

A Musician “Son of People of Color”: Nationalist Writings on José Maurício Nunes Garcia in the Pages of the Magazine *Ilustração Musical* (1930)

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the tributes to Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia in the pages of the magazine *Ilustração Musical* (1930), published on the centenary of his death. The research focuses on understanding how twentieth-century nationalist intellectuals approached the biography of the Afro-descendant priest and the dynamics of ethnic-racial relations. It highlights the magazine's role in disseminating a narrative that, while valuing the musician's career, omitted or softened racial issues. The study problematizes representations of José Maurício as a symbol of national culture and reveals the complex intersections between art, religion, social class, and race. By interpreting these narratives, the article seeks to contribute to a critical understanding of the history of music education in Brazil.

Keywords: José Maurício Nunes Garcia; musical nationalism; ethno-racial relations; modernism; whiteness.

Introduction

The present study concentrates on the tributes paid to Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia (1767-1830) in the centenary of his death. The aforementioned tributes, which were presented in the form of articles, were authored by Brazilian artists and intellectuals for a special edition of the magazine *Ilustração Musical*, issue no. 3, Year I, published in October 1930. Under the direction of musician Oscar Lorenzo Fernández (1897-1948), the periodical functioned as a pivotal medium of communication, particularly by establishing connections between nationalist artists and intellectuals and those who engaged with musical culture and were, to some extent, involved in educational activities and performing spaces across various regions of Brazil.

The initial encounter with several issues of *Ilustração Musical* transpired through the archives of the Centro de Memória do Instituto de Educação do Rio de Janeiro (Memory

Center of the Supporting Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro), which is situated within the Higher Institute of Education of Rio de Janeiro. However, the central issue for this study was later located in the Lorenzo Fernández Collection, part of the archive of the Library of the *Conservatório Brasileiro de Música* (Brazilian Conservatory of Music), an institution founded in 1934 by a group of musicians led by the aforementioned composer. The Lorenzo Fernández Collection, which houses all issues of the periodical, was meticulously compiled into a single booklet, reflecting the institution’s commitment – based in the city of Rio de Janeiro – to preserving the integrity of this print material, which circulated in institutions devoted to music during the third decade of the twentieth century.¹

In the context of *Ilustração Musical*, it is imperative to underscore the principles espoused by composer and poet Oscar Lorenzo Fernández. His artistic trajectory is inextricably intertwined with the nationalist and modernist movements. As the creator and director of the magazine, he authored the editorials for each issue, frequently underscoring the significance of patriotism and musical culture in the formation of national identity, as well as the pivotal role of civility in the nexus between art and nationalism. This commitment is further underscored by the magazine’s stated mission, articulated on the inaugural page, which declared its objective to be “exclusivamente informativa e educadora.” (Fernández, 1930, p. 1).

The issue of *Ilustração Musical* dedicated to José Maurício Nunes Garcia (hereafter referred to as José Maurício) was exclusively authored by men who were neither Black nor identified as mixed-race. Consequently, these contributors presented their understandings and worldviews through the lens of whiteness, defined as “the ethno-racial belonging attributed to white individuals, [...] with the power to classify others as non-white” (Müller; Cardoso, 2017, p. 13). These theorists entered the artistic and intellectual milieu of the twentieth century, particularly following the Modern Art Week of 1922, and in their writings, they reaffirmed the racial identity of the religious musician by referring to him as mixed-race, mulatto, light-skinned mulatto, or as a person of color.

From this vantage point, the artists’ approaches diverged: some elected to omit the mention of race altogether, while others alluded to it without addressing the hardships of social inequality. One contributor offered reflections on the suffering of Black individuals, albeit framing it as a reality that is now consigned to the past. In 1930, a century after the artist’s demise, these white nationalist intellectuals produced and disseminated reflections on the life of a descendant of Africans enslaved in Brazil. Their approach, while superficially addressing or ignoring the intersections of race, class, and religion from the nineteenth century, ultimately shaped the discourse surrounding the artist and the subject of their work.

¹ The pagination of bibliographic references from the texts of *Ilustração Musical* cited in this article was based on a comprehensive compilation of all issues consulted in the collection of the Library of the Brazilian Conservatory of Music, which is located at Avenida Graça Aranha, 57 – Centro, Rio de Janeiro – RJ.

It is understood that these hemerographic sources reflect both convergent interests and tensions within the dynamics of ethno-racial relations among this group of intellectuals. The target audience of these materials, which includes teachers, students, and amateur concertgoers, engaged with musical culture as a means of enriching their education. According to Silva and Nascimento (2019), this social group, engaged with the arts in schools specializing in music education, composed both the audiences and the artists in theaters during the early decades of the twentieth century and was predominantly white. Specifically, regarding the Modern Art Week, Cardoso (2022, p. 17) asserts that the prevailing myths of that era – which have persisted to the present – include the notions that “the modernist movement rediscovered the deep Brazil,” that it rescued “Blackness from erasure,” and that Brazilian modernism would signify a return to the origins of the colonial period.

