

Authorship and co-authorship (*parceria*) in *samba*: creative articulations and social boundaries

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Abstract

Since the birth of the Brazilian music recording and broadcast industry, the production of popular music has involved a contradictory and ambiguous process of articulation AND cleavage between "high" and "low" culture. Collaborative creative processes and co-authorship – *parceria*, partnership, in Portuguese – constituted, especially in *samba* circles, a space of intense aesthetic and economic negotiation involving composers from different social levels and offering asymmetrical opportunities of financial reward and public recognition. These issues are discussed by focusing on the so-called "golden era" of *samba*, 1928-1945, with additional remarks on the period that started with the *bossa nova*, from the 1960's onwards.

Keywords: authorship; co-authorship; composition of popular music; popular music and society; Brazilian popular music.

Introduction

Samba is one of the oldest and best known genres of Brazilian popular music. Approaching its first centenary (if we accept the current notion that establishes its official birth in the year of 1917, with the recording of "Pelo telefone"), the genre spread its lineage in many different subgenres along its history. In order to embrace this diversity, one should actually talk of a "generic complex" rather than of a single "genre". The *bossa-nova* idiom¹ itself, which has become somehow a kind of international musical language, was elaborated within the *samba* field and with that rhythm as its base. All in all, *samba* is often considered to be the most widespread and representative icon of Brazilian musical culture, ever since the 1930s, when it took on what is generally recognized as its modern and most characteristic form².

Among the mythical and ideological discourses traversing the history of *samba*, many refer to what is presumed to be an authentically popular and ethnic nature, based upon its proletarian and Afro-descendant origins. Others frequently refer to its legitimacy and to its ability to represent the Brazilian musical culture and soul. There is no doubt that the rhythmic foundation of *samba* is basically Afro-Brazilian in origin and has been generated inside an essentially oral culture. However, for some decades a consensus has emerged that its artistic and historical construction has been brought about by a process of contact, approximation, transit and negotiation among people belonging to various ethnic,

economic, social and cultural spheres. One of the main references of this idea is Hermano Vianna's book *The mystery of samba* (1995), which claims that this kind of negotiation pervades Brazilian culture as a whole and has in popular music and poetry served as a touchstone.

On the other hand, with regard to *samba* and other cultural expressions, the conditions for association of agents and languages arising from different social fields are affected and/or determined by the huge, ancient and persistent imbalance of income and power distribution in Brazilian society. The production of symbolic goods, notably in the field of popular music, reveals a process, often contradictory and ambiguous, of articulation **and** cleavage between so-called high and low cultures.

One could assume that, besides social and historical reasons for their ability to connect different agents in a joint creative action, music and poetry, when they come together in the human voice, perform a kind of art that is intrinsically shaped by associative devices. *Samba* is not only a rhythmic and musical style; it is also a kind of poetry, an art of song. One of the peculiar features of every art of song, every work of the sung word, is to take its form from an amalgam of at least three different semiotic dimensions: music, words and voice, deeply brought together in synchronisation and interaction. One of the consequences of this multifaceted structure is that the creation of a song is an action able to be shared by two or more agents. Novels or paintings are seldom made by more than a single artist and their authorship is rarely shared. However, most songs, most human creations to be sung, are made by two or more agents.

This association of two or more authors and/or composers in the creation of a song is nominated *parceria* in Brazilian Portuguese. Dictionaries normally translate this word as 'partnership', 'association' or 'collaboration', but in Brazil it has a different and particular signification³ that does not find a correspondence in other languages, and is deeply linked with popular music history and aesthetics. The song writing partnership has been present in the whole history of the sung word. I will talk about the song writing partnership in the context of *samba*, focusing on a special moment: the so-called "golden era" of Brazilian popular music, from 1928 to 1945, the period when this genre was shaped and expanded. Afterwards, I will add some remarks about the composition of *samba* by partnership in the period that starts with *bossa-nova*, from the 1960s onward.

The relevance of partnership in the history of *samba*, both as a creative procedure and as a commercial set-up, is due to two factors: on the one hand, its fundamental link to an oral tradition of poetry-and-music as practiced in predominantly Afro-Brazilian, economically deprived communities; and, on the other, the occurrence of its social and aesthetic elaboration linked to the development of phonographic and radio media, a process that started in the 1920s and had great implementation in the 1930s. It is then that the term *parceria* became widespread, pointing to the sharing of musical functions and author rights as an active and powerful element in the creation and diffusion of *samba* and other popular musical genres.

