

Right to Culture & the struggle for equality: The Democratizing Power of Forró

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Abstract

Forró is a supergenre of music originating from the Northeast of Brazil. *Baião*, *xote*, *xaxado*, *arrasta-pé*, *coco*, *toada*, and the very *forró* itself are the rhythms that make it up. Its roots reveal the multimodal expression of the genre, both in rhythmic variations and in the respective ways of dancing. These roots have been officially recognized as Brazilian cultural heritage since 2021. The name *forró*, in its modern sense, refers not only to the music but also to the dance and the places where this heritage is manifested. Among its forms, the dance is the most common practice in Europe. Dozens of multiethnic communities organize autonomously and create *forró* gatherings, where dance serves as the backdrop for the enjoyment of living heritage, the realization of the right to culture, and, above all, the experience of community and social cohesion. In these cases, *forró* is not only a tool for enjoying the right to freely participate in sociocultural life and access to leisure but also a means to promote other rights, such as recognition of dignity and the reduction of distinctions between people. In this sense, the thriving *forrozeira* community in Porto (Portugal) demonstrates how this heritage remains alive in a self-sustaining way, even far from its place of origin.

Keywords

Forró, Brazilian Heritage, Sustainable Heritage, Cultural Heritage, Right to Culture.

Struggle for Equality

The advancement of scientific knowledge and the growing questioning of social structures have fueled expectations regarding the construction of a more egalitarian society. However, this equality must be expressed not only through legal means but also as a value internalized in human relationships, for without this ethical foundation, legal frameworks lose their effectiveness.

Living with diversity is an essential path toward overcoming inequality, as it enables exposure to other ways of being, thinking, and living. In this process, public spaces and in-person interactions play a fundamental role in both social and individual development.

Nonetheless, various factors have contributed to the weakening of social interactions. The accelerated pace of contemporary society, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), combined with the massive use of social media, has limited physical contact between people. During the lockdown, digital platforms became windows to the world but also raised important concerns: algorithms began reinforcing content like what users had already consumed, reducing opportunities for discovery and encounters with the unknown or with others.

According to Han (2018), information consumed outside public space — that is, privately and not collectively shared — may reduce physical distances but fails to create genuine connection (p. 91). Furthermore, algorithms tend to avoid conflict, producing a "smoothed and polished" digital environment where communication becomes merely an exchange of complacency, rather than a true dialogue (Han, 2018, p. 34). This dynamic contributes to the distancing from the “other,” which is essential for identity formation. The denial of difference fosters fear of change and acts as a reactionary force, giving rise to xenophobic and prejudiced behaviors.

Within this context, *forró* emerges as a cultural tool capable of promoting human reconnection. Due to its communal and relational nature, it is a practice that encourages physical presence, listening, sharing, and mutual recognition. Thus, *forró* contributes not only to artistic enjoyment but also to the promotion of social cohesion, strengthening community bonds and celebrating cultural diversity.

Is it “For All”?

The idea that the name *forró* derives from the English expression “for all” persists in the popular imagination. This term was supposedly used by American soldiers during their stay in *Natal, Rio Grande do Norte*, in the Second World War, or by British engineers during the construction of railway lines in the region. However, this hypothesis has been dismissed by scholars such as folklorist Luís da Câmara Cascudo (Natal, December 30, 1898 – Natal, July 30, 1986) and philologist Evanildo Bechara (Recife, February 26, 1928 – Rio de Janeiro, July 23, 2023).

Among specialists, there is a consensus that the word *forró* is actually a shortened form of *forrobodó*, a term traditionally used to describe popular dance parties, though it has also been used pejoratively to refer to noise or disorder. Even so, the exact etymological origin of the word remains uncertain. Câmara Cascudo suggests that it derives from the *Bantu* language, spoken by enslaved Africans in Brazil. Meanwhile, scholars like Bechara and Nei Lopes (Irajá, Rio de Janeiro, May 9, 1942 –) propose a possible origin in Galician, a language spoken in the region of Galicia, in northern Spain, bordering Portugal.