In light of the aforementioned context, the documentary corpus of this research was analyzed based on the following guiding question: In 1930, how did nationalist modernist thinkers and artists, who belonged to a predominantly white intellectual elite, approach the biography of the Afro-descendant musician and religious figure José Maurício Nunes Garcia in the pages of *Ilustração Musical*? This inquiry aims to elucidate how racial issues were addressed – or omitted – by these intellectuals when discussing the trajectory of an important Afro-descendant artist and his relationship with the Church, in a context marked by ethno-racial hierarchies.

To respond to the proposed question, this article aims to examine the narratives of nationalist intellectuals from the early twentieth century regarding the biography of José Maurício Nunes Garcia, with attention to the partialities of whiteness. The analysis will center on how these writers interpreted and disseminated the trajectory of an artist descended from enslaved Black people in Brazil, whose entry into the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century occurred through music.

The present study explores the narratives found in *Ilustração Musical* to highlight the contributions of composers to colonial Brazilian music. Moreover, it seeks to understand the racial, social, and religious perspectives that shaped the image of the Black musician within nationalist culture in the twentieth century. This analysis is pertinent because it can unveil the intricate intersections that permeate the artist’s trajectory – often disregarded, diminished, or even silenced – thus facilitating a reflection on the voices that have been historically marginalized in the History of Music Education in Brazil.

To provide a comprehensive analysis that integrates the interplay between documentary corpus, conceptual frameworks, and historiography, the article is structured into three sections. The initial section delves into aspects of *Ilustração Musical*, encompassing its institutional affiliations, editorial identity, scope, and dissemination among associations, schools, societies, institutes, and music conservatories. The second section examines how twentieth-century

modernist nationalists shaped the figure of Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia, in light of his condition as a Brazilian of enslaved ancestry and in a situation of poverty. The third and equally significant section presents reflections on the intellectual contributors’ conceptions regarding this Black Brazilian subject’s navigation between the sacred and the profane.

***Ilustração Musical* Magazine: Circulation and Dissemination of Nationalist Culture**

The *Ilustração Musical* magazine, an educational print publication with a focus on music, necessitates a distinctive approach when addressing José Maurício Nunes Garcia, given that its concepts of production, circulation, and consumption adhere to particular flows and directions. Drawing upon the conceptual framework proposed by Catani (2013), it is evident that the magazines disseminated within educational institutions serve as conduits for the expression of intellectual aspirations of the era, articulated through the medium of language. The ideas disseminated in these publications serve as a repository of knowledge deemed relevant and useful for historical research. Consequently, these publications serve as invaluable records for the study of Music Education in Brazil, as they facilitate access to the content that was accessed and discussed in institutions dedicated to education and culture.

The utilization of specialized periodicals facilitates the identification of substantial narratives from societal members and scholars of a particular era – in this instance, the early decades of the twentieth century. Consequently, the pages of *Ilustração Musical* stand as contemporary witnesses to the conceptualizations of a specific era, and in the past, functioned as cultural and ideological mediators between intellectuals and their audience. The magazines reflect the views of their editors and contributors, thereby enabling the recognition and identification of the inclinations of this group of nationalist thinkers, as well as facilitating a deeper understanding of their internal logics and operations. Consequently, interpreting how these thinkers wrote about the biographee – a Black religious figure who resided in colonial Brazil – not only elucidates their worldview but also contextualizes their place in the world.

Concerning circulation, it is imperative to emphasize that, as indicated on the back cover of the issue dedicated to the religious musician (see Figure 1), the publication was, at the time, the official organ of several educational and cultural institutions. Given the established relationship between the magazine and these entities, it is hypothesized that the publication circulated among students and teachers, as well as among attendees of concerts and recitals held in auditoriums, theaters, and concert halls of institutions such as the Brazilian Music Association, the Figueiredo School of Music, the Arcangelo Corelli School and Society of Rio de Janeiro, the Institute of Music of Bahia, and the Carlos Gomes Institute of Belém.

Figure 1 shows the masthead of *Ilustração Musical*, Year I, n. 3, published in October 1930.

ILUSTRAÇÃO MUSICAL

REVISTA MENSAL DE CULTURA E INFORMAÇÕES MUSICAES

Director: **PROF. O. LORENZO FERNANDEZ** (do I. N. M.) Redactor-chefe: **DR. AUGUSTO F. LOPES GONSALVES**
 Redactores: **Dr. Andrade Muricy, Prof. Luiz Heitor e Prof. Octavio Bevilacqua** (do I. N. M.)

ORGÃO OFFICIAL DE: Associação Brasileira de Musica, Escola de Musica Figueiredo, Escola e Gremio Arcangelo Corelli, do Rio de Janeiro — Instituto Carlos Gomes, de Belem.

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Ilustradores: Carlos Oswald e Correia Dias.
Collaborador photographico: Nicolás.

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RECIFE: Dr. Arcenio Meira, Dr. Waldemar de Oliveira.

MACEIÓ: Dr. Diégues Junior, Prof. L. Lavenère.

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 ESTRANGEIRO — 6 meses, registrado, \$2.50 dollars; um anno, registrado, 4.75 dollars.