Before the heavy mediation of popular music, the notion of *parceria* made little sense, since the very idea of authorship was at that time ephemeral or irrelevant. In oral-aural music and poetry, the creation and survival of verbo-musical art is intrinsically linked to its reception and retransmission by a community audience, which therefore becomes a potential partner, constantly re-elaborating and creating new variants for the work in question. Even if particularly gifted individuals are acknowledged in the creation of poetical-musical works, their names are rapidly forgotten, although their melodies and lyrics continue to be sung and re-worked.

Most forms of the sung word cultivated by the oral tradition work with repetitions, variations and additions, which are often improvised at the moment of transmission. In the complex and multifaceted origins of *samba*, one can detect various lineages of song and dance, but the main element comes from the *danças-de-rodas* (circle dances) of the slaves, the so-called *batuques* (drum music), in which the singing part consists of refrains

sung by the chorus which alternate with solo stanzas, these being often improvised at the performance, by one or more singers. This system, very common in traditional music, bequeathed to our popular artists a veritable fountain of poetic and musical motifs and formulas, a rich legacy that nourished the first “authors” of *samba* and is still open to contemporary *partideiros*.⁴

The transition from the notion of community music to the notion that music has an owner came about little by little and sometimes rather contentiously. During the 1920s and 1930s there did not yet exist an ideology of ethics or an ideology of authorship such as had evolved throughout the centuries with regard to written culture. An example of the prevailing attitude is a famous saying by Sinhô⁵ during the 1920s: “*Sambas* are like live birds; they belong to whoever catches them.”

Parceria in the 1920's

The 1920s witness the development of music composed specifically for Carnival, which became, increasingly, a **singing** festivity. The *marchinha* was undoubtedly the prevailing genre for these occasions, but, alongside it, *samba* grew more and more popular. It was also the first genre linked to Afro-Brazilian origins and to oral transmission to become part of a mass media culture. The numerous “chorus” or “refrains”, numerous birds a-flying, provided the basis of many *sambas* which were sung, in the streets, by the *blocos*⁶ and by the incipient *escolas de samba* (*samba schools*) during the 1920s Carnivals. However, they coexisted and intermingled with the fruits of individualized creation, the verses of the *versadores* responsible for the solo parts. Some of those who came to be recognized as important *sambistas* started out as the chosen performers who improvised in Carnival *blocos*, as Cartola did in the Arengueiros or Noel Rosa in the Faz Vergonha. The modern rhythmic frame of *samba* as a genre flows from this *samba* made by the *blocos*. The inaugural landmark of the kind is normally attributed to the *malandros*⁷ from the Estácio neighbourhood: they founded the *bloco* Deixa Falar, which became the first self-denominated *escola de samba*, in 1928.

By that time, the crowd's singing voice in the streets states the popular acknowledgment of a *samba* or *marchinha*. Moreover, even before the sales figures and the accounting statements (always a matter of doubt and suspicion) of royalty-collecting agencies, the success is measured and recognized by organised competition systems, mainly the Carnival songs' contests and the Carnival *escolas*' parades. Popular success came also to involve well-defined and quantitative references and gauges, and acquired a stronger commercial and financial meaning. Setting up visibility and audibility, providing professional *status* and wages, the mediatic system of cultural industry began to incite and sway the artists' activities.

What is at stake now is to *build* an object fitting to artistic and commercial patterns, a *concrete* and saleable object which is the record, the song carried through and stabilised in a storage medium, the circulation and profitability of which have to be foreseen and promoted. As Fenerick (2005: p.24) points out: “the modern *samba* is a commodity, made by professional musicians inserted in a rising phonographic market, which increasingly controls (or manages) the production of *sambas* and alters in various aspects its traditional characteristics.”⁸

The traditional method of composition did not disappear with the professionalization of the *sambistas*, nor did the traditional motifs or the form of refrain (chorus)/stanzas. However, insofar as the name of the author began to be *registered*, bringing both glory and material benefits, there was a transformation in the attitude of those that participated in the creative act. They started to demand to be recognized as *authors*. Every year, new authors appeared, as well as controversies and contests about authorship. One of the first such disputes, which became quite notorious, was about “*Pelo*

telefone", one of the first *sambas* ever to be recorded, in 1917, and registered by Donga and Mauro de Almeida.⁹

Ten years later, the expansion and popularisation of the phonographic and radio media led to an explosion in the consumption of popular music in everyday mass culture. Rio de Janeiro was the principal scene of this explosion in Brazil, stimulated by the populism of the cultural policies of the Vargas era, from the 1930 revolution to the end of the *Estado Novo*¹⁰ in 1945. In every popular musical genre, song writing partnership became increasingly important. In *samba*, however, this practice acquired distinctive social meaning, since it was the locus of both the meeting and the separation of social classes, of ethnic groups and of urban spaces.