Interestingly, the word *forrobodó* appears in Portuguese dictionaries only as a Brazilianism, and its earliest known literary records are found in the works of a Brazilian novelist Aluísio Azevedo (São Luís, April 14, 1857 – Buenos Aires, January 21, 1913), particularly in the novels *O Homem* (1887) and *O Cortiço* (1889), where the term refers to parties with music and dance. “The historical presence of the term in Brazilian literary works reinforces its connection to the country’s popular cultural expressions.” (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional [IPHAN], 2021b)

Regardless of the word’s linguistic origin, the materiality of *forró* — that is, its practical and everyday manifestation from its roots to the present day — clearly shows that it is a popular, democratic, and inclusive festivity, marked by free expression and little normative rigidity in its performance. *Forró* is a cultural manifestation that interweaves music, dance, and regional identity, allowing for a shared and accessible experience that transcends geographic and social boundaries.

What is Forró?

To summarize *forró* as a rhythm, dance, and festival originating from the Northeast of Brazil would be to reduce it beyond its essence. *Forró* is an expression of the popular culture of one of the most racially mixed peoples in the world. Between the music, the dance, the party, or even the place where it takes place, the term *forró* works as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of activities, whose understanding crosses all these forms of manifestation.

As for the musical rhythms that make up the supergenre known as *forró*, we have: *baião*, *xote*, *arrasta-pé*, *xaxado*, *coco*, *forró*, *rojão*, and *toada*. Each of these has variations in terms of speed and time signature. The musical expression results from the mixture of African percussion with European melodies and harmonies (Dias and Dupan, 2017, p. 9).

The instruments originating from the festivals include the eight-bass accordion, *pífano*, accordion, or *rabeca* (Dias and Dupan, 2017, p. 8), in addition to the *ganzá* and *reco-reco*. Luiz Gonzaga (Exu, December 13, 1912 – Recife, August 2, 1989), the greatest exponent of *forró*, who became successful in the 1940s, defined a basic structure that, in addition to the accordion, includes the triangle and *zabumba* as necessary instruments for reproducing the songs. It is still possible to hear in recordings from the 1940s instruments such as tuba, flute, clarinet, seven-string guitar, banjo, and *cavaquinho*. In the 1950s, especially with Jackson do Pandeiro (Alagoa Grande, August 31, 1919 – Brasília, July 10, 1982), the use of the *pandeiro* (tambourine) in *forró* songs became popular. By the 1970s, double bass, guitar, and drums began to be integrated into the recordings of the 3 do Nordeste group. (Dias and Dupan, 2017)

As is common in a popular culture without pre-established rules limiting creation and stylistic variations, Dias and Dupan (2017) propose an empirically proven classification for the development of *forró*: Traditional *Forró*, MPB (*Brazilian popular music*) *Forró*, Electronic *Forró* and *Forró universitário*. Each of these variations has distinctive characteristics that we will see below.

Traditional Forró (1940s): Also known as *forró pé de serra*, it is exemplified by Luiz Gonzaga, creator of the traditional formation called *trios*, which in Portuguese means 'group of 3 people', on this case a band with 3 elements: Accordion, bass drum, and triangle (. This

kind of formation remains until today, such as *Trio Nordestino*, *3 do Nordeste*, and *Trio Forrózão*, and would later influence all other variants.

MPB Forró (1970s): Characterized using instruments like drums, electric guitar, and others that were in vogue at the time, with Alceu Valença, Geraldo Azevedo, Zé Ramalho, and Elba Ramalho being some of the big names. The album *O Grande Encontro* (Alceu Valença, Geraldo Azevedo, Zé Ramalho, and Elba Ramalho, 1996), a gathering of these four artists, synthesizes this trend of the time.

Electronic Forró (1990s): This line is marked using electronic sounds, such as synthesizers and electric guitars, as well as many artists who, in addition to music, also express themselves through dance on stage, with extravagant costumes and choreographies. Some of the exponents of this variation, which dominated the *forró* scene from the 1990s, are *Calypso*, *Mastruz com Leite*, and *Frank Aguiar*.

