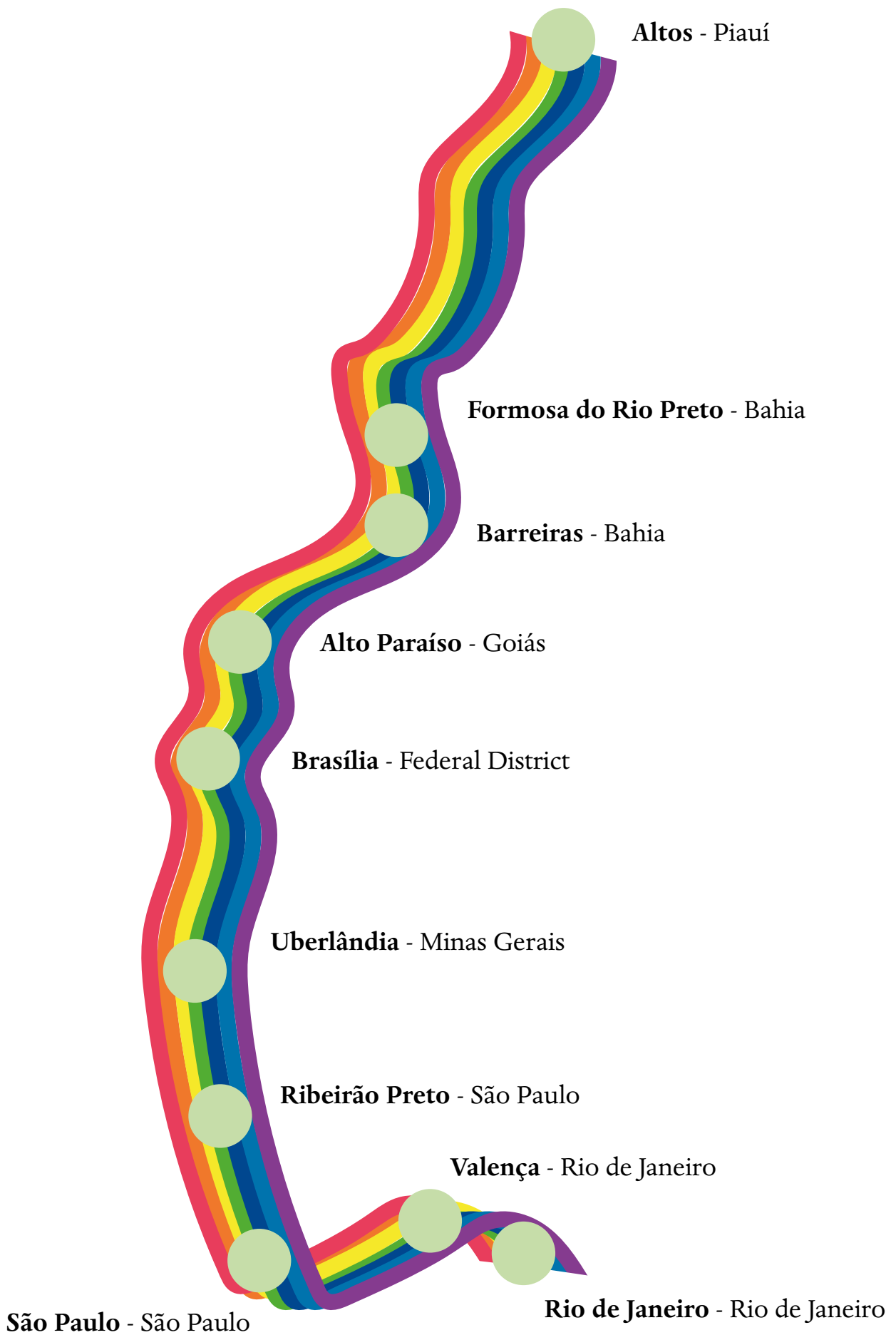
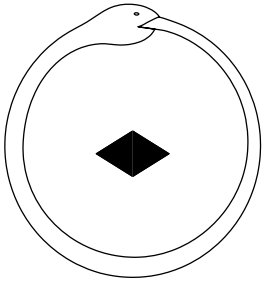


The cover features a dark brown background with a large, stylized archway made of multiple parallel, wavy rainbow lines. The archway frames the title and author information. At the bottom center, there is a small circular logo with a yellow border, an orange interior, and a pink diamond shape in the center.