At this time, the period from the 1920s to the 1930s, three factors were decisive to the history of *samba*: the growing prominence of the *escolas de samba* parade and of *samba* itself as a carnival genre, alongside the *marchinha*¹¹; the growth of popular music in radio and in recordings, with their mass audiences; and the arrival, in the world and practice of *samba*, of composers and performers from the middle and wealthier classes. These factors made co-authorship a decisively central issue here in the process of production of popular music.

At the end of 1920s, with the development of new media and new recording and broadcasting technologies, mediatic devices of popular music increase in number and diversity. The consuming public expands, and the professionalization of authors and performers gets new and larger spaces. New clusters of artists appear on the scene of broadcasted popular music. Yet, in spite of their being enmeshed, both aesthetically and commercially, the opportunities of financial reward and public acknowledgement are radically asymmetrical for the different groups.

It is quite uncommon by that time that composers coming from different economic and ethnic communities get associated to make music together. They belong to different worlds and do not frequent the same places. (Máximo & Didier, 1990: p.196). Campos *et al.* (1983) describe the social and topographical map of the central area of Rio de Janeiro, where the bohemian and artistic coterie circulates at that time. Among places frequented by singers, songwriters, publishers, journalists and other people related to popular music, there are three distinguished spaces, whose frequenters occupy different positions in the scale of social prestige and financial situation. The "poor" ones walk around on the "famine sidewalk" ("*calçada da fome*"), close to the Carlos Gomes theatre and coffee bar, on Tiradentes Square. This is the location of the "composers' spot" ("*ponto dos compositores*"), where songwriters come to sell their *sambas* and other kinds of songs: Bucy Moreira, Bide and Marçal, Nelson Cavaquinho, Alvaiade, Geraldo Pereira etc. The "rich" ones or "*bacanas*" are regulars at the Café Papagaio, on Gonçalves Dias Street, where they talk and get in touch with partners, making plans for new compositions: João de Barro, Lamartine Babo, Alberto Ribeiro go there. According to Cyro de Souza, "it was a sort of private club. The songwriters of Café Papagaio and Colombo, when somebody from Café Nice or Tiradentes Square went there to talk with them, sometimes they didn't even invite us to take a seat, we were standing while they received us and they kept sitting down." (*apud* Campos *et al.*, 1983: p. 63) Midway between the two groups there is the "crowd" (*massa*) of habitués at the Café Nice on Rio Branco Avenue: names such as Haroldo Barbosa, Francisco Alves, Orestes Barbosa, Assis Valente, Aracy de Almeida, Carlos Galhardo, Ataulpho Alves etc.

The epithets given to the two kinds of songwriters coming to sight in popular music since the late 1920s also referred to the spaces of the town: "*compositores do morro*" ('composers from the hill') and "*compositores da cidade*" ('composers from the city'). The so-called *compositores do morro* were dark-skinned musicians and poets, of humble origin, who were beginning to be noticed in the mainstream musical scene. These people came from the *favelas*¹² or the city outskirts, and their style had been shaped after the *samba* made by the Estácio group. In the other group, the *compositores da cidade*, light-

skinned and coming from the middle and upper classes, constitute the so-called “élite” of *samba*.

In the process of articulation that came about between the two groups, the beginning of the 1930s marked a decisive moment, with *samba* as the main pivot. As Fenerick (2005: p.72) writes, “The middle-class musicians, singers and composers had an important role as mediators between the barbaric *samba* and civilized *samba*.” This mediation came about through their creative work, with an intermingling of aesthetic and thematic motifs, and also through commercial transactions. The middle-class whites, specially the so-called Vila Isabel group (Almirante, Noel Rosa, Braguinha, Nássara, Mário Reis, etc.) absorbed the new way of making *samba* brought forward by the composers from Estácio and other poor neighbourhoods such as Mangueira and Oswaldo Cruz; but they added on their own a greater ability to deal with business affairs. They had more schooling, had greater ease with the written language, and sometimes even had a musical education. Many of these middle class whites had genuine creative talent, such as those mentioned above. However, the label on the records and, very especially, the registration of authorship in the copyright organizations and royalty-collecting agencies were also packed with names of the so-called “*compositores*”¹³, the buyers of the compositions of others. Sometimes the buyer would acquire merely the right to future royalties, advancing some money immediately. Usually, however, co-authorship was negotiated. At times, there was the total transfer of authorship, pure and simple, with the name of the true composer not being mentioned at all in the registration of the song.

Carlos Sandroni (2001: p.148) suggests that “we mention ‘nominal’ *parceria* when authorship was given or sold during the process of the commercial distribution of *sambas*; and ‘real’ *parceria* when both partners took part in the composition, even if to different degrees”. He adds: “It was at the end of the 1920s that the importance of *parceria* became intensive; Sinhô (José Barbosa da Silva, 1888-1930), the principal composer of the era that was then ending, rarely used this resource, whereas all the important composers of the following phase would constantly participate in *parcerias*, whether the *parceria* ‘real’ or ‘nominal’”.