Forró universitário (2000s): This trend rescues the dynamics of traditional *forró*, with re-recordings of several songs from the past and the recreation of the *trios* structure, but it can also feature the use of more instruments and songs from MPB *forró*, yet with a style that refers back to *forró pé de serra*. *Falamansa*, *Circuladô de Fulô*, and *Rastapé* are some of the symbols of the time. Very popular in Southeastern Brazil, due to the large northeastern migration, the revamped traditional *forró* became successful in the national commercial circuit, creating a strong contrast to electronic *forró*. One of the major differences in *forró universitário*, besides keeping many of the original songs from *forró pé de serra*, is the prominence of dance. Performed in pairs, it was heavily influenced by *lambada* and *samba-rock*; it became the refuge of dance enthusiasts after the decline in popularity of these other rhythms. The valorization of dance in university *forró* allows, in addition to a form of enjoyment of cultural heritage through listening to music, for the heritage itself to manifest; without the need for live performances, this enables its enjoyment, something that rarely happens in environments not focused on dance, like *samba de roda*, for example.

Pisadinha (2010s): Emerging and gaining strength after the publication of Dias and Dupan (2017), *Pisadinha* (or *piseiro*) is a simplified variation of electronic *forró*, where the synthesizer creates the entire musical base while simulating other instruments, accompanied

by vocals, often performed by the same artist. *Pisadinha* saw great growth in Brazil and is currently the most active variation.

Forró like Heritage

Given the broad range of *forró* derivations, it was the traditional roots of *forró* that were officially registered as Brazilian intangible cultural heritage in December 2021 (National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage [IPHAN], 2021a), Inducted into the hall of national cultural heritage of Brazil on the same month that marks the anniversary of Luiz Gonzaga and, consequently, *Forró Day* — December 13th. The registration is the recognition of a popular culture whose earliest known records date from the early 20th century:

Moreover, we consider that the Traditional Roots of Forró have broad historical continuity and deep roots in the lives of a large portion of the Brazilian population; they are an important cultural reference for the groups that make up Brazilian society; and they demonstrate undeniable national relevance for the cultural, artistic, and musical repertoire of the country. (National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage [IPHAN], 2021a, p.19)

The recognition of this heritage, officially as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Brazil, is justified not only by its national relevance, demonstrated by the widespread practice throughout the country, but also by its deep cultural significance for various social groups. Originating in the Brazilian Northeast, *forró* spread to other regions driven by migratory movements, particularly in search of better living conditions and job opportunities, such as in the construction industry in the Central-Southern regions of Brazil, as well as due to prolonged droughts in the more arid areas. This migratory journey is reflected in the lyrics of the songs, which portray the challenges faced, the harshness of life in the hinterlands, and the experience of migration.

Finally, *forró* is marked by its historical continuity as a living heritage, constantly reinvented by the communities that preserve it and pass it down through generations — both within Brazil and abroad. (National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage [IPHAN], 2021b). It's enhances the prestige of the rhythm and its manifestations, while also demanding concrete actions from the government for its preservation. However, it is necessary that heritage be integrated into daily life so that it is not just another item in the heritage catalog.

The Right to Culture

Culture, in a broad sense, is a widely recognized right and is one of the pillars of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948): In general way the *right to social and cultural life* (Art. 22). More specifically, on Article 27 the guarantees the [...] *freely participate in the cultural life of the community* [...] (United Nations [UN], 1948).

Acting in a direction of non-pure and simple prohibition. However, it does not guarantee the material conditions for its production, maintenance, and use.

The existence of the topic of cultural life presupposes, by the signatory members, the encouragement of its fulfillment. The very heterogeneous nature of culture makes it an open subject, and in practice, from the perspective of the public authorities, it can easily be reduced to the encouragement of erudite cultural activities or those with large popular acceptance, relegating popular culture to commemorative festivals of specific dates. This not only limits the quantity but also reinforces the framing in the actor-spectator logic — which may be more comfortable but does not always reflect the dynamics of the expression in question. Popular culture can only be understood through its complex relationship with other areas of social life, work, and religiosity.

When cultural enjoyment is limited to putting participants solely in the role of spectators, various dimensions of cultural goods are lost, not only those linked to the enjoyment itself but also to the dimension of social interaction — something that is becoming increasingly rare. What we see today is a citizen who, "interpellated as a consumer, does not act as a critical, independent, and rational instance or as a source of power — they are called upon merely as an audience" (Bucci, 2021, p. 160).