FEET ON THE GROUND
Veronica Pinheiro

notebooks
SELVAGEM





FEET ON THE GROUND

Veronica Pinheiro

I ask permission to get started, I ask blessings from my elders and my youngest. I thank ancestry for allowing me to honour the sacred ground. On Kalunga¹ land, my female body moves with home and supplies on my back. Kalunga, me. I am also a peopled land. Along the way, I recognise myself in the red clay that covers the leaves of the trees on the road. I am clay. I recognise myself in the trees. I am baobab seed. I recognise myself on the road, I trust in the path. With my feet on the ground and my heart smiling, singing I walk. Unlike the little girl in the red hood immortalised by the Brothers Grimm, I am never alone on the road.

1. Kalunga means “sacred place of protection”, and is the name of the largest quilombola territory in Brazil.

Come Closer

This report could be the on-board diary of a travelling teacher who chose to spend the school break in a caravan travelling 7,000 kilometres and talking to children on the way about school and about life as a child at school. It could be the echo of a recent memory or a record of the nostalgia that will people me. However, the following lines are an invitation. I invite you to walk barefoot and circle round the campfire. Try not to give in to the temptation to look for meaning or purpose in this invitation; the Western consciousness of the observer pushes us towards a speculative interpretation of phenomena. Just try walking and circling with me.

My name is Veronica Pinheiro, a teacher. I have learnt to summarise so many things in life, and my name is a good example. I have a proper name, polysyllable, proparoxytone, unaccented due to my father's unawareness. Out of so many things I have done and so many others that the certificates say I know how to do, I like being a teacher.

It was by teaching, sometimes in schools and sometimes outside them, that life seemed to make sense. The meaning of things attracts me more than the things. When I say the meaning of things, I do not refer to the meaning, design or purpose, but to how I feel about things. Real and figurative occupy the same space in me. There is nothing that makes me feel as sorry as hearing the bell that tells me that the end of a class has arrived. Let's remember: the same sound as the school bell is the sound of the bell played in factories and prisons. The codes that subject the subjects do not change.

For the last five years, I have held administrative positions in teaching units of the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Department of Education. In order to fulfil life's demands, I took a leave of absence from my duties and, with my leave, I was able to walk on other roads. Out of carelessness or immaturity, I will repeat some of the words many times. It is a process, everything is still unfolding as I take new routes.

Even though I had requested leave from my duties as a municipal civil servant, I was taken back to the classroom, through administrative formalities, to wait for my leave to be granted. What a life! Returning to the classroom just when I am invited to think about educational practices. Thinking about children and schools is what I have been doing every day since the *Selvagem*, cycle of studies about life invited me to coordinate the Children Group. On the eve of the recess for the *Selvagem* Community's team of coordinators, I had to return to the classroom to "teach". There was no vacancy at my school of origin, so I was taken to a school that needed a Portuguese language teacher.

2. Quilombo means "place of rest and encampment", a word that originated in the Quimbundo language from Angola. Quilombos are a symbol of resistance to slavery. The so-called *quilombola* communities still exist today, made up mainly of the descendants of enslaved persons who escaped. They are considered traditional Brazilian communities. (TN)

The school was in one of the thirteen favelas that make up the *Chapadão* complex, in Pavuna, Rio de Janeiro. Weeks before returning to the classroom, during the planning of the Selvagem Children Group's activities for 2024, we planned to hold a semester of meetings with students from a school in Pavuna. At the time, none of the team had anything to do with the area. The reason for the choice: the Pavuna river flows into Guanabara Bay, and the waters of the bay will be the subject of the Selvagem Meetings in the first half of 2024. At the time of writing this text, we thought this was the reason for having a school in Pavuna in our planning.

I arrive at school on market day; I walk down the main street, a long street full of crossroads. I walk. I do not ask. I observe. I pay attention. I learn what I can. Like Exu³ in Oxalá's⁴ house, before going to stand at the crossroads. I trust the one who guards my path. I trust in the cycle.

As a municipal civil servant, I have held the following positions: teacher, pedagogical coordinator, assistant headmaster and school headmaster. I followed many paths and I end the cycle with my initial role: teacher. The cycle. My working life could be represented by the ouroboros and its sacred dance of returning to the beginning. A circular career: beginning, middle and beginning. According to the city council's personnel department, it was essential for me to be in a teaching position in order for the unpaid leave to be approved. But what was really crucial was the return. The encounter. The crossroads. The crossings.