Of course, the social and economically handicapped artists – mostly black and mixed race – were the main sellers of authorship. Among the sales champions, we find names that would be venerated by posterity, such as Wilson Batista, Ismael Silva, Nelson Cavaquinho, Zé da Zilda, Geraldo Pereira. In return, these songwriters received not only money, but also special favours, linked to the recording and promotion of their compositions. Many of the individuals who had a hand in the placing and marketing of the product with the radio and record companies would also become “owners” of the songs. Performers who could record the composition were the most frequent buyers or receivers of the co-authorship, this being a time when the great “radio star” in popular music was white and middle class. The most notorious and fruitful case of this type was the “nominal” *parceria* between Francisco Alves, who for many years was the singer with the greatest prestige in the nation, and Ismael Silva, one of the prominent figures of the Estácio group. Together with a third partner (Nilton Bastos, Noel Rosa) or just both of them, they signed about thirty *sambas* and three *marchinhas* recorded by Francisco Alves between 1927 and 1934.

On the other hand, one must admit that many performers had an important function in the creative process, even when they had no hand in the composition of the *samba* or other type of song itself. They did so not only by the aesthetic result of their interpretations, but also when, due to their agency, new compositions and formations of partnership came into being. It was a common occurrence for a singer to ask someone to write the lyrics for a third party’s melody or to set music to an interesting text, or when, having found a catching refrain or a beautiful first part – be it by an anonymous or a known author – he would ask some other author to write the rest of the song. The successful collaboration between Ismael Silva, a prestigious composer *do morro*, with Noel Rosa, a

legitimate and brilliant composer *da cidade*, came about in just this fashion, through the agency of Francisco Alves.

Parceria in the 1930's

In the 1930s, linked to the great expansion of professions, industries and popular music media, song writing partnership became not only a creative practice, but also a definite commercial apparatus. It became an institution that permitted and encouraged the production and circulation of *sambas*, establishing and organizing the relationships between creators and media men in the new situation of mass consumption. Partnership thus came to express the commercial tone that imbued and even conditioned activities in the popular music field. According to Nestor de Hollanda (1969: p.51), the phrase that was most repeated at Café Nice, a famous hang-out of popular musicians, was: “Music is business.”



Figure 1 – left: Francisco Alves (radioclaret.com.br, 2010); right: Ismael Silva (bahia-online.net, 2010): a “nominal” songwriting partnership.

But on the other hand, the *samba*, beyond and before being a commodity and a professional field, is also, as with poetry and other arts, a language; a language that was still young and full of possibilities at the time, extremely connected with and sensitive to the contemporary space of the city, opening a communication path between cultures. It actually would not allow, in most cases, a true social ascension of the humble *sambista* – the permanent though constantly frustrated popular artist’s dream. However, it could provide opportunities for meetings, generously creative transgressions and de-territorialisation.

The above-mentioned group of Vila Isabel, whose most famous artists formed the musical group Bando dos Tangarás, played a remarkable role in this process. Lead by Almirante, in 1930 they made the first recording accompanied by percussion instruments typical of the street *samba*, and played by percussionists linked to *samba* schools: in “Na Pavuna” (by Almirante & Homero Dornellas) it is possible to hear for the first time, on record, “a big set of *tamborins*, *cuícas*, *surdos*, *pandeiros* and *reco-reco*” (Severiano, 1987: p.28). The most important members of the Bando dos Tangarás (Almirante, João de Barro and Noel Rosa) also made pioneering song writing partnership with composers *do morro*, namely with Canuto (Deocleciano da Silva Paranhos), from the Morro do

Salgueiro. “*Tangarás* discovered Canuto practically at the same time, Almirante was the one who had the idea of take him with his *tamborim* to a recording studio and João de Barro was the first to become his *parceiro*; but among all of them Noel is the one who gets closer to him.” (Máximo & Didier, 1990: p.195)



Figure 2 - Bando dos Tangarás, c.1930 (Andreato Comunicação e Cultura, 2009).

The association between the creative agents of the different social groups, whether direct or indirect, also had an innovative, significant aesthetic function. The middle-class composers *da cidade* and the *sambistas do morro* enjoyed a relationship of mutual emulation (Sandroni, 2003: p. 19, *passim*) that manifested itself in various aspects such as rhythm, music, instrumentation, poetry and language. In this way, “the mystery of samba” seems to have come about, just as in so many other forms of sung language, by *parceria* as its form of artistic production, that is, the “real” *parceria*.