When dance is taken as a focal point, it brings back the essential need for dialogue — not as a unilateral presentation centered on a stage, but as a shared experience in which each participant becomes a protagonist, not through theatrical dramatization, but by truly inhabiting the moment.

Through physical contact, we perceive in the other body its temperature, weight, texture, and form — subtle dimensions that can only be grasped in a singular and irreproducible instant. It is a sensory and symbolic experience that can only unfold fully here and now.

The *hic et nunc* is the guiding principle of this form of expression: it happens in the present moment, bound to its unique and unrepeatable nature, enveloped in its own aura, as Walter

Benjamin (2012) describes. Each movement reflects not only rhythm and cadence, but also the energy of the action itself — a dynamic constellation of variables that ensures no two bodies are ever synchronized *a priori*.

What is needed, therefore, is a genuine dialogue — a dialectical process through which a harmonious synthesis of bodies can emerge. This is not the result of easy or predetermined fits, but the outcome of attentive listening, mutual permission, and empathy. It is an exercise in giving and proposing, where conscious improvisation replaces rigid choreography, and authentic encounter transcends mere technical display.

Monocultural valorization, in structural terms, defines the lifestyle of a community and, consequently, helps delimit, through norms about bodies, how and when culture should be enjoyed.

A society that values theatrical performances and formal music shows tends not only to invest in spaces suited to host such manifestations — usually closed, institutionalized venues — but also to standardize the timing and format of cultural enjoyment. These norms commonly include events held after dinner, following the traditional workday, and typically lasting around 90 minutes. Consequently, any cultural manifestation that deviates from this model is often perceived as subversive or as a form of expression that challenges predefined systems.

In the city of Porto, for example, the use of public space is strictly regulated by mechanisms such as the Noise Monitoring and Control System, which classifies activities into categories like permanent noise sources (e.g., commercial or industrial activity) and temporary noise sources (e.g., construction, festivities, concerts). Those falling into the latter category require a special noise permit for any activity taking place after 8:00 p.m. This permit must be requested at least 15 working days in advance, with the city administration allowed to respond as late as one working day before the event. The process also involves fees and bureaucratic requirements, making it largely inaccessible to independent organizers or grassroots initiatives. (Câmara Municipal do Porto, n.d.-a)

Street artists face even stricter limitations: performances are allowed only until 10:00 p.m., permits are valid for a maximum of 15 days, and returning to the same space (toponym) is forbidden for 30 days afterwards. Additionally, permits are limited in number and often require

fees for performing in specific areas of the city, which significantly reduces access to urban spaces. (Câmara Municipal do Porto, n.d.-b)

In the case of music and dance, these regulations reinforce a monocultural structure by imposing strict spatial and temporal boundaries on spontaneous or community-driven cultural practices. The rules are anchored in a dominant idea of productivity, linked to a traditional work schedule, and fail to account for alternative rhythms of life, such as for those working late or irregular hours. They also offer no viable alternatives for autonomous or collective cultural expressions. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult to occupy public space in a spontaneous and meaningful way, and, as exemplified by street artists, any continuous connection with place is inhibited — a connection that could, over time, foster a socially engaged and potentially subversive cultural presence.

Popular Culture and the Market

Popular culture is often turned into a product; this is one of the paths for the survival of some manifestations, especially when the government does not ensure their existence. In this logic, to fit the market, culture is also modified to cater more to the "consumers."

When Luiz Gonzaga created the *trios* formation, a compact way to bring complete musicality to his concerts mainly on far away places (Freitas, 2021) or when *Pisadinha* synthesized synthesizer and voice, often reducing the entire performance to just one artist (Correio Braziliense, 2020); or even on *forró universitário* made *forró pé de serra* more palatable to the tastes of the Southeast — it was always the market that indirectly influenced the musical production.

The commercialization of culture can also occur in the public dimension. At the largest *São João* festival in the world, in Campina Grande (Paraíba), the most important festival for the *forró* roots, in 2023, the two main acts on the festival's main day were: one of traditional *forró* (with Flávio José) and one of *sertanejo* (a Brazilian country music style, with Gustavo Lima). The show time for the first act was reduced by 30 minutes, totaling 1 hour and 10 minutes, compared to 2 hours and 30 minutes for the *sertanejo* performance (Duarte, 2023).