June 2023: among the seventh and eighth graders I met, some still could not read. Unduly, there are those who hold children responsible for not mastering the skills expected for each school cycle. People who do this forget that, historically, there has been a permanent project to erase traditional languages. On Brazilian territory, we are forced to cry, pray, dream and live in a language that cannot express what indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people really feel. Out of cruelty, Brazil's schools teach the official language in such a way that we do not have access to our mother tongues, nor do we have technical mastery of Portuguese.

3. Exu is an orisha [divinity], guardian of communication, who is part of religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda. The orisha is seen as a faithful protector of the people who worship him and are grateful for his protection. (TN)

4. Oxalá is the creator of the universe and also the most powerful orisha. (TN)

Basic education is compulsory in the country. At the age of 6, a child is enrolled in the first year of Elementary School. A student who has never been held back during the basic cycle is able to complete the course in twelve years, nine in Elementary School and three in Secondary School. How is it that, after twelve years of study, neurotypical people are considered functionally illiterate in our country? What kind of people are our schools trying to educate?

There is no single answer, nor is there a linear path to follow in order to resolve illiteracy issues in Brazil. But it is disturbing to realise that a child can spend more than a decade at school and leave without learning to read, write and interpret. We call children *infantes*, Latin for ‘one who is unable to speak’. A society that considers a person incapable because of the length of their life urgently needs to revisit itself.

When I returned to the classroom, I realised that the official figures and the school reality did not match up. I found many students in the final years of Elementary School, aged between 13 and 16, who could not read or write. As a practice, before bringing in information and curriculum content, I hear the children, listen to their stories, and answer questions about myself. I try to give them a voice. I hope that they feel able to speak. I read to them by ear. Finally, I ask for some written gossip. Secrets that remain between me and them. Gossip is the perfect textual genre to gauge a student’s narrative mastery. Plot, narrative focus, characters, time, space – I will explain these to the class another time. Or I do not even need to explain it, a good gossip writer has mastered the structure. This is how we build our first bond, the same bond as the *comadres* [co-parents, partners] who exchange recipes, share knowledge and build the memory of a place.

I ended the first day of class exhausted from feeling so much. My throat was sore from talking so much, I spoke loudly, competing with the noises from outside and inside the room. I often made noises because I said things that were of no interest to anyone in the room, who only listened to me out of politeness. I have seen myself in them, I have had that face, I have worn that uniform and I have wished I had not sat in silence for five hours. Someone asks me if I am someone “to lay down the rules”, I reply that I was not there for that. What a

life! The children expected me to show strength, because that is how the State makes itself present in the peripheries, almost always. The school is often the place that reproduces the authoritarianism that domesticates bodies and tames individuals. “The perfect student copies, does not walk around the classroom, only speaks when authorised, knows how to control their physiological needs and responds to what the teacher expects them to respond to. “What a life! I try to explain that I prefer days permeated with delicacy. That I have learnt to tread softly. I seem strange to them. I am probably stranger than I look. That has never been a problem for me. Before I left school, I was surprised by a hug. It was 15-year-old Julia, who was holding me in her arms and asking me to teach her to read. I do not know what surprised me most: the hug, the request or the girl’s craving eyes.

I return home and call my friend Lila. We cry for our own powerlessness. We know how fragile public education is. Lila and I have always cried together; joy and despair are the most common reasons for our tears. Lila is a Portuguese language teacher and, like me, dreams and studies possibilities for teaching in which students savour knowledge, without anything being shoved down anyone’s throat.

After listening to me, Lila says she is going to the Quilombo São José da Serra in Valença (at Rio de Janeiro state inland) for her research. I offer to go along because our research is similar and I needed to be close to a teacher like Lila. Only dreamy teachers understand dreamy teachers.

Lila and I arrived at the quilombo late on a Saturday morning. We were greeted by Dom Nelson. When I saw him, I remembered the verses of “Oração ao tempo” [Prayer for time] by Caetano Veloso. And I sang it softly: “You’re a man as handsome / as my son’s face”. Our host is a black man, extremely kind and charming, just like the storytellers. When I enter that territory, I feel like I have come home. Everything about the place is very familiar. There was nothing there that made me feel strange.

However, one thing really struck me: all the people, absolutely all the people in Quilombo São José, physically resembled me. How crazy! I was at home. This is my family! The girls are identical to me when I was their age. We were the same in every detail, from our colourful

braids to the shape of our hands. Hands just like my mum's, dad's and brothers' ones. My heart knew that I and those brothers of mine were the seeds of the same baobab tree.