There are very many forms of creative practice in song writing partnership. To simplify matters, we may say that, in the recorded popular music of that time, it operated in one of the two following ways:

(a) One of the partners wrote the first part of the song and the other partner wrote the second one. This procedure is derived from the *modus operandi* of traditional, pre-phonographic music, which was based on the sequence of choral refrain and improvised solo stanzas. Máximo & Didier (1990: p.119) explain the process that led from one system to the other: “What is certain is that the refrains of *partido-alto*¹⁴ gradually suffered a transformation, an enrichment, with the two or three verses of old taking on more daring forms. The second parts were no longer improvised but were made up especially for the given samba. This detail, in addition to the change of beat, led to an alteration of the melodic structure, which became lengthier and more elaborated.”

The connection between this transformation and the process of media influence on *samba* was pointed out by Carlos Sandroni (2001: p.155) “In the professional context, [...] *samba* becomes reified; it gains its autonomy with regard to those who create it – which is why it becomes possible to steal and then sell it. As an independent object, it needs to have its frontiers clearly outlined, becoming a space no longer open to improvisation, but having once and for all well-defined parts, with lyrics and music duly written down, published and recorded.” This type of composition was most common among artists from the popular strata, but it was also present in the works of the middle-class *compositores da cidade* who absorbed the popular *sambistas*’ style. A case in point is that of Noel Rosa (1910-1927), who, although having had a brief life (he died at the age of 26) is generally

considered to have been the most brilliant artist of the period. No other composer of *da cidade* was associated more frequently and more closely to the *sambistas do morro* than Noel. He was also “a champion of second parts, peerless in completing works that had been barely sketched, when someone would come to him with an idea, or a finished first part, and he would complete the work with skill, competence and even, at times, brilliance, without departing from its original style.” (Máximo & Didier: p.130).

(b) One person wrote the lyrics, the other wrote the music. This pattern, lyricist + melodist, is associated with literate culture and common to both erudite and popular music, and was therefore more prevalent among the educated composers. Professionalization seems to have stimulated also the specialisation of functions. What formerly was a type of play, a contest, a spree, an essentially group activity linked to performance, became a specialised and profitable task, which could now be accomplished in isolation. This system also became characteristic of the stable song writing duos whose *parcerias* became so successful at that time and later on (e.g. Bide & Marçal, Ari Barroso & Luís Peixoto, Pedro Caetano & Claudionor Cruz).

The features mentioned about song writing partnership continue to be pertinent in describing a later phase in the evolution of *samba*, the period that began at end of the 1950s. The previous decade, especially its second half, which saw the end of World War II and the end, in Brazil, of the Estado Novo, was one in which *samba* suffered a relative decline, linked to the great expansion of foreign (especially North American) music in the Brazilian media. Several *sambistas* remained productive, but the space for the genre in radio and recordings became more restricted to the Carnival period.

Parceria in Bossa Nova

At the end of the 1950s, alongside the Carnival songs, two other types of popular music were heard that identified themselves as types of *samba* or were so designated: the *samba-canção abolerado*¹⁵ and the first stirrings of the *bossa-nova*. However, in the middle of the next decade, one can notice the restoration of what could be called a paradigm of *samba*, proud and protective of its Afro-Brazilian and proletarian features. The return of this genre to the media in its traditional format, which also had the support of some *bossanovistas*, opened up a long period that fostered the so-called *samba de raiz* (roots *samba*), stamped by an ideology of “authenticity” and at times by a certain nostalgia.

And how did the process of *parceria* fare, in this revitalisation and development of *samba* since the 1960s? It is difficult to give a quick outline of this scene due to the diversity of its tendencies and subdivisions. Nevertheless, it is possible to map out at least four different sets of authors, styles and productive practices: (1) the *bossa-nova samba*; (2) the offshoots of the *samba de raiz* (‘roots *samba*’); (3) the *samba-enredo*; and (4) a bit later on, in the 80s, the revival of the *partido-alto* at the *pagodes*¹⁶ of working-class neighbourhoods.

The *bossa-nova* group presented a wish for stylistic refinement and formal elaboration, and there was a great, constant demand for their professional work. These conditions led to stable, long-standing, close song writing duos, based on a division of functions (lyricist/melodist), but also on long sessions of conjoint work. The classic example is that of the musician Tom Jobim and the poet Vinicius de Moraes, a team that would also include the singer and guitarist João Gilberto.