An analysis of the media coverage of the event points to a preference for *sertanejo* over *forró* in pre-event promotions and the media taking advantage of the conflict after the incident (Nascimento and Nóbrega, 2024).

There is, indeed, a Brazilian preference for *sertanejo* over *forró*. However, reflecting on the tastes of the majority, especially in an event specific to a culture, is the challenge for those who aim to defend a heritage.

In market-driven logic, focusing on dance presents some limitations:

- The physical space required per person is significantly larger compared to many other types of events or cultural activities.
- The type of flooring, which might go unnoticed in other cultural experiences, plays a crucial role in dance — directly influencing the practice of this activity, especially as a form of physical exercise.
- Overall consumption of products such as food and drinks tends to be lower, as participants are actively engaged in the main activity.
- Alcohol consumption is also reduced, since it impairs reflexes and balance — both essential for good dance performance.

Although these characteristics are associated with a higher quality of life and promote health and well-being, they are often seen as disadvantages within the consumption paradigm, which values high turnover activities and constant stimulation of product and service consumption.

Forró in Europe

The *forró universitário* is the most prominent variant of *forró* in Europe. This style continues to grow, while its more modern branches, such as electronic *forró* and *pisadinha*, gain visibility in the places where the rhythm originated. According to a survey by the European Forró Federation, *forró universitário* (and *Forró Pé de Serra*) is now present in over one hundred European cities¹. Festivals like *Forró Douro* brought together 900 participants from 30 different nationalities in its 2025 edition (personal communication, May 28, 2025)

Forró communities in Europe are made up of rhythm and dance enthusiasts, both Brazilian and non-Brazilian, who gather to listen to and, especially, dance to *forró*, due to the lack of

¹ Consult the world map of *forró* from the European Forró Federation at: <https://forroffederation.com/what-we-do/forro-dancers/>

dedicated spaces for the rhythm, as is common in many cities in Brazil. The gatherings often take place in public squares, bandstands, and viewpoints, reflected even in the names of several groups. In Portugal, for example, there are *Forró do Miradouro* (Lisbon), *Forró no Coreto* (Lisbon), and *Forró do Coreto* (Aveiro). Spontaneously organized *forró* events are commonly referred to as "clandestine", reflected in the name *Quinta Clandestina* (Porto).

These communities typically start in open spaces where no entry fee is charged. Information is shared through messaging groups or by the participants themselves, which fosters organic and credible growth—a system that can be maintained within the community structure, where the exchange of information and even decisions can be made in a more horizontal way. This offers a very different experience from a commercial product.

Among the challenges of maintaining a community, financial sustainability is the greatest. It is necessary both for the sound system setup and for holding gatherings in covered spaces during cold weather or rain, as well as for investments in project expansion, including hiring artists, marketing, and communication.

The most common funding methods for communities vary between charging for admission, collective fundraising, fully organizing the event, or hiring the community. Charging for admission is only feasible in closed spaces, which usually have associated costs and logistics. Collective fundraising is done by asking event participants for financial contributions. Another form of collective funding includes online campaigns aimed at maintaining and/or achieving specific goals, such as the successful campaign run by *Quinta Clandestina* to acquire a sound system². Fully organizing the event allows for higher profitability but requires a lot of associated work. Finally, hiring the *forró* community by businesses to attract an audience is viable when there is a loyal base of participants, and it is the ideal way to maintain an inclusive environment with the possibility of offering free entry and sustainability.