I forgot about Lila for a few moments and walked in silence through the quilombo lands, trying to hear things that only the birds and the wind know. The quilombo was quiet because of Tia Tetê's death. I did not arrive in time to receive her prayers and eat her *feijoada*⁵. On my walk, I met three children and they told me about the *Jequitibá*⁶, the quilombo's guardian, and about the *jongo*⁷. They told me that I would have to come back later, because as long as there was mourning, no one could go near the *Jequitibá*. Like me and the quilombo elders, the drums were also silent. That weekend, there would be no campfire or *jongo*. Timidly, Dandara, in the fullness of her 11 years, taught me about waiting. It was not yet time to take off my shoes and dance barefoot with my *jongueiros* brothers from the hills.

When the days of living in the quilombo were over, I asked Dom Nelson how I could return for a longer stay, expressing my desire to write my dissertation from a small house that I had seen empty in the territory. I said goodbye to Dom Nelson and his family on 9 July 2023. Two days later, I received an invitation from him to leave for Piauí, for a meeting of alternative communities, and along the way to visit some traditional communities and villages. At first, I said "I can't"; it would take twenty days to get back and forth from Rio de Janeiro to Piauí in a bus with a first and last name: Wiphala Rainbow Caravan for Peace. Seduced by the possibility of a colourful peace, I accepted the invitation.

5. *Feijoada* is one of the best-known and most popular typical dishes in Brazilian cuisine. It basically consists of black beans, various parts of the pig, sausage, manioc flour and a side of greens and vegetables. (TN)

6. *Jequitibás* are large trees native to Brazil. They belong to the genus *Cariniana* and the family *Lecythidaceae*. The word *jequitibá* comes from the Tupi language meaning "giant of the forest." (TN)

7. The *jongo*, also known as *caxambu* and *corimá* or *tambu*, *batuque* or *tambor*, is a Brazilian dance of African origin that is practised to the sound of drums, such as the *caxambu*. It is essentially rural. It is part of Afro-Brazilian culture. (source: <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jongo> visualized in march 26th 2024)

Goodbye cangoma⁸
farewell
Goodbye cangoma goodbye
Goodbye I'm leaving
I'm going my cangoma stays
Here and see you another time

Mãe Zeferina, Quilombo São José da Serra

WIPHALA,
HAPPINESS RIPPLED IN THE WIND

Invitation accepted. I received guidance. Doubts arise. I dream up landscapes. Curiosities popped up. A PDF for caravanners stated: bring strong, comfortable footwear. My flip-flops for all occasions and my colourful trainers did not meet the requirements. I needed to wear shoes. I buy the only hiking shoes that fit my feet in the shop. I call Lenon, my friend who is experienced in hiking and long journeys; I ask if the only boot that fits me is suitable for the amount of places I am going to pass through. After Lenon's approval, I am reassured about the purchase. My feet would be protected during the journey, that was the only certainty I had.

When the day of departure arrived, I got ready like someone setting off on a great adventure. I left Rio de Janeiro with a borrowed rucksack that was almost my height and a fancy sleeping tent that I had bought with my friend Lila. I set off carrying on my back the happiness of inhabiting me and holding my little country house in my hands. The weight of the backpack was directly related to the traveller's lack of experience and the fear of going cold and hungry. I decided to accompany the expedition five days before the journey began. Lila did not go with me, she had an appointment in Manaus.

8. Cangoma = party drum or drum party. Farewell song.

I arrived to meet Wiphala and its crew late at night. Two handsome young *quilombola* brothers, Abaiomi and Diguinho, welcomed me. I nicknamed them Cosma and Damian, a pair with jet-black eyes and an upright heart. The boys are Dom Nelson's sons. The *quilombola ibejis*⁹ soon became my great travelling companions. Friends. Brothers. Guardians on the entire journey. Wiphala would take us seven thousand kilometres, following this route: city of Rio de Janeiro; Valença, state of Rio de Janeiro; city of São Paulo; Ribeirão Preto, in the state of São Paulo; Uberlândia, in the state of Minas Gerais; Brasília, in Brazilian the Federal District; Alto Paraíso, in the state of Goiás; Barreiras, in the state of Bahia; Formosa do Rio Preto, also Bahia; Altos, in the state of Piauí; city of São Paulo; city of Rio de Janeiro.

I could barely balance the weight of what I thought was essential on my shoulders. What was really essential was that I had left. Thanks to Wiphala, I did not have to carry everything I took with me when visiting and setting up camp. Wiphala, my base, allowed me to walk and camp with very few things.