After the *bossa-nova* heyday, new *sambistas* appeared, along with veteran composers who were being recorded again. They marked a renewed esteem for tradition tied to a modern and sophisticated touch. Having individualized, multifarious talents, they were the performers of their own *sambas*. Paulinho da Viola (first album in 1968) and Martinho da Vila (first album in 1969) are examples of this group, being part of the first generation of black singers of *samba* to have a constant presence in the media. Alongside them, it is necessary to consider artists, such as Jorge Ben (first album in 1963; later

renamed Jorge Benjor) and Luiz Melodia (first album in 1972), whose work has *samba* as a central reference point, but in a manner that is highly stylised and often linked to other genres. In the compositions of these new authors-composers-performers, who were enrolled into the roster of the so-called MPB¹⁷, song writing collaboration is uncommon, and authorship is mainly individual.

In the field of Carnival music, *sambas-enredo* (which are sung by the *samba* schools during their parade) became dominant. A brilliant period was started in 1964, with *Aquarela Brasileira*, signed by Silas de Oliveira alone. However, with the growth of the parade and the increase in complexity and importance of its organisation in the media and in business, *sambas-enredo* became swamped with numerous co-authorships, some of them merely nominal. By 1967 and again in 1968, the *sambas-enredo* of Mangueira already displayed five names as being their authors (in 1993, there were eight).

Parceria nowadays

Finally, since the end of the 1970s, the return to the music scene of the *partido-alto*, played by *pagode* groups such as the Fundo de Quintal, reinvigorated the composition partnership of first and second parts, with a larger sharing of poetic and melodic functions. Numerous new authors appeared, emerging, as before, from the hillsides and the popular neighborhoods, feeding into the production of the musical groups and of the collective LPs, which brought together various artists. They became the so-called “world of *samba*”, in which the singer and *partideiro* composer, Zeca Pagodinho (1959-) has reigned from 1986, when he brought his first album out, to the present.

The intensive practice of song writing partnership, especially in the mode of first and second or more parts seems to be a multiplying factor in the number of authors who are active in the musical market. In a way, this contributes to the democratisation of production. On the other hand, since it opens up a space that is fiercely disputed by a quantity of authors of little renown and scant known production, it allows the proliferation of a voluminous repertoire of banal works that try to reproduce successful formulas. Nevertheless, in the middle of the chaff, one may find wheat of the highest quality. And we can see the appearance of unique personalities, such as Bezerra da Silva (1927-2005). This singer is quite a champion in the number of different authors he has recorded. Of the twenty-six albums and 321 original tracks that make up his discography, we find 270 authors. Bezerra himself signed relatively few numbers, but he opened the path for many humble, unknown songwriters. Most compositions – almost 80% of the total – were produced by *parcerias*, with 25% being signed by three or even four *parceiros*. Connected to the aesthetics and ideology of the *partido-alto*, Bezerra updated the old discourse of the *malandragem*, and established himself as a true representative of the *favelas*, a voice of the impoverished communities – or, as the title of one his albums proclaims, the legitimate “product of the *morro*.”

Bezerra is not completely mistaken when he somehow resets the old boundary line between classes and locations. To this day, as a matter of fact, few effective and lasting song writing partnerships have been accomplished between artists coming from distant social levels. We still find a limited number of artists who are able to transcend their own social borders in a creative action, like Noel Rosa did in the 1930s. Noel remains an emblematic – and to a certain extent unmatched – case. Unattached and somehow *déclassé*, he liked the taverns and the company of *malandros* better than parties in wealthy houses visited by his fellows of the Bando de Tangarás band (Máximo & Didier, 1990: p.105).

Noel’s talent was quickly acknowledged by the public and by the other musicians. Everyone wanted him as a partner, and he made himself easily available to collaborate with those who came to him. A “constant experimenter of partners” (Máximo & Didier, 1990: p.258), Noel generously exerted in his creation a kind of marginal, Baudelairian

vocation which opened his work to engage with many poetic-musical expressions, without ever confining itself to a single individual language, hence its peculiar diversity, copiousness and richness. He was the single author of half of the more than 200 songs he made in his short life. The other 100 songs were co-authored by a broad number of *parceiros*, around fifty. Some of them became big names of the Brazilian popular music, whereas many remained unknown. The point to be stressed here, however, is Noel's collaboration with several highly talented composers belonging to the "morro" world. Those were *sambistas* named Canuto, Ernani Silva, Antenor Gargalhada, Bide, Gradim; *malandros* like the above-mentioned Ismael Silva, the most famous composer of the Estácio de Sá group, and most frequent Noel's partner; humble and nameless masters like Cartola (1908-1980), *compositor do morro* who would be – after a long while – acknowledged as one of the greatest Brazilian songwriters¹⁸. Noel visited him at his home in Mangueira. They became close friends and made several *sambas* in *parceria*, most of which are unfortunately lost.