For Brazilians in Europe, *forró* initially serves as a tool for identity cohesion, either through the implicit familiarity of the music or the atmosphere of the dance and/or the celebration, which reminds them of their homeland. Certainly, the adaptations and variations that *forró* undergoes transform it into a different experience from that of its country of origin, which we will explore

² See the news at: <https://ppl.pt/blog/quinta-clandestina-e-um-movimento-forrozeiro-semanal-gratuito>

further on. This identification makes even Brazilians who didn't attend *forró* in Brazil participate in it abroad. In this way, the communities act as channels for social demands of the Brazilian immigrant experience. For non-Brazilians, the popular and flexible nature of *forró* facilitates integration, and not only with people from the country of origin of this cultural heritage, but also with other nationalities and among themselves, wherever *forró* takes shape. This is undoubtedly *forró's* greatest feature and make it's common to find very successful organizations without Brazilians as *forró* teachers or festivals like *Forró Douro*, which is recognized for its quality and respect for tradition, demonstrating that this cultural heritage fulfills its intended role.

Among the dancers in the Porto (Portugal) community, for example, there are participants from folk, blues, salsa, west coast swing, as well as zouk and *gafieira*. Those from other rhythms find in *forró* an opportunity to express their movements, expanding their potential, especially when their own communities lack sufficient engagement. Non-dancers also find an environment, usually friendly, and often consider *forró* their first dance community—even without dancing. It is precisely this integrative potential, fostering social cohesion, identity, and flexibility, that makes *forró* a tool for integrating people from different backgrounds.

Forró is a relaxed environment, with the focus on dance. The comfort of the participants and their partners presupposes simplicity. People can be found dressed in outfits that refer to *forró's* origins and the region it comes from, such as patterned cotton clothing or leather boots, often sandals, further reinforcing its simplicity. Clothing is a prominent element in *forró* and is often represented in the lyrics of many *forró* songs. Although not officially recognized as one of its main features, it is widely present in the expressions of this cultural heritage.

As a cultural expression that is intrinsically connected to its environment. As a form of popular heritage, it allows for numerous adaptations depending on the spatial and cultural context in which it is practiced. The freedom inherent in the dance enables the incorporation of steps from other styles.

Likewise, songs in languages other than Portuguese are welcomed, as seen in performances by *Forró de Ka* in German, *Bicho de Pé* in French, and *Matti Caspi* in Hebrew. This flexibility allows *forró* to adapt to its surroundings while respecting the individuality of each region, establishing a harmonious dialogue with the space that fosters cultural connection and integration.

This adaptive nature also means that each *forró* is unique in the way it is organized, sung, and danced, reflecting both local cultural influences and the specific choices and characteristics of the community that practices it.

The challenges of *forró* today

Forró, as a partnered dance practice, carries historically problematic paradigms related to gender dynamics. Due to the absence of rigidly pre-established choreographies, the structure of the dance is shaped by spontaneous proposals made by one partner to the other. Traditionally, these roles are assumed in a fixed manner: the "gentleman" leads, and the "lady" follows — a terminology that reveals a direct association between gender and function within the dance.

This structure extends into other aspects of the practice: the "lady" is generally not expected to initiate a dance invitation, occupying instead a passive role — as someone to be chosen and guided, rather than to take initiative. However, the *forró* community itself has increasingly challenged these conventions. A growing number of dancers are now exploring more flexible role dynamics. Many have adopted the gender-neutral terms leader and follower — or their Portuguese equivalents, *condutor* and *conduzido* — to dissociate these roles from the gender binary, as opposed to the traditional “*cavalheiro*” and “*dama*.”

There is also a growing openness to the idea that anyone, regardless of their role in the dance, can invite others or propose movement variations, which contributes to flattening the hierarchical structure between partners when it comes to decision-making during the dance. In this context, practices such as co-leading and the role of active followers have gained prominence — alternative approaches to *forró* in which the follower also initiates movements and influences the flow of the dance. Researcher, teacher, and dancer Camila Alves has been an active proponent of these new dynamics within the *forró* scene, offering important contributions to the understanding and development of these ongoing transformations.

In Brazil, prejudices persist regarding the region where *forró* originated. The simplicity of this musical expression, so characteristic of the Northeast, attracts a specific audience but also alienates others who perceive *forró* as a form of "musical poverty"—a result of misunderstanding

this intangible cultural heritage and a reflection of prejudice toward one of Brazil's most significant symbols of cultural identity.

In Europe, although Brazilian music and dance are appreciated, popular cultural expressions are often associated solely with festivity and joy, rarely being recognized as heritage with historical and cultural value. It is undeniable that joy is a fundamental component of *forró*; however, the lack of a perspective that values its serious and symbolic character hinders its access to institutional spaces of dialogue and exchange within the society in which it exists.