To call Wiphala a bus is an almost infamous reductionism. Some say it is a big vessel, a portal, a habitable planet. In a formal description, Wiphala is part of the Rainbow Caravan for Peace and is therefore a travelling cultural pontoon¹⁰, a mobile ecovillage, a small tribe of rainbow warriors for peace. Originating in Mexico in 1996 with Alberto Ruz, the *Rainbow Caravan for Peace* has already travelled through 19 countries on the Central and South American continents, carrying out many activations, sharing knowledge, feelings and visions of love and healing for life on Earth. The caravan is made up of five buses/NGOs: BEIJA-FLOR (hummingbird); CARACOLA (snail); LAGUILA (eagle); MAZORCA (Creole corn cob); WIPHALA (flag of the original Aymara peoples).

The caravan is currently in two countries: Brazil and Mexico. In Brazil, Dom Nelson is the guardian of the Wiphala. He leads and governs

9. Ibejis - according to traditional African narrative the Ibejis are twin Orishas. (TN)

10. A Culture Point Hub. Points of Culture are artistic and cultural projects that were funded and institutionally supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture (MinC) and implemented by governmental or non-governmental organisations. They aimed to carry out actions with a socio-cultural impact on communities. The Ponto de Cultura was the priority action and the articulating element between the other activities of the MinC's Cultura Viva Programme, which was discontinued since 2016 due to political changes. (TN)

the rainbow family during the journeys. I followed his movements very closely during the expedition to Piauí. For me, the Wiphala was a school of life, pluriversal, dynamic and a generator of possibilities; and Dom Nelson, my great master.

Wiphala

Wiphala lalalalaia
The great vessel will set sail
Dom Nelson will command
The great vessel is colourful
It attracts attention wherever it goes

Cidadão da Mata

THEO

I PRETENDED I WOULD GO, THEN I DIDN'T, AND ENDED UP WENTING¹¹

A tear ran down my cheek, my amazed eyes remained fixed on the window for hours. From nightfall to dawn, I was interested in looking out. Watching the landscape changing before my eyes kept me busy. I was in front of myself, trapped by the fear of coming back too changed. As the landscape changed outside, I changed a little too. After many hours awake, I fell asleep with my eyes tired from looking outside. Perhaps I was running away from everything that was happening inside the bus. It was the first time I had travelled with a large group of people. Silence overtook me for three days.

During the silence, we stopped in São Paulo, and most of the caravan's travellers boarded the Wiphala, including four children accompanied by their guardians. I remained an infant until a child climbed into

11. It is a hard-to-translate expression coined by Dedeu, a former football star from Sobral, Ceará, when he was playing for Náutico in Recife. A reporter received exactly this explanation from Dedeu for one of his spectacular moves: I pretended I would go, then I didn't, and ended up "wenting" (in Portuguese, *fôndo*, a non-existent inflection of the verb to go, according to grammar). The expression soon became part of the language of Piauí.

my lap just before we arrived in Uberlândia. A little boy of almost three travelling with his mother forced me to look inside.

“Horse,” Theo said.

His mother tried to translate what the boy had said, and I interrupted her: “Horse.”

Communication goes beyond phonetics; beings communicate through vibration and bonds. The boy, me and the horse. Another world was being created for me. We rode for kilometres. I spent many hours without looking outside. There were four children, nine adults and a plastic horse riding inside the Wiphala. Among the children, Lia, the only girl, spoke little like me.

As I lay there in silence, another tear ran down my cheek. My eyes were now closed. The boy kept saying “horse”. There I knew for sure that I would not be able to write my report. My heart galloped away at the sound of the little one’s words. I fell asleep and dreamt of the road. I woke up on the road. Far away from everything, I fixed my eyes on the window again.

Dom Nelson, silent, seemed to know everything. He anticipates the thoughts and actions of the group. From him comes guidance, adjustments and advice. At every stop, he reminded us:

“Take off your shoes when you get on the bus. This is our home, don’t keep your shoes in here.”

At times, I had the feeling that he was not talking about shoes. Not keeping one’s shoes on was ambiguous, to say the least. Dom Nelson’s gentle eyes activated my subjectivity. And I just wanted to be attentive and deliver a report with relevant information.

I looked for a way to get closer to my fellow travellers. I did as the sunlight does: I looked for cracks, fissures and holes. Small gaps allowed me to make subtle contact with the adults in the caravan. We arrived in Alto Paraíso de Goiás. The red clay on the road took over my eyes, nostrils, ears and mouth. A dense cloud of red dust, raised by the wheels of the bus, reddened my journey. There I questioned the reason for my compacted thoughts. When did I stop being a particle in motion? I wished I was rising dust. It was the earth calling me to trust in the movement of life.