Figure 3 - Bezerra da Silva's albums covers showing the authors of the tracks: front cover of *Bezerra da Silva e um punhado de bambas* (1986) and back cover of *Alô, malandragem, maloca o flagrante* (1989)

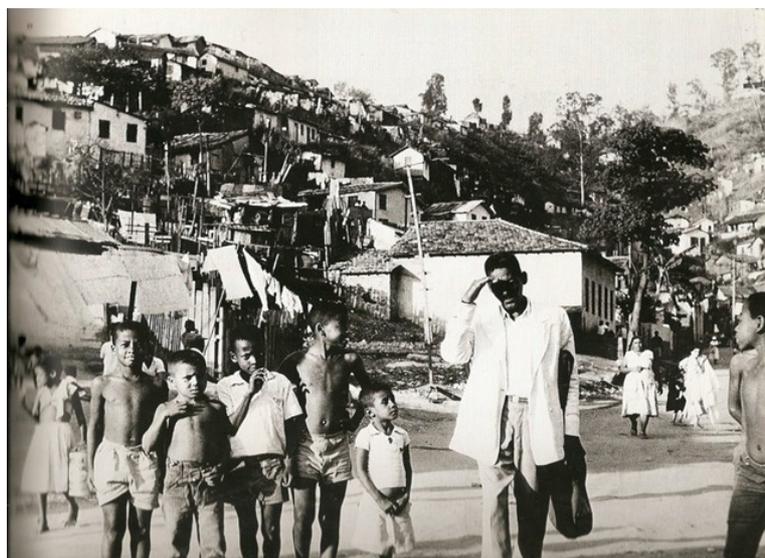


Figure 4. Cartola coming down the Morro da Mangueira, in Rio de Janeiro (estação primeira.org, 2009).

As the musician and writer Henrique Cazes remarked: “He didn’t go there just to meet any partner, he went there to seek after the best ones” (Cazes, *apud* Dias, 1998). The *sambas* that Noel produced with his partners *do morro* are still waiting for a detailed and systematic analysis. Anyway, many specialists and musicians nowadays believe that the interaction between Noel and these lower class songwriters at the beginning of the 1930s played a central role in giving *samba* a new and lasting aesthetic pattern.

Moreover, in that context somehow unsuitable for true associations between composers *do morro* and *da cidade*, Noel’s attitude, motivated by a constant aesthetic and emotional excitement, assumes a deep social meaning. “Noel is conscious of his search. In these two or three years [1929-1932], no other *compositor da cidade*, white-skinned, not poor, educated, having even been at the university, will be so often a partner of the ‘*compositores do morro*’. With such an open mind and open heart.” (Máximo & Didier, 1990: p.196.)



Figure 5 - Noel Rosa (Couto, 2009).

Noel’s radical option is disclosed even when he claims that the source of his art is located in a subjective and interior space, evading geo-social topography. This idea may come to one’s mind, for instance, if one considers a small detail in the lyrics of the famous *samba* entitled “Feitio de oração” (1933), by Noel Rosa and Vadico, which last stanza says:

Table 1 – “Feitio de oração” (1933), by Noel Rosa and Vadico, last stanza.

O samba na realidade	The <i>samba</i> , as a matter of fact
Não vem do morro nem lá da cidade	Does not come from the hill nor from the city over there
E quem suportar uma paixão	And whoever bears a passion
Saberá que o samba então	Then this one knows that the <i>samba</i>
Nasce no coração	Arises from the heart

The poet (Noel) says that his *samba*, “shaped like a prayer” (“*com feitio de oração*”), “arises from the heart” (“*nasce do coração*”). Yet, precisely when he states that “the *samba*, as a matter of fact, does not come from the hill nor from the city over there” (“*o samba, na realidade, não vem do morro nem lá da cidade*”), Noel brings to light the displacement of his poetical *persona* and voice. By means of a simple adverb inserted in the verse (“*lá da cidade*” – “from the city *over there*”), the symmetry of the double negation is broken up, and the “city” – from which the poet comes – is located far back, far away. We can therefore imagine that this composer *da cidade* has made his way up the hill (where he would find some of his best *parceiros*), and that, now, he also belongs, somehow, to the *morro*.