Figure 1 – Masthead of *Ilustração Musical*, Year I, n. 3, published in October 1930 (source: Lorenzo Fernández Collection, Library of the Brazilian Conservatory of Music)

To broadly disseminate artistic culture, the publication established correspondents in institutions located in significant cities across various Brazilian regions, as well as in numerous parts of the Americas and Europe. The masthead indicates that *Ilustração Musical* was not limited to contributions from residents of the capital of the Republic; it also included participation from collaborators across different Brazilian states and benefited from individuals in countries such as Spain, France, and Italy. This international collaboration extended to representatives of musical scenes from American countries, including Argentina, Chile, Cuba, the United States,

Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru. Despite this, the texts regarding José Maurício were written exclusively by Brazilians, as contributions from foreigners focused on other subjects.

In this extensive and institutionally diverse geographic context, *Ilustração Musical*, with national circulation and international reach, emphasized the tribute to the religious musician amid actions and reflections on the culture and history of his artistic expression. The pages of this publication were marked by a nationalist perspective. Consequently, from this perspective, the priest, who experienced the transition from colonial Brazil to independence from Portugal in the 19th century, is repositioned within the republican context of the 20th century.

The cover of issue number 3 of *Ilustração Musical* (Year I) features a woodcut by Fernando Correia Dias (1892-1935) of the portrait of Brazilian musician José Maurício Nunes Garcia. The issue also includes an editorial by Oscar Lorenzo Fernández, entitled “Regarding a Centenary.” In this piece, Fernández (1930a, p. 73) pays tribute to José Maurício, highlighting the immense significance of his contributions to Brazilian music. The publication also includes texts from other contributors, with laudatory as well as more critical viewpoints. These include “The Death of José Maurício,” a text by the sociologist and folklorist Manuel Baltazar Diégues Junior (1912-1953); a musicological investigation by Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo (1905-1992) titled “The Religious Spirit in the Work of José Maurício”; and a study by modernist Mário Raul de Morais Andrade (1893-1945) titled “The Modinha of José Maurício.”

In addition to the cover, editorial, and articles, this issue provides a catalog of works composed by José Maurício, which was compiled by Guilherme de Mello (1867-1932). The catalog details the repertoire available at the library of the Instituto Nacional de Música, which is now preserved at the Biblioteca do Instituto Nacional de Música at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The issue also includes the score for *Ingemisco*, a piece for voice accompanied by organ, harmonium, and piano from the Requiem composed by José Maurício. The piece features analyses and commentaries by Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920), who Pacheco (2023) considers a precursor of Brazilian musical nationalism.

The preponderance of Brazilian intellectuals’ contributions regarding José Maurício indicates the magazine’s endeavor to establish a nexus between the nationalist perspective of authors and the musical culture of colonial Brazil in the 19th century. By emphasizing the life of José Maurício through these narratives, the periodical appears to have sought to contribute to the construction of a discourse that values Brazil’s cultural heritage, reinforcing national identity within a republican framework. Consequently, the magazine did not merely function as an ideologically neutral conduit between music producers and consumers; rather, it catalyzed the development and popularization of nationalist culture, a phenomenon that was particularly pronounced during the early decades of the 20th century.

Researchers generally concur that nationalism, in its various forms, is an artificial construct. It “derives from culture, history, and customs, values that can encompass an entire

political territory and, above all, its populations” (Schwarcz, 2024, p. 273). Building upon Hobsbawm’s (2012) observations, Schwarcz also cautions against the potential dangers associated with nationalism, as it often conceals, under a guise of pacification, attitudes that permit the naturalization of differences and the covert perpetuation of violence. In light of these concerns, is it imperative to examine how ethnic, racial, economic, and social issues are addressed by a group of white nationalist intellectuals in *Ilustração Musical*?

Biography of a Poor Black Man

In the context of tributes paid to the religious musician born in the 18th century, he is celebrated as the “first superior Brazilian musician” (Fernández, 1930a, p. 73). Oscar Lorenzo Fernández substantiated this designation by contending that José Maurício Nunes Garcia stood as the sole composer who exhibited concurrent mastery in both sacred and secular Brazilian music. Garcia was distinguished by his erudition and prominence during a tumultuous era, characterized by Brazil’s transition from a colony to an independent nation in the 19th century. In essence, the director of the aforementioned magazine, which circulated throughout different regions of the country, conceptualized the priest as a remarkable symbol of that era. Moreover, he underscored the significance of Garcia’s oeuvre, asserting that it offers invaluable insights to musicologists, elucidating the artistic and historical milieu that gave rise to the formation of national identity. This seminal work, as highlighted by Fernández, enhances our understanding of sacred art from that era, particularly within the context of Garcia’s multifaceted role as a figure who moved between salons and churches.