The ancestral rocks of the plateau welcomed me; there I pitched my tent next to a river. Our first camp was in the village of Moinho, in the heart of the Chapada dos Veadeiros [Veadeiros Plateau], on the banks of the Bartolomeu River. When it dusked down, the voices stopped and I tried to sleep in the pitch black of the night. The river spoke throughout the night. I endeavoured to understand its riddles. I stopped struggling with reason; like the waters, I looked for the easiest path and dripped possibilities. There I questioned my immobility. When did I become a shallow puddle? I wished to be and flow like the river. It was the water calling me to run and flow into somewhere else.

I woke up in sacred territory, lands of very old rocks. Some people asked me if I was Kalunga. The question still echoes within me. Kalunga is the name of the largest *quilombola* territory in Brazil, and it is very close to where we were camped. Kalunga, me? In the Bantu language, the word *Kalunga* means ‘sacred place of protection’. I am the seed of a distant baobab tree. I was planted in the earth. But I am also fertile land. I people the land and I am peopled land. My body is territory. Kalunga, me. The question provoked the second awakening. I am land inhabited by dreams. I am the dream of my ancestors and I plant dreams which will not be harvested by me. I am reminded of what made me want to be a teacher: building paths. Internally, I am walking again. I sang and smiled again. Lia stops in front of me. She must have been 4 or 5 years old. I broke the silence that surrounded me. It seemed that the conversation would not yield much, but it did.

LIA

DON'T YOU PUT YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND?

The girl moved her fingers to explain to me how to write LIA.

“Hi, Veronica. You know my name, don't you? Lia: L; little straw with a little drop on top; A.”

She knew my name. I smiled in surprise. I tried to spell my name with gestures, following Lia's method. She thought it took too long and

said that my name had too many letters. Lia was as tiny as her name. Her voice was as soft-sounding as the trio of letters that named her. I sang a *ciranda* and we danced shyly. Another Lia, the one from Itamaracá, drew us closer¹². I told her a story. Lia told me several. She wondered why I wore my shoes all the time.

“Don’t you put your feet on the ground?”

I wanted to say so many things at that moment! The little girl’s question opened up so many possible answers! However, I only replied that I was afraid of hurting my feet. Lia smiled, seeming to think the reported fear was silly. The girl switched the subject, she knew that I was one of the people cooking during the trip, and she brought me the recipe for the soup her mum used to make. A very good soup, according to Lia. Fuelled by the generosity of that meeting, I wrote my first entry: “Memory and narrator – Memories of home and the typological domain”.

Lia spoke about the typological continuum with extreme naturalness; as she recounted her memories of a “very good soup”, orality and writing presented themselves as discursive practices that do not compete, on the contrary, they complement each other. I could write the recipe here, but I would be leaving out all the other information that Lia’s body gave me. I prayed for Lia. Schools have focussed their studies especially on written productions, paying little or no attention to orality. Children are silenced, because in most of our schools, writing still takes precedence over speaking. During the schooling process, many students lose the fluidity of ideas, the speed of production and the control of communication. Literacy is just one arm of learning; it should be a facilitator, not a communicative brake.

The conversation ended due to a swim in the river. I continued savouring the soup of words, gestures, looks and smiles. The last twenty years of my life I have shared with children from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo – social projects; schools; shelters; churches. Lia’s life did not correspond to the reality of most of the children I interacted with. The reality of a poor, peripheral student can be cruel. On the way to the

12. Maria Madalena Correia do Nascimento, known as Lia de Itamaracá, is a Brazilian *ciranda* dancer, composer and singer. She is considered Brazil’s most famous *cirandeira*. (wikipedia - https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lia_de_Itamarac%C3%A1). (TN)

sertão [backlands] of Piauí, I met children bursting with life and carrying many complaints about school life.

The word school comes from the Greek *scholé* and means ‘place of leisure’. In Ancient Greece, those who had money and free time would gather at school to think and reflect on life. In Brazil, a series of words and expressions used in the school world make me feel strange: homework; a lesson; discipline; the curriculum; syllabuses. Leisure and reflection are not officially on the syllabus; just as there are not the bond, the encounter and life. Talking about home economics, family planning and profession is not reflecting on life. Nothing is more limiting than training an individual to fulfil a role in society.