NOTES

1. Referring to *bossa-nova* as a musical “idiom”, I’m adopting the term used by the journalist and music critic Tárík de Souza, among others. He wrote: “By condensing impressionism (Ravel, Debussy), American song (Cole Porter, Gershwin) and cool jazz (Chet Baker, Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan) in a samba of many notes stressed at the weak beat, the bossa-nova spoke a universal idiom without giving up the *carioca* slang.” Souza refers in general to the musical language of *bossa-nova*, which comprises characteristics such as a natural and cool way of using voice, harmonic sophistications and peculiar rhythmic accents.
2. The so-called modern form of *samba* originated in the late 1920s, when the composers of carnival groups in some poor districts of Rio, especially Estácio de Sá, introduced some innovations in rhythmic *samba* that have persisted until the present day. They added new percussion instruments, emphasized the swinging rhythm and created a sound that would keep people dancing and going forward in time with the music, when the group was parading on the street. This rhythmic pattern was different from the one of the current samba of the time, which was more similar to *maxixe*’s rhythm.
3. The most important and well-known Brazilian dictionary of Portuguese language, the so-called *Aurélio*’s, points out the relevance and specificity in Brazil of this meaning of the word “parceria”: “1. reunion of persons for a purpose of common interest; association, company.
2. *Braz*. Duo of popular music composers.” (Ferreira, 1975: p.1045).
4. *Partideiros* or *versadores*: soloist composers/singers who improvise the “versos” (verses, lines, stanzas) alternating with the choral refrain in the *partido-alto* and similar forms of *samba*.
5. Sinhô (José Barbosa da Silva, 1888-1930), self-titled “the king of *samba*”, was one of the most popular songwriters in the 1920s, and the most important composer of this first instance of *samba* as an urban musical genre.
6. *Blocos*: groups of people who parade along the streets during carnival, singing, dancing and playing percussion instruments.
7. *Malandro*: The ideal of malice and brinkmanship become embodied in the *malandro*, a central character of the mythology and poetics of *samba* since the late 1920s. The term denominates a kind of hustler or rogue who refuses to work regularly and is always in trouble with the police. But it also has a positive meaning, being often used as a synonym of *sambista*. This archetypal figure is viewed not simply as a criminal, but as a mastermind of the con art and an expert in *samba*.
8. I have been in charge of the translation of this and next quotations from Brazilian originals.
9. “Pelo telefone” (“By telephone”) was for a long time considered to be the first recorded composition having the word “samba” on its label. For many decades, therefore, specialists have pointed out that it was in fact preceded by a few other recordings also labelled as “samba”. However, having immediately got a large popularity, “Pelo telefone” was the one that made the new rhythm recognized and appreciated, having remained in the tradition of the genre as an initial landmark. Under the label “samba carnavalesco”, the score of “Pelo telefone” was registered at the National Library in Rio de Janeiro by Donga (Ernesto dos Santos, 1889-1974) in December 1916. An instrumental version of the composition was recorded by the Casa Edison Company in January 1917; and, in February, another recording was produced with the sung version by the singer Bahiano, bringing the name of Mauro de Almeida as author of the lyrics. The song was a big success in the carnival of that year, and has provoked many quarrels and controversies as to its authorship. As a matter of fact, several of its musical and textual elements arose from the anonymous repertory of oral tradition and community domain. There is a great deal of bibliographic detail about this case. An interesting analysis of the composition may be found in Carlos Sandroni, *Feitiço decente: transformações do samba no Rio de Janeiro 1917-1933*, p.118-130.
10. *Estado Novo* (‘New State’) was the name of the authoritarian government installed in Brazil by President Getúlio Vargas, between 1937 and 1945.

11. Mixing the binary compass of martial music, fast tempo, simple and joyful melodies and witty lyrics, the *marchinha* became, in the 1920s, the most typical Carnival rhythm in Rio de Janeiro.
12. *Favelas*: slums, shantytowns. Many of them, notably those located in the central areas of Rio de Janeiro, are settled on the hills.
13. *Compositor*: play on words mixing *comprar* ('to buy') and *compositor* ('composer').
14. *Partido-alto*: a kind of *samba* which consists in a free improvisation in the shape of a dispute (humorous or not) between two or more singers, whose solos alternate with refrains sung in chorus by the rest of participants.
15. *Samba-canção* is a kind of slower and more melodic *samba*, whose lyrics generally focus on sentimental, romantic and gloomy themes. In the 1940s and 1950s, the *samba-canção* was often influenced by the Latin-American *bolero*.
16. *Pagode*: since the 1970s the term denotes a kind of popular party, often made outdoors, with music, dance and food. In the 1980s the term refers to the style of *samba* which was practiced at these occasions and was based mainly in the *partido-alto* tradition, with the introduction of some new instruments. Later, the term has been somehow degraded, in association with many groups which played a very commercial pop *samba* full of clichés.
17. MPB: acronym of Música Popular Brasileira, Brazilian Popular Music. Since the early 1970s, the expression is used as a sort of umbrella term denominating not a specific genre, but rather a constellation of artists and styles in post-*bossa-nova* urban middle-class popular music.
18. Cartola only recorded his first album at age of 66, in 1974.

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