Lorenzo Fernández, a nationalist musician who taught at what was then the Escola Nacional de Música – currently the Escola de Música da UFRJ – hoped the centenary of Father José Maurício’s death would awaken historical awareness within the musical education institutions of republican Brazil. Fernández articulated his aspiration that the nation’s citizens would acknowledge the “intelligence and artistry of the nation’s greats,” exemplified by the priest, who stood as a remarkable exception during a period characterized by the predominance of popular songs and religious works devoid of originality (Fernández, 1930a, p. 73). It is noteworthy that the founder of *Ilustração Musical* was the sole author in the magazine who refrained from addressing racial and social issues when discussing the black musician’s movement between the sacred and secular realms in the commemorative edition.

Accordingly, Fernández’s decision to omit the musician’s ethnicity and economic constraints aligns with the prevailing nationalist cultural consolidation ideals that characterized the first half of the 20th century. According to Vaccari (2020), nationalists deemed it imperative to select artists who embodied a “Brazilian-ness” still in the process of formation. In their efforts to monumentalize the nation’s musical heritage, intellectuals specializing in musicology have

underscored the seminal contributions of figures such as Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia from the colonial period and Antônio Carlos Gomes (1836-1896) from the imperial era.

Fernández’s text, while focusing exclusively on technical proficiency, musical characteristics, and aesthetic quality, disregarded or omitted the racial complexities experienced by the Black composer. This oversight served to perpetuate the nationalist tendency toward racial neutrality in Brazilian music during the early decades of the 20th century. Consequently, “the historical ‘whitening’ experienced by Afro-descendant figures became especially apparent at the peak of Nationalism, following the Modern Art Week of 1922” (Vaccari, 2020, p. 82).

A social scientist and folklorist from Alagoas, Manuel Baltazar Pereira Diégues Júnior (1852–1922), highlighted in *Ilustração Musical* the undervaluation of Brazilians regarding 19th-century artistic works and the scarce resources available to José Maurício. Diégues Júnior observed that the Brazilian public was unacquainted with the merits of this figure, a value that was further enhanced by the fact that he was self-made (Diégues Júnior, 1930, p. 74).

Although Diégues Júnior did not overtly address the priest’s race, he made three notable references in the article to the musician’s ownership of a Black individual who was enslaved. These references introduce racial complexities that cannot be disregarded, reflecting a broader tendency toward whitening.

Addressing the priest’s lack of recognition, Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo reinforced the narrative, stating that those who ignored José Maurício Nunes Garcia in the 19th century did so from lack of access to art, thus “did not sufficiently know his work, [as] he does not represent merely the modest efforts of a colonial artist” (Azevedo, 1930, p. 5).

In contrast to Fernández and Diégues Júnior, Azevedo openly discussed the condition of black musicians in 19th-century Brazil, affirming that José Maurício had a humble background: “His parents were of mixed race; his grandparents had been enslaved. He himself was a light-skinned mulatto. And very poor” (Azevedo, 1930, p. 77). Azevedo further elucidated the challenges faced by the composer, citing the lingering effects of racial prejudice stemming from slavery and the pervasive influence of European colonial thought in 19th-century Brazil, which stood in contrast to the nationalist modernist cultural milieu that emerged in the 20th century.

Azevedo underscored the hardships of historical racism as past realities. Azevedo’s analysis underscores the distinct characteristics of 19th-century racism compared to that of the 20th century. The evolution of racism into more subtle forms of inequality, prejudice, and discrimination, marked by denial and the illusion of irrelevance, enabled its perpetuation without the explicit structures of slavery. Azevedo’s analysis draws upon the works of the Brazilian polymath Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987), who examined artistic expressions from a cultural perspective, frequently overlooking considerations of white supremacy and racial issues affecting black and indigenous populations.

It is important to note that Gilberto Freyre, the intellectual mentor of Azevedo, advocated for the idea of racial democracy. His perspective emphasized racial mixing as a means to overcome the prevailing racist ideologies. Freyre addressed miscegenation as an essential tool of European colonization, asserting that Portuguese settlers, through relationships with Black and Indigenous women, fostered the potential democratization of ethnic relations in Brazil – a path distinct from that taken by English settlers during the colonization of North America.

The concept of democratizing racial relations is extensively debated and considered problematic by many scholars who dispute the existence of genuine “racial democracy” in Brazil. This notion is often seen as a myth that must be deconstructed through analysis of studies about the social dynamics among the various ethnicities that shaped the nation. According to Valle (2017, pp. 163-164), this “sweetened vision of the country masks social realities and frequently obstructs efforts to combat social issues.”

The 1930 text by Mário de Andrade in *Ilustração Musical* primarily concentrates on the secular aspects of José Maurício Nunes Garcia’s compositions, particularly emphasizing his Brazilian salon modinhas. The modernist poet acknowledges the racial background of this religious figure when referring to his musical education under the Jesuits, who systematically taught music at the Santa Cruz site, educating the so-called “negrinhos” (little black boys). While describing the Black inhabitants of that location, Andrade observes that they were “a bunch of 1,500 idle slaves who wandered around enormous fields doing nothing” (Andrade, 1930, p. 85). Andrade portrays the religious musician as an exception, identifying him as the most notable product of an environment the modernist considered unproductive. Despite this portrayal, Andrade acknowledges the significant role religious institutions played in training Black musicians, of whom José Maurício Nunes Garcia represented the pinnacle of musical virtuosity during Brazil’s monarchy period.