Childhood should be the place of possibilities. Our society is so sick that adults fill all children’s free time with extracurricular activities. A girl who likes to dance is automatically enrolled in a dance class. From then on, the movements take on a name and a pattern of execution. She just wanted to dance, now she has to fulfil the school timetable and take part in dance shows that were not in her plans. The idea of putting a person’s tastes and abilities to good use all the time is extremely violent. Just as it is violent to sit someone down for four and a half hours, five times a week, to listen, copy and reproduce what has been heard and written down.

JANAÍNA

ON THE ROAD

After six days of travelling, we stopped on the road on our way to Teresina, in the state of Piauí, to have breakfast. Behind the counter of the snack bar, Janaína’s round eyes sparkled at the sight of so many people getting off a colourful bus. The daughter of the establishment’s owner, the 12-year-old girl, came up with a strategy to ask who we were and what we were doing there. I told her about Wiphala, said I was a teacher and we started talking about school.

“It’s hot, there’s no door and it doesn’t have enough teachers.”
Janaína was adamant.

There were so many complaints that we started talking about possibilities. It was not her responsibility, but leaving her in disenchantment was very uncomfortable. We took pen and paper and wrote down: rights, possibilities and dreams. A powerful figure emerged before me. Janaína is the very creative force itself and a creator. I let her speak, because she knew more about things than I did. I kept quiet in front of her. I saw the girl’s father proud of his daughter.

Another master I meet along the way, Janaína. She lives in the time of myth, she does not yet have the anguish of certainty. This makes her alive, so alive that it thrills me. There was a deep memory in her, formed by her ancestors. A memory that was not in books, but lay dormant under the skin of a collective subject. At just 12 years old, she lectures about what school should be like in her region and anywhere else like her town. About her school, she considers:

“The school isn’t good for the students. There are teachers missing. It’s very hot. School meals are biscuits and juice. Will any good students come out of there?”

*If it is in the field of education that you
begin to fabricate the subject, to build
the person, what kind of people are our
schools intend to educate?*

Ailton Krenak

The schools on the outskirts of Brazil are very similar in their lack of structure and share very fundamental difficulties. No child deserves to be forced to spend hours in the heat, waiting for a teacher who will not arrive and eating snacks or meals that no politician would eat (and it could get worse: Brazil could have a deficit of 235,000 teachers in basic education by 2040, according to the Semesp Institute). Nobody needs to travel 7,000 kilometres to find a classroom without decent facilities for children and teachers. You do not have to go far, just put

your feet on the ground of a real school to see how much we still need to do for our children.

Sparkling schools made for a handful of people with the same socio-economic characteristics are not real. They are model schools, dream schools for educators and children. Many educators and teachers who produce materials or write about education have no set foot in real schools for years, or never have. It is important to dream of an education model, but it is in daily practice, with well-established links, that the possibility of building change lies. Janaína represents the socially vulnerable children I have met: children who have been emotionally wounded, including by the neglect of the state, and who are trying to regain confidence in themselves in order to fulfil their dreams.

NOEMILLY E NAEMILLY

LET'S DANCE?

At almost midday, the sun was shining so brightly that I was startled. I was in the town of Altos do Piauí; 26 kilometres away, the caravan's camp was set up. That day, I woke up before the sun and took the only bus from the countryside to the city. It was Saturday, market day at the central market. On Saturdays, local producers gather at the market to sell a bit of everything. I arrived early, before the high street shops opened. I went straight to the market. I watched life wake up in the city, while I ate *pastel* [fried pastry] and drank sugar cane juice. That day, I walked from shop to shop to find out about life and the locals. I had ice cream and returned to the church square, where I would catch the bus back to the camp.

Noemilly and Naemilly were waiting for the same bus as me.

"I saw you," said Noemilly.

"I saw you too," said Naemilly.

They explained that they saw me early in the morning on the same bus as them.

I did not see them because they were very small, and when I got on the bus, they were already sitting with their mum and grandma. Noemilly Maria presents herself full of solemnity:

“N; o; e; m; i; l; l; y. Noemilly Maria is my name.”

I have never met so many spelling children!

“My sister’s name is Naemilly Cristina. We live in Retiro, in the town of Altos, Piauí.”

I respond to the solemnity of the contact by mentioning my name and where I am from. I explain that I am spending my holidays in Altos. I give Mrs Francisca and Mr Assis’ house as a reference. They run to their mum and tell her the news. They come back, repeat a few times that they liked my hair, that they did not know what to name it, but that it was very beautiful.