This perception reinforces a recurring dichotomy between leisure and labor—where work is exalted as noble and productive, while leisure, art, and cultural enjoyment are relegated to the leftover moments of time. Within this logic, recognizing *forró* as cultural heritage might appear to challenge the central role of work in Western society, making its full integration as legitimate heritage in the collective social imagination nearly unthinkable. In this context, since it is regarded solely as a form of entertainment and stems from a culture easily identified as both Brazilian and immigrant, *forró* — and its enjoyment — can be interpreted as a subversion of the dominant work ethic and national values. As a result, immigrants are burdened with the responsibility for this distorted and demeaning interpretation of the cultural expression, further reinforcing social and cultural stigmas associated with their origins.

Like any other form of heritage, *forró* is a product of the society in which it emerged and inherits its defining characteristics, functioning as a simulacrum of its symbolic actions and cultural values. Even though it is rooted in the reality where it takes place, *forró* creates a unique spatiality, filled with symbols that reflect values tied to its origins — values we choose to preserve, even if only through inaction.

From this perspective, it becomes easier to rethink the limited symbolic dimension in which this heritage is often confined. Hierarchical structures, for instance, lose their relevance within the context of *forró*, prompting us to question the hierarchies ingrained in broader society as well.

The preassigned role of a gender in dance makes as much sense as the gender roles imposed by society — in other words, none. Similarly, the ways people are judged based on their origin, whether in the context of *forró* or in society at large, also prove to be unfounded and restrictive.

In fact, we have tools that help reorganize these structures. The only "currency of exchange," in the words of Deborah Goldemberg (2025), is dance. Forró levels the participants through dance, creating a new form of relationship. It unites people from different professions, economic classes, and age groups. Each new form of reorganization means new connections, opportunities for mutual help, cultural exchange, and, ultimately, the promotion of peace.

Conclusion

Forró is a profoundly identity-driven Brazilian cultural heritage, carrying with it a popular strength capable of reinventing itself over time. Its openness to new influences—whether from instruments, dance styles, or people—makes it a dynamic cultural expression that transcends borders and connects different societies. In Europe, *forró* transforms into a bridge between cultures, promoting encounters, integration, and access to social life, while subtly combating discrimination and xenophobia. The growing interest in *forró* across different countries contributes to the formation of a network that can serve as a pathway toward a multiethnic democracy. This is only possible if we begin to "place greater emphasis on what unites us than on what divides us" (Mounk, 2018, p. 33). Beyond leisure, it offers Europeans the opportunity to connect with a vibrant and diverse culture, enriching the local social fabric.

However, the challenges of maintaining *forró* as a popular culture are significant and common to other cultural heritage forms: competition with more commercial styles, the need for recognition and support from the state, and the search for sustainable funding methods. Nevertheless, *forró* resists and reinvents itself—occupying streets, squares, and public spaces, often autonomously or even clandestinely, reinforcing community ties and staying alive despite adversities. Certainly, as a reflection of society, it faces deep-rooted contradictions and prejudices, but it possesses an open and adaptable nature, which helps us to rethink social relationships within this dimension and in society.

Thus, *forró* is not just an artistic expression but a powerful tool for socializing, integration, and exercising the right to culture, reaffirming its relevance both in Brazil and abroad. Its ability to adapt and create a sense of belonging demonstrates the transformative potential of popular culture, which deserves to be valued, protected, and celebrated by all.

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Biography

Tiago Mazza (Brazil/Portugal) is the creator and founder of the project *Quinta Clandestina*, a popular culture movement that, through *forró*—a major Brazilian musical genre considered an intangible cultural heritage—promotes social integration. An immigrant, dancer, and cultural activist, Mazza graduated in Tourism, specialized in Art history, and later pursued a master’s in art history, Heritage, and Visual Culture at University of Porto. He is a member of the Board of the European *Forró* Federation and the founder of the Portuguese *Forró* network. With extensive experience in entertainment, Mazza combines both theoretical and practical aspects of his knowledge to advocate widespread access to culture.