Mário de Andrade, a key figure in Brazilian modernism, unquestionably contributed to national culture and the pursuit of Brazilian identity. However, in his writing about José Maurício Nunes Garcia in *Ilustração Musical*, particularly regarding racial issues, he reveals the inherent limitations of the white-centric project. This emerges from his depiction of the musician and his musical education as exceptional within an environment he characterized as unproductive, and from his reference to the Black inhabitants of Santa Cruz as “idle.” Therefore, even a century after the Afro-descendant musician’s death, stereotypical conceptions persisted, underestimating the contributions of Black individuals to Brazil’s cultural and economic development.

Even though modernism endeavored to underscore Brazilian national identity, Andrade’s contemplations concerning José Maurício Nunes Garcia exhibit a contradiction, stemming from his adherence to a white-centered perspective. By centering his analysis on the secular contributions of the Priest’s works, particularly the modinhas, and accentuating the virtuosity

of his compositions, Andrade, to a certain extent, effectively whitened Afro-descendant figures, whose significance was recognized only when aligning with the standards established by the cultural and economic elites of the era. In essence, the Black individuals of Santa Cruz gained visibility in the musician's biography when they met a cultural demand; those who did not align with financial or artistic interests were considered idle.

This critical stance by Mário de Andrade regarding Black labor reveals a tension between the nationalist ideal of incorporating popular cultural expressions and the persistence of latent and subtle prejudices. By treating Black musicians' production as exceptional, Andrade fails to foster broader reflection on the culture of a historically marginalized group, instead reproducing conceptions of economic productivity and injustice that he should challenge.

It is noted that Lorenzo Fernández did not address social and racial issues, while Diégues Júnior mentioned the musician's poverty and the fact that he owned an enslaved Black individual, without specifying the musician's skin color. In contrast, musicologist Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo, in *Ilustração Musical*, describes the religious figure as a poor, light-skinned mulatto, connecting his ancestry to profound social inequalities resulting from centuries of slavery in Brazil, a process he considered largely overcome in the Republic. Mário de Andrade, in turn, included the honored musician among a group he called "negrinhos" (little Black boys), numbering 1,500 Black individuals whom he described as idle. This analysis cannot be dissociated from the context in which white intellectuals addressed the musician's biography without critically examining slavery in 19th-century Brazil, a perspective observable in *Ilustração Musical* in the early decades of the 20th century.

In this logic, it is essential to recall Cida Bento's (2022) considerations on the "pact of whiteness," highlighting how, in societies historically marked by European colonialism and structural racism, being white offers a broad range of perspectives on Black people. This occurs because individuals identified as white integrate into whiteness in various ways, depending on gender, sexuality, education, class, religion, age, and nationality. Therefore, reflections on the biases of whiteness are necessary, justifying the plural use of the term "whitenesses," even among a single group of nationalist intellectuals.

The color of his parents, their relationship with slavery, and descriptions of the artist as a light-skinned mulatto, mixed-race, or omitting his skin color, reveal complex racial dynamics in Brazilian society, evident during Portuguese colonialism in the 19th century, the Empire, and persisting through the Republic of the 20th century.

In this context, as noted by Bento (2022), categorizing individuals as mixed-race was influenced not only by non-European parentage but also by their experience of the harsh realities of slavery – an intersectionality that appears in the magazine merely as a vague, almost invisible backdrop or as something from the past.

Additionally, mulattos frequently resulted from relationships that did not adhere to the marital legal standards of the period. As Pessoa (2007, p. 16) highlights, “Generally, they had no privileges, rights, or legitimate power to demand legal acknowledgment from their progenitors as fathers.” In José Maurício’s case, orphaned by his father at a very young age, his scarce resources came from his mother’s work as a seamstress and cook. Within this scenario, the musician – who later became inspector of the royal chapel of King João VI – shared similarities with many popular musicians of the 19th century.

These musicians largely depended on resources provided by women’s labor. In *Ilustração Musical*, Luiz Heitor emphasized that José Maurício Nunes Garcia, “fatherless since the age of six, pursued his initial studies thanks to the efforts of two remarkably courageous women who invested all their love, pride, and limited resources in him: his mother and his aunt” (Azevedo, 1930, p. 75). Such emotional and financial female support was a common reality among many Black musicians of the 19th century, who depended entirely on solidarity and labor networks established by their mothers and other female relatives to overcome challenges imposed by a racially delineated society dominated by whiteness.

Among freed individuals in the 1800s, mothers’ income from sewing and cooking played a critical role in social advancement by challenging a system that jeopardized survival and perpetuated racial inequalities. These professions thus became essential factors, embodying knowledge, expertise, and learning passed down through generations of women. Silva (2024) emphasizes this by discussing the significance of these occupations in the daily lives of the mothers of Black musicians from 19th-century Rio de Janeiro, amidst the economic, social, administrative, and urban processes shaping that era.

