his voice as a rhythmic instrument that combines with the others of the ensemble. When on stage, Jackson do Pandeiro moves a lot, taking the microphone with him. He interacts with his musicians and with the public. In the beginning of his career, he had a partner, Almira Castilho, and they used to have comic sketches over music pieces. This experience probably led him to be very free with his body and hands when on stage, and he usually dances, moves and gesticulates while singing in a very expressive way. He also talks with his audience, gets closer to them, tells jokes.

His audience tends to watch him more than Gonzaga, since there is visual action going on beside the sound, but also they dance, applaud, whistle, laugh, scream, shout, and participate almost in the same way as in Gonzaga’s performance.

A final attempt

In relation to this paper and what I want to show with it, I would say that Forró is organized musically over the rhythmic feel of a dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note that has to be learned in practice, through experience (dancing, playing, listening, watching how it is done). This would be the marrow common to the subgenres, which, of course, is not enough to constitute a “living organism.” This rhythmic feel has to be intertwined with the instruments and the voice or the soloist creating other cells as a compound. The instruments playing Forró music can range from a melodic solo to a group of instruments that combine melody with percussion. When present, the voice sings about reality, how it looks and feels. An aura of informality is sought in performance, as if everybody knows each other.

Taking Forró as communication in Feld’s terms (as I explained before), in my opinion, the reality that Forró constructed in the time of Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro was related to work and migration. It seems to me that work was the foundation of the very existence of Forró music, as is suggested by the origins of the word “Forró.” When Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro took Forró to the recording companies, radios, and movies, they added a migration factor—a factor that was work-related, since migration in itself was prompted by the desire for a better life, a better job. As they were migrants themselves at a time when migration from the Northeast to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo was all the rage, the experience of migration was something common to Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro and their numerous fellows. Their music was the expression of that reality, which was their own. When they performed, their audience recognized themselves, their histories, and their memories. The intended reaction was this empathy, this catharsis—a bonding made possible by the establishment of communication.

For the audience of today, which was not part of that context, listening to Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro evokes “the past”, our parents’ past, our country’s past. Reactions to it are as varied as they are with other music genres and other styles of Forró music.

Nowadays there are many different styles of Forró groups performing and different ways of interaction. In general the groups are bigger, with more instruments. New instruments were added, such as electric guitars, basses, saxophones, keyboards and electronic drums. The use of preset rhythms became common. The groups also advertise themselves in the middle of the performances as part of the songs. Lyrics tend to have sexual themes, and are filled with double entendres. More attention is paid to visual presentation and the groups tend to wear matching outfits. The dance is also emphasized and it is common to have dancers performing choreographed movements for the songs.

Their dance is unlike that usually practiced on the dance floor, which itself changed, incorporating steps from other types of dance. However, as much as in the times of Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro, people still go to Forró and some stare at the band, and others dance, have fun, enjoy it in a more engaged mood. Because of the more visual impact that the bands have today, it is more common to have people who go to the shows to actually see the band, and get as close as they can to the stage.(7)

Many things have changed since the 1950s affecting the communication process, mainly due to the cultural industry, which is responsible for the long-lasting life of Forró in the mass media. However, for the industry, the product, Forró, had to be “modernized,” “refreshed,” for the new generation. New brands and labels emerged. A new way of dancing to it emerged, as well as a new way of singing and presenting it. The reality expressed by the Forró groups today is plural. There are many realities, almost as many as the number of groups or individuals practicing Forró. This excessive number of groups and styles jeopardizes social interaction insofar as it dissolves

Forró's shared reality, leaving a multiplicity of realities. Even when it is a matter of listening to Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro today, we must ask who is doing the listening? Of course, as we have seen, Forró has been practiced in many contexts throughout its trajectory, hence its reality has always been plural. But I need to add that it was engrained in people's lives; its time-scale was the scale of those lives. By contrast, the reality created by the cultural industry is artificial, momentary; it lasts for the length of a concert, the total time of a CD. It lacks human sustainability.

Returning to my definition of genre as a communication tool within a communication system, it seems to me that we are living in a period of message disintegration. The message here is the performance itself. Messages are being sent but there is not enough social interaction among the recipients to allow them to construct realities with these messages. The communication is defective and threatens to fall apart. However, this is a giant process and it cannot take place without provoking reactions. The communication is defective but still works with groups of people who are more exposed to mass media. This is clear when we consider the artificial and generalized context created by the cultural industry, the market, the media. If I consider the contexts where these performances are part of people's lives, exactly as Forró was originally created - as a "social need," as a consequence of social interaction and bonding, communication still takes place, and Forró is a genre, *quod erat demonstrandum*. The data also show that a musical expression as a communication tool has roots and is anchored when it is created starting from a social interaction that then feeds back on its creation. The cultural industry inverts this process and presents a musical item, hoping a social interaction will happen. But that musical item is not a musical expression of those people to whom it is being presented, because they did not share the process of making it. Therefore, analyzing Forró as a genre emphasizes its social nature, its origin in social interaction, and reminds us that this interaction is important for its survival. It also makes clear how the cultural industry works, and shows the lack of sustenance for many of its creations, because it is not based in the communication processes of social interaction but in other bases. Analyzing Forró under the concept of genre gives us a new perception of its development and a new understanding of its facades nowadays.

NOTES:

- 1) Parts of this article draw on material from my PhD dissertation (Fernandes). I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Marc Perlman, a colleague and a friend, who gently reviewed my writing in this article.
- 2) For clarity, when I refer to the genre I capitalize the first letter (Forró) in order to distinguish it from the subgenre, forró.
- 3) To get an idea of Gonzaga's performance, see the site:
http://www.luizluagonzaga.mus.br/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=43
- 4) There are some videos of Jackson do Pandeiro on youtube. You can see his performance of "Forró em Limoeiro" at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzRkTV8axno&feature=fvwrel>
- 5) For more information on Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro's vocal characteristics, see Laranjeira, *A Identidade Vocal de Luiz Gonzaga e Jackson do Pandeiro*.

6) Depending on the words used and the phonetics of the language, songs with lyrics can add more layers of rhythm and melody to a given piece because of the intrinsic percussive characteristic of consonants and melodic characteristic of vowels.

7) To get an idea of these new styles, watch for example the group called Calcinha Preta at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA2-q4W8jGg> and the band called Rastapé at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0dp3rrO-TE>

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