I explain *dreads* to them. I show them photos of other people with the same hairstyle on my mobile phone. They got chatting about things in the city. I asked about the school and the conversation ended. The girls had performed typical Piauí dances at the school party. Without much explanation, the show came on. They started dancing. I sat down, leaving the upper part of the pavement for the duo. They sang and danced two complete songs. Not knowing how to return the gift, I stood up to give them a standing ovation. Then they took me by the hand. We formed a circle. Noemilly said it was preparation for “Balandê Baião” and “Cavalo Píancó”¹³. At first, I did not understand what they were saying, but I tried to pick up the choreography straight away. The next thing I knew, I was singing, dancing and trotting like a lame horse. I said:

“Lame horse.”

They replied:

“Píancó.”¹⁴

Our bodies understood each other. Noemilly co-ordinated all the choreography with her eyes. Six years old and a lot of memory in her body. She behaved like an old *jongueira* and led the circle with the chants. The first verse was Noemilly’s; Naemilly and I were the chorus. Everything was there: the circle; the fire; the prayer; the force of life.

13. The Balandê Baião and the Cavalo Píancó are centuries-old dances that keep African traditions alive in Piauí. The first record of the dances is from 1887, in the work of the writer Jonas Batista.

14. *Píancó* means ‘lame’; the basic movement of the dance simulates the trot of a lame horse.

Piancó horse

*Now my horse is Piancó
Now my horse is Piancó
Now my horse is piancó
Beautiful for loitering
Mate swap the pair
He runs and stomps his foot
He runs and stomps his foot
He'll end up in the canindé
He'll end up in the canindé¹⁵*

I do not know how long we spent dancing in the middle of the street in the city centre of Altos. Under the almost midday sun, we danced until the bus arrived. Time is a physical quantity considered to be one of the dimensions of the universe. My universe was expanded by those little sisters. They were only 6 and 4 years old, but they were carrying a constellation of beings inside and out. The *balandê* made me spin on my own axis. Sunny. I was moving the air around me and expanding. My body's memory was activated. My little masters smiled and sang louder. "*Ajádi agbón li o nsoro si*" is a Yoruba proverb that I have tattooed on my arm. It means 'the dam has been breached'. The first time I felt the walls that contained me shake, the sisters were not born. At the time, so much water was dammed up in me that a lot was swept away by the dam breaking. Noemilly and Naemilly brought me the sensation of a new breach. The bus arrived.

"I'm going to sit with you," said one and then the other.

Before I took my seat, I asked if I had danced well. In reply, I heard:

"Yeah... you have. But it had to be without boots, with your feet on the ground."

I returned to rural Altos, and the first thing I did was put my boots away. The Earth was calling me. I climbed up a forest track to watch the

15. Canindé is a Brazilian river that flows through the state of Piauí.

sun go down. Along the way, there were tucum¹⁶ thorns, lots of loose stones and scorpions. But I was determined to walk with my feet on the ground. Even though I knew I would come back in the dark of night, I trusted on Earth. As I was shoeless, I stepped softly on the ground, feeling that a new way of being in the world and at school emerged. I climbed down from the viewpoint where I watched the sun go down and went to the edge of the campfire.

Some musicians played and sang in the circle. I danced with my feet on the ground for hours, spinning into the night away. *Ciranda*, *coco* and *cavalo piancó*. The child I was arose in front of the flames, to the sound of the drums, wanting to play with the night. I made sure she played in peace. In peace I said goodbye to the circle and went to sleep in my tent.

The next morning, I dismantled the tent and set up camp. It was time to go home. A farewell circle was called on the morning of the last day.

Lia took part in the farewell circle with her father. She asked me if I was going to stay in São Paulo like her. I replied:

“I won’t stay in São Paulo. I’ll go back to my house. I live in Rio.”¹⁷

Lia looked me in the eye and asked:

“Deep down?”

At first, I did not understand the question. Then... I considered the possibility.

16. Tucum is a palm tree which grows in dense clumps. (TN)

17. *Rio* means “river”. The sentence is a reduction of “I live in the city of Rio de Janeiro”, but could also be heard as “I live in a river”.



Site Caravana: <https://www.caravanaarcoiris.org/> Instagram: [@caravanaarcoiris](https://www.instagram.com/caravanaarcoiris)

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18. The term *brincante* [playful] refers to a person who is dedicated to cultural and artistic activities, often linked to popular traditions such as dances, music, street theater, and other forms of cultural expression.

TRANSLATION
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The editorial production work of the Selvagem Notebooks is carried out collectively with the Selvagem community. The editorial coordination is by Alice Faria and the design by Tania Grillo. The editorial coordinator of English translations is Marina Matheus. Thanks to Samia Rios for proofreading this booklet.

More information at selvagemciclo.com.br

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