When intellectuals address the biography of José Maurício Nunes Garcia, they highlight his status as an orphaned Afro-descendant, mirroring the experiences of many popular Black musicians of his time. Hence, narratives constructed in *Ilustração Musical* from a nationalist perspective present the honored musician as a symbol of a more homogenous and simplified cultural past, neglecting adequate contrasts with the realities of non-poor white children. This approach promoted the construction of a unified national identity at the expense of ethnic-racial, historical, and cultural diversity. However, it raises an essential question within the religious context: how did 20th-century intellectuals address the figure of the Afro-descendant musician regarding his navigation between the sacred and the profane in the 19th century?

A Priest Between Sacred and Profane

In the special issue of *Ilustração Musical*, excerpts frequently highlight José Maurício Nunes Garcia’s tension between ecclesiastical belonging and his journey across sacred and profane realms. The magazine reports that the black musician began his musical education

under precarious conditions in the 18th century, sustained by his efforts, a supportive network of women – as previously mentioned – and guidance from a priest devoted to music.

Azevedo (1930, p. 5) underscores that “José Maurício sought to gather all general knowledge necessary for building a solid culture.” His relationship with the Catholic Church consolidated at age 23 when he became a priest, seeing religious life as an opportunity for his musical career. Additionally, the author emphasizes that due to his racial background, José Maurício chose priesthood to access the protection offered by clerical attire, driven mainly by racial prejudice and financial hardship. According to Azevedo, this decision benefited Brazilian music significantly, as religious life led José Maurício to become the music inspector of the Royal Chapel with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil.

Azevedo’s words (1930) were not critical of the composer’s devotional life, suggesting instead that choosing priesthood was a courageous response to life’s challenges, not a retreat into monastic solitude. It was not vocation or desire for devotional life but circumstantial interests that guided his decision. Moreover, ordination allowed José Maurício greater social prestige, overcoming his humble origins, as “the cassock substitutes age, birth, wealth, and knowledge. Furthermore, priesthood suits him due to the possibilities it offers to his art” (1930, p. 5).

However, despite religious recognition, José Maurício received no Church support in his final days. Diégues Júnior (1930, p. 75) sociologically noted that “the man surely died isolated, having only a son and a slave as friends. Forgotten by the city he once amazed with his genius, José Maurício Nunes Garcia passed away.” This reflects a reality familiar in the 19th century, yet possibly perplexing to professional or aspiring musicians reading the magazine in the 1930s: a priest fathering a child and an Afro-descendant owning an enslaved person.

Just as it occurred with José Maurício Nunes Garcia upon having a child, marriages and fatherhood experienced by other priests throughout the centuries were viewed as transgressive, profane, and sinful relationships. This perception must be analyzed considering the clergy’s function, the prevailing legislation, and the role of royal and ecclesiastical authorities. In the case of the Brazilian priest, it is essential to acknowledge that the increased recognition of priests’ children in the 18th and 19th centuries was associated with a document signed by Father Diogo Antônio Feijó (1784-1843). As a deputy and clergyman, Feijó argued in Brazil’s General Assembly that the illegitimate children of priests of any nature would inherit their fathers’ assets if they had no legitimate heirs (Feijó, 1828), enabling many priests to officially acknowledge their descendants.

However, there were strong and divergent reactions to this stance, intensifying the contentious debate over celibacy. Nineteenth-century documents contain arguments highlighting that “the imposition and obligation of celibacy contradict the needs of human nature, justifying the transgressions committed by some clergymen. Eager for change, Father Feijó raised fundamental questions that persist to this day” (Nolasco, 2022, p. 28). To support

his position in 1828, Feijó invoked medieval tradition and argued against the sustainability of celibacy's apostolic condition. Nonetheless, his objections did not prevail, and the requirement of celibacy remains in force in Brazil today.

Besides Diégues Júnior highlighting José Maurício's fatherhood, Andrade (1930, p. 80), in the article "A modinha de José Maurício", emphasizes the composer's musical activities beyond the religious environment. Andrade states that, "despite being a priest and a good man, he also engaged in mischief that was permissible for priests at the time." He notes that the black man sang profane romances as a child, and even after becoming a priest, though primarily dedicated to religious music, he continued composing secular pieces, including entertainments for salons, bands, and operas.

The modernist argued that, given José Maurício's involvement with both religious and secular arts, it would not be fair to judge the priest for his musical experiences. Andrade attributes this duality to the musician's exposure to a new cultural level after the Portuguese royal family arrived in the capital city. This atmosphere introduced him to secular influences, inspiring works like the opera *Beijo a mão que me condena*, published in 1837, seven years after his death.

Beyond these matters related to José Maurício's private life addressed by the publication, his intellectual production linked to religious life is understood as secondary to his music. Here, it becomes evident that art comes first, philosophical sophistication second, and spiritual fervor third. Azevedo (1930), as a musicologist, admits he was unable to access documents regarding the musician's piety or spiritual fervor, characteristics arising from his poverty. However, he references accounts by José Caetano da Silva Coutinho (1768-1833), the bishop of Rio de Janeiro, who described José Maurício as one of the most illustrious priests in his diocese, with talents extending beyond music. Nevertheless, the religious leader made no mention of José Maurício's devotion to the priesthood or the purity of his personal life.

Azevedo's analysis adds that José Maurício's elevation to Royal Preacher does not indicate excellence in religious virtues; rather, it demonstrates that he became scholarly and wise through his "unshakable determination to dedicate himself to composition. He declined the Royal Chair of Philosophy so as not to interrupt his musical career" (Azevedo, 1930, p. 76). This suggests José Maurício prioritized music over conventional professional viability and social immunities typical for an Afro-descendant priest during the 19th century.

These assertions by Azevedo (1930) are supported by documented accounts referenced in a footnote, indicating their origin in *Iconografia Brasileira*, volume XIX, a journal of the Instituto Histórico Brasileiro. According to the author, the Brazilian who became inspector of the Royal Chapel was a Royal Preacher with deep humanistic culture, a regular attendee, and speaker at scholarly conferences. He was well prepared for the life of his time, practical and energetic, with clearly defined goals of dedication to musical composition.

Indeed, among *Ilustração Musical* contributors, musicologist Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo and poet Mário Raul de Moraes Andrade were the ones who most frequently cited sources supporting their articles. This contrasts with musician Oscar Lorenzo Fernández, in the editorial, and folklorist Manuel Baltazar Pereira Diégues Júnior, who, in the text regarding the religious man’s death, did not mention documents.

Unlike the magazine’s director and the social scientist, Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo presented readers with eighteen documentary sources and eleven bibliographical and musical score references. However, this rigorous documentation is not maintained when Azevedo, writing for *Ilustração Musical*, approaches the end of the priest’s life, adopting a laudatory tone or what Bourdieu (2006) terms a “biographical illusion.” He again resorts to the words of Bishop José Caetano da Silva Coutinho, who admired the Brazilian musician’s intellectual excellence, as a generalized credential allowing narrative developments without documentary foundation. Thus, he expressed impressions as tacit considerations, suggesting that José Maurício’s philosophical sophistication was not simply the result of a mere craftsman of sounds and that, as a priest, he did not become a servant of the court.

Azevedo (1930), however, openly acknowledges academic doubt stemming from the lack of documentation for certain historical details. This absence of reminiscence is transparently communicated to *Ilustração Musical* readers, as he admits: “We have no documents clarifying José Maurício’s piety” (Azevedo, 1930, p. 76).

Notably, Azevedo wrote about José Maurício Nunes Garcia’s last days without presenting sources. In discussing the musician’s death, the musicologist emphasized the human aspects of the artist, highlighting his engagement with the secular world, as his words in *Ilustração Musical* illustrate:

In his weary, prematurely aged spirit, the depraved taste of overseas noblemen had ultimately prevailed; for them, church ceremonies served as a pretext for worldly amusements, transforming the temple into a display of ostentation, vanity, and flirtation, where they would listen to easy, sensual music, literary sermons, and fabricate love stories (Azevedo, 1930, p. 78).

There is another version of the priest’s death in *Ilustração Musical*, narrated by Diégues Júnior (1930), emphasizing José Maurício’s religious experience in his final moments. However, both Azevedo and Diégues Júnior construct their narratives similarly: neither cites consulted documentation nor other sources, following a biographical tradition that, as Bourdieu (2006) points out, tends to incorporate common-sense notions into scholarly discourse. Both authors appear to rely on empirically familiar versions when describing José Maurício’s final days, reinforcing the conventional image of a Black musician and inspector of the Royal Chapel, who lived a linear journey with a predictable beginning, middle, and end, even though their conclusions differ.

In this context, Azevedo's account of José Maurício's final moments adopts a secular perspective, closely aligned with available documentation that partially covers the composer's journey but leaves considerable gaps regarding his devotional life. In other words, he pursued a safer scholarly route. Diégues Júnior, however, presented an alternative account: narrating the priest's death as that of a religious artist whose journey concluded in an almost expected manner.

Thus, there are two distinct narratives about the death of José Maurício Nunes Garcia. On one hand, Azevedo connects the musician's last moments to a depraved and worldly taste, yet without condemning his behavior; on the other, Diégues Júnior offers a contrasting view, linking the end of the priest's life to a profound spiritual experience mediated by sacred music. These two versions not only illustrate different interpretations of the musician's life but also reflect tensions between morality and artistic creativity within Brazilian religious music.

According to Diégues Júnior (1930), the priest, aware of his impending death on April 18, 1830, asked an enslaved person to buy an image of Our Lady of Monte Serrat. Additionally, he expressed a desire to hear his composition, *Hynno de Nossa Senhora*, performed by his friend, the flutist and clarinetist Policarpo. In an almost cinematic manner, the author describes the timely arrival of the musician, whose music echoes from afar, while José Maurício, near death, sings the hymn before calmly passing away, surrounded by an enslaved person and his son. The narrative is presented almost as a divine event, though the author does not provide historical sources to substantiate these precise details. The account was published in the magazine as follows:

The priest was already speaking with some difficulty, but still managed to utter a few words: "I know I will die today. How much I wished to hear the Hymn of Our Lady once more! And Polycarpo hasn't arrived yet!" Shortly afterward, the first notes of the hymn could be heard in the distance. It was Polycarpo's clarinet. "The hymn," José Maurício said, and began to sing it. At the door, Polycarpo stopped playing, entered, and found Father José Maurício in his bedroom, calmly passing away, with the enslaved person on one side and his son on the other (Diégues Júnior, 1930, p. 74).

Despite José Maurício's extensive secular works, Diégues Júnior chose to emphasize the priest's relationship with sacred music in his final moments. This reflects an effort to portray him in a manner consistent with the image of religious devotion expected from someone who served the Catholic Church and the Royal Chapel. By doing so, the author seems to utilize narrative freedom to highlight the role of ecclesiastical music at the end of José Maurício's life, simultaneously neglecting aspects of his journey as an Afro-descendant from a poor background – although reiterating that the priest owned an enslaved person.

From this perspective, throughout *Ilustração Musical*, it becomes evident that in colonial Brazil, clerical attire was, for black musicians like José Maurício, a condition for having their works performed in religious ceremonies and accessing more sophisticated training. For the magazine's intellectuals, José Maurício's choice of priesthood was perceived less as a spiritual

necessity and more as a strategy for survival and social mobility. Therefore, the artist was not portrayed merely as a priest devoted to sacred music but as a composer navigating between the sacred and the secular, responding to the demands of his context.

On one hand, intellectuals from *Ilustração Musical* underscored the absence of documents proving José Maurício Nunes Garcia's life of sanctity or intense religious fervor. Thus, his clerical attire can be understood more as a symbol of immunity for an Afro-descendant, while also representing the Church's power exercised through discipline, institutional mechanisms controlling the body, and the conduct of its members. In other words, religious garments functioned as mechanisms of surveillance and conformity to institutional regulations, capable of conferring status and protection. As Gomes (2021, p. 121) observes, "for many black individuals, the Brazil of gold and diamonds was a colony where religious piety coexisted with the brutality of slavery," making priestly vestments a kind of shield that, to some extent, camouflaged the profane and mixed-race characteristics of black individuals within colonial society.

On the other hand, by asserting that José Maurício Nunes Garcia dedicated himself to the Church because of music, the intellectuals suggest that the musician, a son of colored people, skillfully utilized the Church's structure and prestige to achieve artistic and social ascension. With its nationalist bias, the periodical appropriates José Maurício's figure to illustrate the nation of the 20th century through the hybridity of his work and his transit between sacred and profane, projecting him as a symbol addressing the diverse musical demands of a society dominated by white people. By emphasizing this "crypto-nationalism," *Ilustração Musical* seems to have sought to shape the composer's image as someone transcending divisions between popular music and sacred art, highlighting his role in constructing a Brazilian national identity envisioned as both mestizo and unified.

Final Considerations

Upon carefully examining and re-reading the tributes to Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia, published in 1930, it became evident that the narratives crafted by nationalist artists and intellectuals around the musician reflect both the appreciation of his trajectory and the limitations and contradictions of republican Brazil in the 20th century.

In this context, the analyses conducted in this article allowed an interpretation of how thinkers and artists previously recorded the biography of an Afro-descendant and religious musician through a lens subtly shaped by whiteness. This perspective subtly ignored, minimized, or inaccurately treated prejudice and racism – issues still prominent in the 19th century – as though they had nearly vanished by the 20th century. The tribute to the composer mirrors an attempt to fit his life within a nationalist discourse that, while acknowledging his contribution to Brazilian music, frequently ignored or diluted his status as a descendant of enslaved Africans in Brazil, thus reinforcing the myth of racial democracy.

Undeniably, José Maurício's relationship with the Catholic Church was central to his artistic formation and the visibility of his compositions. The authors featured in the magazine agreed that, during the 19th century, the musician faced hardships due to limited financial resources and thus relied upon the credentials provided by the religious institution for his musical education, social mobility, and livelihood. Contributors to *Ilustração Musical* highlighted how this context, despite its challenges, enhanced his artistic production and allowed him to navigate between sacred and profane realms. Thus, beyond his connection to the sacred and charitable aspects, intellectuals emphasized the artistic demands and the racial and social implications of his engagement in this environment.

Ultimately, narratives regarding José Maurício Nunes Garcia's biography reflect biases inherent in whiteness, and the analyses in this study support plausible arguments for necessary historical reparations. Consequently, it is essential to critically question previously narrated life stories of Afro-descendant musicians, recognize their significant contributions to national culture, and especially acknowledge the ongoing challenges posed by racial issues. In other words, the racial and social intersections discussed here – sometimes highlighted, sometimes concealed – in the narratives of 20th-century nationalist intellectuals about José Maurício Nunes Garcia encourage new inquiries and foster a critical reading of the History of Music Education. This critical approach should not obscure the diversity and complexity of its protagonists, nor those who remain marginalized, demanding academic attention and investment from researchers committed to historical redress.

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